

LUMBARD, Joseph E. B., ed.: *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition. Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*. Bloomington, Indiana, World Wisdom Inc. 2004. 324 pp. ISBN 0-941532-60-7.

September 11, 2001 brought into sharp relief the struggle for the soul of Islam which has gripped Muslim communities across the world. In its wake the younger generation of Muslim intellectuals, working at Western, predominantly American universities and institutions, experienced an urgent need to reflect critically on the heritage of Islamic thought. Most of them arrived at the conclusion that recovering the Islamic intellectual tradition was an essential step to ameliorating the malaise which Muslims have long been experiencing. In their opinion this tradition has for quite a long time been the victim of two rigid extremes at the opposite ends of the spectrum of contemporary Muslim thought: on one side puritanical reformists who abuse Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) so as to excuse suicide killings, distort theology and decontextualize the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and on the other side modernists who argue that there is now an epistemological rupture with the past, reject the authenticity of the sayings of the Prophet, and call for abolition of the Islamic legal and theological schools of thought. Both have almost completely abandoned the age-old principles of Islamic thought. Each side continues to advance its position, but there is no dialogue, since in the absence of the traditional Islamic modes of interpretation, there is no basis for a common discourse among Muslims.

Neither side, however, is able to attract many ordinary Muslims. The conservative party is perceived as too restrictive, the modernists, on the other hand, do not appear authentically "Muslim" enough to most Muslims. The challenge, Muslim scholars believe, is to create an open space enabling critical conversation about the Islamic tradition in the light of modernity. Anouar Majid in his Preface to his *Unveiling Traditions* (2000), written after the global upheaval caused by the Rushdie affair, argues that Islamic subjectivities and epistemologies have to be included into the world of equal differences. People cannot simply step out of their culture (notwithstanding the hybridizing effects of the market place). Only secure, progressive, indigenous traditions, cultivated over long spans of time can sustain meaningful global diversities. This general line of thought is followed, among others, by the authors of essays contained in another recently published volume, *Progressive Muslims* (2003), edited by Omid Safi.

Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition, the book under review, is an additional contribution to the ongoing conversation. In this case the authors, Muslims who have been educated in the West and Westerners, converted to Islam, are followers or sympathizers of what is known as "Guénonian" Traditionalism, a movement established by the work of the French religious philosopher René Guénon (1886 – 1951). Guénon lived the last twenty years of his life in Egypt and died there as a Muslim. The movement is the fruit of the marriage of the 19th century oriental scholarship and the Western esoteric tradition. Originally, Traditionalists were all Europeans, mostly converts to Islam. Today their number includes born Muslims both in the West and in the Islamic world.

For Guénon progress is an illusion. Truth cannot be found in the future or in the discoveries of natural sciences, but in the past, which must be salvaged from the general collapse of the present. For the individual it means following an orthodox master in an "initiatic" tradition. According to Guénon only the influence of a spiritual and intellectual elite composed of such individuals can save the West.

Traditionalist groups usually take the form of sufi orders. Traditionalist sufi orders began their history with Maryamiyya established by Frithjof Schuon (1907 – 1998).

Among his early followers were Titus Burchardt (1908 – 1984) and Martin Lings (born 1911). In the last two decades of the 20th century Shuon began to attract followers in American universities and a number of professors of religious studies became followers of his. The most famous of them is probably Sayyed Hossein Nasr. With the support of the Shah of Iran he established the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (1974). The Academy began a project for the study and renewal of the traditional sciences and attracted many influential figures from abroad. Although Nasr fled Iran following the Revolution, the Academy survived and the Traditionalists today participate in debates such as on religious pluralism, their views being regarded with some sympathy by the highly influential Qom seminary.

Sayyed Hossein Nasr is also the author of the Foreword to the present volume of essays, which, he believes, can help create better understanding between Islam and the West. In accordance with the Foreword most of the essays clearly reveal their Traditionalist background.

The book is divided into three parts (Religious Foundations, Historic Dimensions, Political Dimensions) and an Epilogue. The essay "The decline of knowledge and the rise of ideology" (Part I) by the editor of the volume, Joseph Lumbard, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the American University in Cairo, represents the intellectual core of the book. In the author's own words the aim of the essay is to provide historical contextualization of movements in the Islamic world in order to enable the non-Muslims to appreciate the complexities of the Islamic intellectual tradition. His greatest attention, however, is directed at one dimension of the Islamic intellectual heritage which, as he states, has been abandoned, rejected and forgotten for much of the modern period, namely sufism. As against some scholarly authorities past and present the author argues that sufism has always been an integral part of the Islamic intellectual tradition. This tradition, which combines the highest degree of intellectual and spiritual rigour, has been in modern times dismissed by both puritanical reformists and liberal secularists. In the author's view it is one of the most significant losses endured by the Islamic world. Only when the legitimacy of the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Islam are recognized, and their teachings employed, will Muslims find solutions to problems which now confront their societies.

Fuad Naeem's "A traditional Islamic response to the rise of modernism" provides a historical illustration of the intellectual traditions discussed by Joseph Lumbard. The essay examines the response of the famous Indian scholar Maulanā Ashraf ʿAlī Thanvī (died 1942) to the rise of modernism in India.

"Roots of misconception: Euro-American perceptions of Islam before and after September 11" by Ibrahim Kalin, the Assistant Professor of Islamic studies at the College of the Holy Cross (Part II) is a well researched, highly informative and at the same time well balanced text. The author successfully avoids superficial and simplistic judgments. In our view it is the most valuable contribution to the volume.

David Dakake (Part I) and Reza Shah-Kazemi (Part II) address the highly sensitive issue of *jihād*. Dakake in "The Myth of Militant Islam" counters the idea of Islam as an inherently violent faith by directly discussing Qur'ānic verses and the most authoritative Qur'ānic commentaries, the *ḥadīth* tradition and early historical works. He points to the limits that the first Muslims placed on the *jihād* and shows that the traditional doctrine leaves no room for brutal acts like those perpetrated against the United States on September 11th.

The third part of the volume examines political dimensions of the current relations between Islam and the West. The approach to the phenomenon of terrorism through modern game theory in the essay written by Waleed El-Ansary may seem rather

unusual."The economics of terrorism: how bin Laden is changing the rules of the game" examines the strategic issues which must be accounted for in combatting terrorism. The author analyses Bin Laden's own publicly stated strategy and evaluates the mistakes of his opponents. Ejaz Akram's "The Muslim World and Globalization: modernity and the roots of conflict" studies the political, economic and social consequences of globalization in the contemporary Muslim world, especially in the Middle East. He shows that globalization carries ideologies which produce tensions in both public and private life of the people in the region.

The reprint of an essay by T. J. Winter of Cambridge University written after the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, "The poverty of fanaticism", showing how fanaticism not only damages the relations between Islam and the West, but also the Muslim community itself, is an appropriate epilogue to the volume.

The work has to be accepted for what it intends to be – an expression of the views of a group of scholars with a certain kind of vision. It offers an insight into the authors' interpretation of the current issues and their hopes for future. In some instances the work suffers serious limitations reflecting the philosophical standpoint of its authors. The arguments are sometimes based on a narrow and limited amount of sources. The defence of the creationist worldview (page 268) lets one pause in disbelief – to say the least. On the other hand the picture of the spiritual dimension of Islam drawn with deep understanding and intimate knowledge cannot but evoke sympathy in every reader.

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