

Other-Worldly and This-Worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival

In his *Islam in Modern History*, published in 1957, yet still a work remarkable for its insights, Wilfred Cantwell Smith refers to the extraordinary energy which had surged through the Muslim world with increasing force in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He talks of :

dynamism, the appreciation of activity for its own sake, and at the level of feeling a stirring of intense, even violent, emotionalism ... The transmutation of Muslim society from its early nineteenth-century stolidity to its twentieth-century ebullience is no mean achievement. The change has been everywhere in evidence. ¹

This surge of energy is closely associated with a shift in the balance of Muslim piety from an other-worldly towards a this-worldly focus. By this I mean a devaluing of a faith of contemplation of God's mysteries and of belief in His will to shape human life, and a valuing instead of a faith in which Muslims were increasingly aware that it was they, and only they, who could act to fashion an Islamic society on earth. This shift of emphasis has been closely associated with a new idea of great power, the caliphate of man. In the absence of Muslim power, in the absence, for the Sunnis at least, of a caliph, however symbolic, to guide, shape and protect the community, this awesome task now fell to each individual Muslim. I hazard to suggest that this shift towards a this-worldly piety, and the new responsibilities for Muslims that came with it, is the most important change that Muslims have wrought in the practice of their faith over the past one thousand years. It is a change full of possibilities for the future.

Throughout Islamic history there has been a tension between other-worldly and this-worldly piety. This said, dependent on time and on context, the broad emphasis in piety has swung first one way and then the other. Amongst the early

Muslims the emphasis was this-worldly. In Mecca and Medina, the Prophet and his companions promoted an activist this-worldly socio-political ethic. The community they created was the most successful in worldly terms the earth had seen. In little over a hundred years it came to rule a huge swathe of rich and fertile lands from Central Asia and the Indian Ocean in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. For the following thousand years, from the eighth to the eighteenth century of the common era, the worldly success of the community helped to underpin the authority of God's revelation to man through Muhammad. The possession of power was seen to be essential to upholding the *shari`a*, the holy law, the systematised form of guidance for man which Muslim scholars had derived from the Quran and the traditions.

From early on, however, this activist community of Muslims came to develop an other-worldly strand in its piety. This was Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, which was inspired by the Quran, the religious practice of the Prophet, and that of the early Muslim community. It grew, in part as Arab Muslims came into contact with the Christian and other mystical traditions of the lands they conquered, and in part in reaction to the moral laxity and worldliness of the Umayyad and Abbasid courts. The term *sufi*, it is thought, was derived from the Arabic *suf*, wool, which Sufis wore in contrast to the rich clothes of the worldly. Early Sufi feeling was inspired by fear of God and Judgement, then by love, and then in the third Islamic century by the doctrine of the 'inner way', or the spiritual journey towards God. The mystic progressed along this way through processes of self-abnegation and enhanced awareness of God. The final stage was reached when the self was annihilated and totally absorbed in God. It was this, of course, which led al-Hallaj in 922 to declare 'I am the Truth', and be brutally put to death for his pains. Side by side with the mystical way there also developed a metaphysical understanding of God and his

relationship to humankind. Sufis proposed a transcendent God whose spiritual radiance was reflected in humanity. To discover the divine essence that lay within them, human beings had to overcome their worldly nature.

Thus Sufis fostered an other-worldly piety. Many came to rely on *futuh*, unasked for charity, in order to survive; they glorified poverty; they made much of their complete trust in God; they stood apart from power, as for the most part Indian Chishtis did, and avoided family life. ‘When a Sufi gets married,’ declared Ibrahim bin Adham in the eighth century ‘it is as if he has boarded a boat; when a child is born to him, it means he has drowned.’² On the other hand, there were Sufis who felt bound to engage with the world. Some embraced the powerful. Thus, the shaykhs of the Yasaviyya in Central Asia engaged with the Timurid princes, and the shaykhs of the Naqshbandiyya engaged with the Mughals. Others made it clear that waiting around for God to provide was just not good enough. Men must follow the Prophet’s example and be active in society; they must earn their living as traders, they must cultivate the earth.³ Few were as strong on this point as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), for many the greatest Muslim after the Prophet. In his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* he makes a strong case for men earning their living within the framework of the *shari`a* and cites the Prophet’s saying that ‘the honest traders will have the same position on the day of Judgement as the most truthful persons and as martyrs in the path of God.’⁴ Indeed, al-Ghazzali’s own life, which is most wonderfully told in his autobiography, *The Deliverance from Error*, makes manifest the tensions he experienced in his own life between other-worldly and this-worldly pulls, which he resolved eventually in favour of the latter. He began as a teacher in Baghdad’s Madrasa Nizamiyya, whose aim was to gain an influential position and widespread recognition. Then, he realised the error of his motivation and retired to live the life of

a Sufi for ten years. But finally he realised that it was not right that he should cling to retirement for, as he puts it, 'laziness and love of ease, the quest for spiritual power and preservation from worldly contamination.'⁵ He must return to the work of teaching, but not for worldly success, but in order that men should recognise the 'low position' of such success 'in the scale of real worth.'⁶

From the fourteenth century CE the emphasis in Muslim piety began to swing firmly in the other-worldly direction. The main source of this shift was the extraordinary influence of the Spanish Sufi, Ibn 'Arabi, who died in 1240. On a pilgrimage to Mecca Ibn 'Arabi had a vision of the divine throne in which he was told that he stood foremost amongst the saints. This led him to develop his doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, the 'unity of being'. God, Ibn 'Arabi argued, was transcendent. But, because all creation was a manifestation of God, it was identical with him in essence. It followed that God was necessary for men and women to exist, but equally they were necessary for God to be manifest. In expressing his vision he both generated a rich symbolic vocabulary and produced a masterly synthesis of Sufi philosophic and neo-Platonic thought.

From the fourteenth century mystical discourse increasingly focused on Ibn 'Arabi's 'unity of being'. One of the main vehicles of his ideas was poetry. This was as much the case for poetry in Arabic and the African languages, and for the poetry of Yunus Emre in Turkish, of Bullhe Shah in Punjabi, or 'Abd al-Latif in Sind, as it was for poetry in the higher Persian tradition, that of Jalal al-din Rumi, or of Hafiz Shirazi, or of Mulla Jami of Herat. The outcome of such widespread absorption of the idea of the 'unity of being' was to lessen the importance of observing the *shari'a*. If everything was God, if achieving ecstatic union with Him was enough, it made it less

important to put into practice one earth His revelation. The emphasis on this-worldly performance was lifted.

A second vehicle of Ibn `Arabi's ideas was, of course, Sufis themselves. The period from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century was one of immense expansion of the Islamic world - into sub-Saharan Africa, into South and Southeast Asia. It was in this period that the foundations were laid of the Muslim community in the world today, in which as many live east of the Hindu Kush as to the West. Sufis were the prime agents in the long process of slowly drawing people of a myriad local religious traditions into an Islamic milieu. This meant accommodating local needs and customs. It meant incorporating worship of trees, or fish or crocodiles, or cults relating to St. George or Khwaja Khidr, into local Sufi piety. It meant tolerating a range of ritual practices: the lighting of candles, the smearing of sandal paste, the tying of a piece of cloth to a shrine to remind a saint of a request. In enabling Sufis to build bridges between their Islamic messages and local religious practice, in enabling them to help to fashion an expansion of the Muslim world of enormous geopolitical significance, Ibn `Arabi's central idea of the `unity of being', and the profound other-worldly focus it gave to piety, was of the first importance.

From the beginning there was a running critique of Ibn `Arabi, in particular of ideas that appeared to permit Muslims to flout the *shari`a*. There was the fourteenth-century Hanbali scholar, Ibn Taymiyya of Damascus. When Ibn Battuta, who accepted most Sufi practices, heard him preach in 1326, he thought Ibn Taymiyya had `a kink in his brain'. Soon afterwards the Mamluks appeared to agree because they threw him into prison, where he died.⁷ But, from the seventeenth century, there was growing sympathy for his uncompromising attitude to Ibn `Arabi, and today he is regarded as embodying the spirit of the Islamic revival.⁸ There was the famous

dispute in seventeenth-century Sumatra over the interpretation of Ibn `Arabi, which was only resolved by a magisterial intervention from Ibrahim al-Kurani, the great scholar of Hadith in Medina.⁹ In the same century, there was in India the Naqshbandi Sufi, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, who proposed to counter Ibn `Arabi's `unity of being' with the concept of the `unity of witness' *wahdat al-shuhud*. Instead of Sufis saying that `all was God' they should now say that `all was from God'. God had created the earth. He had also sent down, through his Prophet, guidance as to how his community should be fashioned on earth.¹⁰ Sirhindi's ideas were taken up by his followers, the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, and from the eighteenth century they were to be widely followed in South and West Asia.¹¹ Then, in eighteenth-century Arabia there was Muhammad Ibn `Abd al-Wahhab who, strongly influenced by Ibn Taymiyya, around 1740 began to preach against all Sufi innovations. His puritan message, which went as far as to oppose any form of reverence for the Prophet's tomb in Medina, gained added force from 1744 when he hitched his fortunes to those of the house of Muhammad ibn Sa`ud of the Najd.¹² This said, having noted the continuing opposition to Ibn `Arabi's doctrine of the `unity of being', we must accept that his other-worldly piety was that of most Muslims from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the emphasis in Islamic piety swing firmly in a this-worldly direction. The prime cause was the assertion of Western power throughout the Muslim world. It is worth noting the spread and nature of the change. The symbolic beginning was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, followed in 1799 by the snuffing out of Mysore, the last significant Muslim opponent of British power in India. Between 1800 and 1920, the British, the French, the Russians, the Dutch, the Italians and the Germans annexed or asserted influence over

almost the entire Muslim community. In 1920 the only areas largely free of European influence were Afghanistan, the Yemen, the Hijaz and Central Arabia. Iran enjoyed a much-qualified freedom; Ataturk was fighting for Turkish freedom and self-respect in Anatolia.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, with the exception of the Muslims of Central Asia who had to wait until the 1990s, Muslim societies achieved their freedom from direct foreign rule. But for many it was freedom of a limited kind, if freedom at all. First the departure of their Western rulers did not mean that the West would not still wish to have a say in their affairs, whether it be for continuing reasons of empire, or in pursuing Cold-War rivalries, or, after the Iranian Revolution, in striving to limit the spread of Islamic revivalism in political form. The process of meddling in the Muslim world continued, whether it be in the politics of Pakistan, of Iran, or of Algeria. It is a process which has been interlarded with some notable acts of bullying and adventurism, whether it be the British and the US in Iran in 1953, the British and French in Egypt in 1956, the British and the US in Iraq in 2003, or the Russians, who for these purposes are part of the West, in Afghanistan and Chechnya in the late twentieth century. Second, the end of Western rule did not bring an end to transformative Western influences in Muslim societies. In many cases their impact was redoubled. The penetration of Western trade and capital continued, fashioning local economies to their purpose. New elites continued to emerge to manage the new economic and political structures - technocrats, bureaucrats, bankers, intellectuals, industrial workers, all people who belonged to an existence outside the old urban communitarian world of the artisan workshop, the bazaar trader, the caravansarai and the quarter, which had long sustained Muslim societies and their distinctive worldviews. Foremost amongst these new elites were the new political elites - the

Zulfiqar `Ali Bhuttos, the Abbas Hoveidas, the Habib Bourguibas - more often than not trained in the West, subscribing to Western values, supporters of Western culture, and happy to see it given substantial freedom to flourish in Muslim societies.

The onset of Western power in Muslim societies, and the continuing blows it has delivered to Muslim self-esteem right down to the present, has led to a major process of self-questioning and reflection. How could Islam, which for 1200 years had walked hand in hand with power, become divorced from its exercise? Was it, perhaps, because Muslims had not been good enough Muslims? Was it because they had not tried hard enough to relate the guidance they had received from God to changing human circumstance? And how were they to sustain Muslim societies without power, a question which was as relevant in an independent Egypt, Iran or Turkey, as it was in an India ruled by the British or an Indonesia ruled by the Dutch? Indeed, the onset of Western power created circumstances in which critics of other-worldly piety were to be heard with much greater sympathy. These were circumstances in which attacks on Ibn `Arabi's hold on Sufi thought were likely to increase and be successful, in which the Quran and *Hadith* and the early community at Medina gained new prominence as sources of Muslim guidance, in which there was redoubled interest in the life of the Prophet as a model to follow, and in which there was a new emphasis on *ijtihad*, individual enquiry, to renew the faith. The outcome was the emergence of an activist, willed - for some a protestant - Islam. The outcome was the dynamism which Cantwell Smith saw sweeping through the twentieth-century Muslim world. At the heart of this activism, and the energy which it created, was the placing of the responsibility of fashioning Islamic society on each individual Muslim - the caliphate of Man.

It is well understood that this move to an activist this-worldly Islam was expressed differently in different Muslim societies with their distinctive social, economic, political and cultural formations. Acknowledging this, let us see how the move towards a this-worldly Islam was expressed in British India. Here, under a British rule, which in the early nineteenth century began vigorously to hack away the financial and institutional structures which sustained Islamic society, the issue was how to create a Muslim society without power. A concern to elevate the principle of *tawhid*, the oneness of God, ran through most of the movements of the age. There was a running attack on all Sufi customs which, following Ibn `Arabi, suggested that God might be immanent rather than purely transcendent, which was expressed most frequently and forcibly in attacks on any practices which suggested that Sufi saints might be able to intercede for man with God. At their most extreme these attacks aimed to wipe out Sufism altogether. By the same token there were assaults on indigenous customs which had come to be incorporated into Islamic practice. Some Muslims, for instance, followed the Hindu custom of not marrying widows. In some cases this led to overzealous reformers engaging in widow-rustling to ensure that Muslim preference was observed.¹³

A Muslim community which was going to sustain itself needed teachers and scholars to transmit knowledge and make it work in society. The Deoband madrasa, founded in 1867, and supported by public subscription alone, was the model for this. By 1967, it claimed to have founded over 8000 madrasas on this model. The reforming movement as a whole favoured a madrasa curriculum which gave little weight to theology and philosophy and the triumphs of medieval Persianate scholarship, preferring instead to elevate the Quran and *Hadith* - the unadulterated record of the activist days of the early Muslim community. Whereas some elements of

the reforming movement favoured *taqlid*, or the following of legal rulings handed down from the past, the more extreme reformers, for instance the Ahl-i Hadith, favoured *ijtihad*, and as the revival progressed the demand for *ijtihad* was to get stronger and stronger. This shift towards a self-sustaining this-worldly community of believers was powerfully supported by the introduction of print and the translation of the Quran and large numbers of key texts into vernacular languages. The reforming `ulama were the great supporters of the printing press; rightly they saw it as the means of creating a new constituency for themselves outside the bounds of colonial power. But they also helped to breed something totally new in Muslim history, a growing body of Muslims, trained outside the madrasas, who could reflect upon the sources of their faith and interpret them for themselves.¹⁴

These processes were only enhanced by the way in which the reforming movement made it clear that there was no intercession for man with God. Muslims were personally responsible to God for the way in which they had put His guidance to them into practice on earth. We are fortunate in having the guidance which a leading reformer, Ashraf `Ali Thanwi, prepared for women in his tradition, though it could equally have been for men. Entitled *Bihishti Zewar*, or 'The Jewels of Paradise', it is said to be the most widely published Muslim publication in the subcontinent after the Quran. Should anyone consider backsliding in performing their duties, Thanwi paints a horrific picture of the Day of Judgement and the fate that will befall those who have not striven hard enough to follow God's guidance. To help believers avoid this awful fate, Thanwi instructs them in a process of regular self-examination, morning and evening, to ensure purity of intentions and to avoid wrongdoing. Thus, the Deobandi tradition, which was at the heart of the Indian reforming movement set about

fashioning Muslim individuals who were powerfully conscious that they must act to sustain Islamic society on earth in order to achieve salvation.¹⁵

The feeling of personal responsibility before God, and the need to act on earth to achieve salvation, ran through the many manifestations of reform in India. It was a central issue for Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), who hailed from the reforming tradition but, in his development of the principles of Islamic modernism travelled way beyond it. Listen to what he has to say about the driving force behind his educational mission:

I regard it as my duty to do all I can, right or wrong, to defend my religion and show the people the true, shining countenance of Islam. This is what my conscience dictates and, unless, I do its bidding, I am a sinner before God.¹⁶

This sense of personal responsibility, if anything, was even more an issue for Muhammad Ilyas (d. 1944), the founder of the Tablighi Jama`at or Preaching Society, which is now, we are credibly informed, the most widely-supported movement in the Islamic world. He was constantly oppressed by fear of Judgement and whether he was doing enough to meet God's high standards. 'I find no comparison between my anxiety, my effort and my voice,' he wrote, 'and the responsibility of *Tabligh* God has placed upon my shoulders. If He shows mercy, He is forgiving, merciful, and if He does justice, there is no escape for me from the consequences of my guilt.'¹⁷ The members of the Tablighi Jama`at make manifest the need to act on earth, following the precept of Ilyas 'knowing meaning doing.'¹⁸ Every year members of the Tabligh form groups of ten, *jama'ats* as they are known, to go out and preach their faith.¹⁹

The sense of personal responsibility, and the centrality of action on earth to the Muslim life, was expressed most completely by that sensitive and remarkable thinker, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1933). For Iqbal, man was chosen by God, but equally free to

choose whether he would follow God's guidance or not. Man realised himself in the creative work of shaping and reshaping the world. The reality of the individual was expressed most explicitly in action. 'The final act' he declares in the closing sentences of his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not just something to be seen and known through concepts, but to be made and remade by continuous action.²⁰ Man was the prime mover in God's creation, as Iqbal makes so clear in Man's response to God in his poem 'God's Talk with Man':

You created the night - I lit the lamp

You created clay - I moulded the cup

You made the wilderness, mountains and forest

I cultivated flowerbeds, parks and gardens.²¹

As the prime mover, Man was God's representative on earth, his vice-regent, the Khalifat Allah. Thus Iqbal draws the Quranic reference to Adam as his vice-regent, or successor, on earth, which had been much discussed by medieval commentators on the Quran, and not least among them Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Arabi, into the modern politico-Islamic discourse of South Asia. In doing so he both emphasises the enormous responsibility of each individual human being in the trust that he/she received from God and encapsulates that relationship in the concept of the caliphate of each individual human being.²² The idea was further taken up by Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-79), founder of the Jama`at-i Islami, who added his considerable weight to its presence in Islamic thought on the subcontinent, and beyond.²³

The sense of the personal responsibility of each human being is no less present in the thought of other Muslim reforming traditions, which of course intermingled

with that of India. It is there in the grand narrative of the Egypto-Arab tradition. It is there in Jamal al-Din's Afghani's (1838/39 – 1897) admiration for the achievements of the European Protestants in Christianity, for their willingness to ignore the advice of their priests, in going back to first principles, and making up their minds, as he urged Muslims to do, using their own efforts. 'Verily,' he was to say many times quoting the Quran, 'God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly.' He identified himself, of course, with Martin Luther.²⁴ This activism for individuals was present in his friend and pupil, Muhammad `Abduh (1849-1905), who was probably the first major thinker in the modern Arab world to emphasise the caliphate of man. Because of the power of reason with which God endowed him, `Abduh argued, man 'has unlimited capacities, unlimited desires, unlimited knowledge and unlimited action.' Man was required to use these capacities to break the bonds of *taqlid* and demonstrate that Islam was fully compatible with the demands of modernity.²⁵ This activism was present, too, in the emphasis of `Abduh's leading disciple, Rashid Rida (1869-1935) on jihad, or positive effort, being the essence of Islam. This was, he argued, a principle contained both in Islam and in modern civilisation. If the Europeans manifest this quality more than anyone else in the world, it was for Muslims to recapture it and regain their true position.²⁶

This activism was there, of course, when the movement for reform, shocked by the corruption and complacency of Egypt's elites, both `ulama and layfolk, began to be manifest as a radical popular movement, an Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, which would morally regenerate society from within. Its founder, Hasan al-Banna (1906-49), appealed for personal and individual reform which would create a leaven of spiritually-inspired individuals in society, who would actively execute a programme addressing modern problems.²⁷ It was there, too, in the second

phase of the Brotherhood's existence in the call of Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) for Muslims to commit themselves to jihad against the *jahili*, Islamically ignorant, elements which pervaded it. He, following the lines of argument of `Abduh, emphasises the role of man as the *khalifa* of God on earth:

It is thus the supreme will intending to give to the new being the reins of the earth, and a free hand in it; and entrusting him with the task of revealing the Creator in innovation and formation, in analysis and synthesis, in alteration and transformation; and of discovering the powers and potentialities, and treasures and resources of this earth, and makes all this – God willing – subservient to the great task with which God entrusted him.²⁸

If we move away from the grand narrative of reform and revival in the Arab context to address it in the Iranian context, while acknowledging the distinctive differences of the Shia tradition, we nevertheless find a similar emphasis on personal responsibility and action in this world. It is there in the thought of two of the most important players in the ideological buildup to the Iranian Revolution, Ayat Allah Murtaza Motahhari and `Ali Shari'ati. They were ideological rivals, the one protecting the position of the `ulama, the other attacking it, while both sought to develop a constituency amongst the young. For Motahhari, pupil, friend and confidant of Khomeini, whom the Ayat Allah described as the `fruit of my life' as he wept at his funeral in May 1979, man was not so much the vice-regent of God but, using that classical term from Iranian religio-political discourse `the shadow of God on earth'.²⁹ God, moreover, in his creation of man had bestowed upon him the potential to gain perfection and return to Him. But Motahhari's route to God lay very firmly through this-worldly activity:

this and the other world are connected together. This world is the [cultivating]

field for the other ... What gives order, prosperity, beauty, security, and comfort to this world is to bear other worldly-standards upon it; and what secures other-worldly bliss is to perform this-worldly responsibilities properly, combined with faith, purity, prosperity and piety.³⁰

For `Ali Shari'ati, models for contemporary Muslims were the Prophet and the men trained by Him - `Ali, Abu Dharr and Salman, all of them men of action in this world but also men of piety and devotion. In his essay `The Ideal Man - the Vice-regent of God', as is his wont he paints a daunting picture of the ideal. Amidst an amazing array of qualities and achievements:

He has accepted the heavy Trust of God, and for this very reason he is a responsible and committed being, with the free exercise of his will. He does not perceive his perfection as lying in the creation of a private relationship with God to the exclusion of men; it is rather, in struggle for the perfection of the human race, in enduring hardship, hunger, deprivation and torment for the sake of liberty, livelihood and well-being of men, in the furnace of intellectual and social struggle, that he attains piety, perfection and closeness to God.³¹

So far we have been concentrating on the central shift in Muslim piety over the past two hundred years, the shift towards individual personal responsibility for working to create an Islamic society on earth in order to achieve salvation - a this-worldly Islam. This was a key element in the packages of ideas developed by Islamic reformers and revivalists from the mid nineteenth century onwards. By the second half of the twentieth century these reformers and revivalists had by and large transformed themselves into what we now know as Islamists - the Muslim

Brotherhood in its various forms in the Arab world, Mawdudi's *Jama'at-i Islami* in South Asia, some of the makers of the Iranian revolution - men concerned to fashion a vanguard of the pure morally to rearm society, men who created an understanding of Islam as an all-embracing ideology, men concerned to lead organisations which might capture the state so that they might use its power to impose their ideology, their *nizam-i Islam*, on society and keep out corrupting influences from the West. The leaders of Islamist movements were typically teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, government servants, people commanding modern science and technology, modern legal and bureaucratic systems, but concerned that they should serve Islamic ends. Islamism was essentially the ideology of a middle and lower middle class, which was opposed to the culture and corruption of their elites, and their close association with the ideas, values and interests of the West. They wanted, and still seek, to fashion the world in their own (bourgeois) image.

From the 1960s support for Islamist movements rapidly grew. This was in part the outcome of the expansion of the state, of business and of service infrastructure - of the expansion of those social locations in which the Islamist ethic might thrive, with its concern for setting and meeting targets, the rule of law, promotion by merit and so on... It was in part, too, an outcome of the huge increase in the consumption of oil, accompanied by the great oil price rise of the 1970s, and the vast new resources it brought to many Muslim societies. It was also in part due to the massive movement of population from the countryside to the cities of this period. This last development brought mass support to Islamists, as they stepped in where the state frequently failed to provide the schools, hospitals and clinics, the social and psychological support, which these new entrants to the urban environment often desperately needed. We should note, in addition, the capacity of Islamist movements

to mobilise mass support by constructing and transmitting an understanding of Islam as the answer to modernity.³² As we know this process has greatly enhanced Islamist influence in all Muslim societies, leading of course to the Iranian revolution, but also to substantial Islamist advances through the ballot box as, for instance, in Turkey, or Pakistan, or Algeria - although this last victory was aborted by the intervention of the army, and also to an Islamist hollowing out of a secular Egypt from within, as has been recently and brilliantly described by Geneive Abdo.³³ In the twenty-first century, as compared with the nineteenth, the numbers of Muslims who feel a strong personal responsibility to act on earth to achieve salvation has been greatly increased.

I want to end by reflecting briefly on what this great shift in the emphasis of Muslim piety, which Iqbal in particular, but also other observers, described as being similar to the Protestant Reformation in Christianity, might mean. In particular what significance should be given to the emphasis on personal responsibility and action on earth.

In another place I have argued that, in British India in the first half of the twentieth century, this new sense of personal responsibility led to increasing manifestation of aspects of individualism. There was increasing consciousness of the self being instrumental in the world, of the self, as Iqbal stated, making and remaking the world by 'continuous action'. There was a sense of self-affirmation and personal autonomy which came from adopting the way of faith as a result of personal choice. There was an affirmation of the ordinary things of the self, the ordinary things of daily life - family, domestic life, children, love, sex. This is a change which can be witnessed in the changing representations of the Prophet in the *sirat* literature, the biographies of the Prophet. Less attention is given, as Cantwell Smith has pointed

out, to his intelligence, political sagacity and capacity to harness new social forces in his society, and more to his qualities as a middleclass family man: his sense of duty and his loving nature, and his qualities as a good citizen, his consideration for others and in particular those who are less fortunate. And finally there has been the growth of self-consciousness and the reflective habit. Reflectiveness, you will recall, was urged by Thanwi's *Bihishti Zewar*. Its impact can be seen in the creative and biographical literature of the time. As we might expect, the growth of individualism was bound to lead to tensions with the requirements of the community. And, because Muslim women in British India were given the particular role of preserving an Islamic private space in a world in which public space was dominated by Western values, it was a burden particularly felt by them. The relationship between this-worldly Islam and the growth of individualism in Muslim South Asia is an exciting line of enquiry.³⁴

In a recent article designed to demonstrate the modernising aspects of Islamism in Egypt, the Norwegian scholar Bjorn Utvik, draws attention to the individualising impact of the Islamists' central idea of the personal responsibility of the believer to struggle for the cause of God on earth. He emphasises, as we might expect, the crucial importance of this being a personal choice. It is associated with ideas of work as a calling, of the value of time, indeed, of an Islamic work ethic, with a demand for the impersonalisation of public life and an end to bribery and patronage, and for merit to be the sole criterion for promotion to posts of responsibility in society. 'Together', he says:

these aspects of Islamism work to open the road for the idea of individual career, individual life projects. This has been shown to be a characteristic setting young Islamist students in the 1980s off from their parent generation. It means that the choice of partner and line of work is something

the young Islamists expect to do for themselves and not be decided by the family or some other communal entity.³⁵

In a remarkable book, *Being Modern in Iran*, the brilliant French anthropologist, Fariba Adelkhah, discovers increasing individualism to be the outcome of the interactions between the Islamist project, the emergence of a significant public sphere and the rationalisation, bureaucratisation and commercialisation of Iranian society. She notes the huge popularity of self-help books and magazines of all kinds, the new importance of going to the gym and other forms of body care for men and women, the great attention given to individual achievement in sport, the popularity of game shows, the public rewards given for academic success in school, the films which approvingly depict women of independent spirit and behaviour, and the move towards the nuclear family, and respect for individual space within that family.³⁶

I put it to you that the shift to a this-worldly Islam, with its emphasis on personal responsibility to achieve salvation, and with its emphasis on the caliphate of man, which was adopted to help give Muslim societies the strength to resist the Western onslaught, has played, and is playing, a significant role in underpinning the growth of individualism. This growth of individualism is accompanied by self-discipline and the work ethic, respect for law, support for promotion by merit and opposition to patronage and corruption. Last year Bernard Lewis published a most tendentious book entitled *What went Wrong? The clash between Islam and modernity in the Middle East*. In it he declared that the problem with Middle Eastern countries, indeed all Muslim countries, was Islam.³⁷ Whatever one's view of the role of Islam in

what might or might not have gone wrong in Muslim societies, I suggest to you that this-worldly Islam may also be part of what is going right.

¹ W.C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957), p. 89.

² Statement attributed to Ibrahim bin Adham in the *Kitab al-Luma* of Abu Nasr Sarraj cited in Riaz ul-Islam, *Sufism in South Asia: Impact on Fourteenth Century Muslim Society* (Karachi, 2002), p. 216; for a discussion of the *futuh* system see *ibid.*, pp. 87-150.

³ For sufi ideas on engagement with this world see *ibid.*, pp. 151-215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, trans., *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (Oxford, 1994), p. 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷ H.A.R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta A.D. 1325 – 1354*, I (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 135-37.

⁸ K.A. Nizami, 'The impact of ibn Taimiyya on South Asia', *Journal of Islamic Studies*. I (1990), pp. 120-49; H. Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (New York, 2002), pp. 8-10; E. Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 94-107.

⁹ A.H. Johns, 'Islam in the Malay World: An Exploratory Survey with Some Reference to Quranic Exegesis' in R. Israeli and A.H. Johns, *Islam in Asia: Volume II South and Southeast Asia* (Boulder, Colorado, 1984), pp. 115-61; P. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London, 2001), pp. 125-32.

¹⁰ B.A. Faruqi, *The Mujadid's Concept of Tawhid*, 2nd ed., (Lahore, 1943) and Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal, 1971).

¹¹ A. Hourani, 'Shaikh Khalid and the Naqshbandi Order', in S.M. Stern, A. Hourani and V. Brown (eds) *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (Columbia, S.C., 1972), pp. 89-101; H. Algar, 'The Naqshbandi Order: a Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance', *Studia Islamica*, XLIV, pp. 123-52; M. Gaborieau *et al.*, *Naqshbandis: Historical Developments and Recent Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order* (Istanbul and Paris, 1990), in particular the articles by Algar, Adams, Friedmann and Damrel; for the reach of Sirhindi's ideas into twentieth-century Turkey, S. Mardin,

Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Albany, N.Y., 1984).

¹² Algar, *Wahhabism*.

¹³ B.D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), pp. 3-86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-296; 'Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia' in F. Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 66-104.

¹⁵ B.D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf `Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar: a Partial Translation with Commentary*, (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 221-30, 233-36.

¹⁶ Speech of Sayyid Ahmad Khan to the students of Aligarh College, undated but made after he began his commentary on the Quran c. 1876, quoted in Altaf Husain Hali, *Hayat-i Javed*, trans. by K.H. Qadiri, and D.J. Matthews (New Delhi, 1979), p. 172.

¹⁷ S.A.H.A. Nadwi, *Life and Mission of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas*, trans. Mohammad Asif Kidwai (Lucknow, 1979), p. 108.

¹⁸ C.W. Troll, 'Five Letters of Maulana Ilyas (1895-1944), the Founder of the Tablighi Jama'at', translated, annotated, and introduced, in C.W. Troll, ed., *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries 2: Religion and Religious Education* (Delhi, 1985), p. 143.

¹⁹ M.K. Masud, *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal* (Leiden, 2000), especially pp. 3-42.

²⁰ M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1954), p. 154.

²¹ Translation of part of Iqbal's poem 'God's Talk with Man' in N.P. Ankiyev, 'The Doctrine of Personality', H. Malik ed., *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York, 1971), p. 274.

²² Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 95. The particular verse is 2.30. 'And when thy Lord said to the Angels, I am going to place a ruler [*khalifa*] in the earth, they said: Wilt thou place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood? And we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness. He said: Surely I know what you know not.' Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 5th ed. (Lahore, 1973). Jaafar Sheikh Idris provides an excellent discussion of the views of early commentators on the meaning of this and other verses using the term *khalifa*. He notes that the interpretation favoured by thinkers of the Islamic revival is closer to that of Ibn `Arabi than that of Ibn Taymiyya, but it nevertheless remains distinct. He explains the modern understanding of the caliphate of man in terms of the idea 'that man is master of

this world and of his own destiny, and of material development, which material development is not desirable only because it satisfies human needs, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it is a reflection of man's great abilities' as the outcome of Western influences. J. S. Idris, 'Is Man the Viceregent of God?', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, I (1990), pp. 99-110.

²³ S.A.A. Maudoodi, *Fundamentals of Islam* (Delhi, 1979, p xviii, and for a disquisition on the role of man as God's trustee on earth pp. 29-30.

²⁴ N.R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Materialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley, 1968), pp. 81-84.

²⁵ Idris, *Ibid.*

²⁶ A.H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1789-1939* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 228-29.

²⁷ B. Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement* (Reading, 1998), pp. 83-84.

²⁸ Qutb's *Fi Dhilal al-Qur'an* quoted in Idris, p. 107; for the second phase of the Brotherhood's development and the particular influence of Qutb see Sivan, *Radical Islam*.

²⁹ V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London, 2000), p. 83.

³⁰ H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, 1993), p. 194.

³¹ 'Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, trans. H. Algar (Berkeley, 1979), p. 123.

³² The role of Islamist interpretations of Islam in mobilising support for action has been most effectively analysed from the standpoint of theories of political mobilisation by C.R. Wickham in *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York, 2003) and from that of comparative political theory by R.L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, 1999)

³³ G. Abdo, *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (Oxford, 2000).

³⁴ F. Robinson, 'Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia*, XX, 1 (1997), pp. 1-15.

³⁵ B.O. Utvik, 'The Modernizing Force of Islamism', in J.L. Esposito and F. Burgat eds., *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and Europe* (London, 2003), p. 59.

³⁶ F. Adelhkhan, *Being Modern in Iran* (London, 1998), pp. 139-78.

³⁷ B. Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (London, 2002).