

Islamic World-View of history, Culture and Civilization
as presented by Mohammad Iqbâl (1877-1938)
and Malek Bennabi (1905-1973).



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Introduction

In the closing chapter of *Vocation de l'Islâm*¹, Bennabi discerns two tendencies in the seeming chaos of the Muslim world. The one of historical order is imputable to internal forces manifesting themselves as actions and reactions of colonisability and colonialism ; while the other pertains to the grand phenomenon of the transfer of civilization on a global scale, it is the displacement of the centre of Islamic gravity from the Mediterranean to Asia.

Bennabi envisages as the most important political, cultural and psychological consequences of this transfer, the formation of the *volonte collective* and the liberation of Islâm from its internal impediments in its new social climate which is not hierarchical but broadly popular. Further Islâm would also be forced to adapt itself to the genius of an agrarian society with its innate sense of work, promising a new synthesis of 'man, soil and time' that would form the basis of a new civilization.

While in its Mediterranean era, says Bennabi, the contact of Islâm with Christianity had taken place in a colonial context, gravely distorting the Christian faith in Muslim eyes and helping it to retain its superiority complex, without any provocation to re-understand or rethink its faith, in Asia it was confronted with an entirely different situation. In this land of Buddhism and Brahmanism, *«Islâm could not help feeling itself a stranger... At the same time conquérant et minoritaire, it lived in a land conquered by other religions, and the Muslim there daily witnesses the extraordinary religious life of these beings... who live in an atmosphere aflame with mysticism...»*

It is before this spectacle and in this atmosphere, that has ripened the consciousness of an Iqbâl, the rich subjectivity of consciousness, endowed at the same time with reason and affectivity, with the faculty of understanding and of vibrating. This dialogue between the heart and the mind that the post al-Muwahhid man² has lacked and which still does

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not seem to have been resuscitated on the Mediterranean littoral, is not the least lesson that Islâm could draw from its displacement towards the Asian sphere»³

When he wrote the above lines, Bennabi in all probability knew Iqbâl only through the pages of Gibb's *Modern Trends in Islâm*,⁴ which by no means convey a full or fair picture of the latter's thought. Yet the instinctive response of this social thinker from the West of Islâm to the 'dialogue between heart and mind', he discerns in the poet-philosopher from the East, and his observations on the role of Islâm in India that strongly recall latter's own ideas on the subject, point to a mutual affinity of mind and soul.

A study of the thought of the two thinkers lends further substance to this claim. Despite the great distance that divides them politically and geographically and the difference in approach, Iqbâl adopts a philosophical approach in his momentous effort to re-think the entire content of Muslim religious thought in the light of recent development in science and philosophy, while Bennabi examines from a mainly sociological angle, the ruptures and tensions within the Islamic civilization that led to its disintegration. The two thinkers not only share the same world view but also come remarkably close in their diagnosis and conclusions, regarding various aspects of what Bennabi terms the «Muslim problem»

It would be both interesting and profitable to present a joint study of the world-view of the two great thinkers concerning history, culture and civilization in view of the grave moral and cultural crisis in the West that threatens to destroy all that humanity has achieved over the past centuries, and drag back humanity to the barbaric law of jungle.

One is struck at the outset by the profound insight of the two thinkers into the inner meaning and working of their own culture coupled with a deep consciousness of the immense achievement of modern thought, their innate belief in the organic unity of human origin, the concept of life as a continuous, creative, rationally directed movement in time, and the spiritual regeneration of the individual as the basis and condition of all civilization.

The Spirit of Muslim Culture

The Prophet of Islâm, Iqbâl says seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is

concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the modern world. The birth of Islâm is in fact the birth of inductive intellect». In Islâm prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need for its own abolition.

This involves the keen perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islâm, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality.⁵ However, it must be noted that the idea does not exclude inner experience, Qur'an regards both *Anfus* and *Afaq* as a source of knowledge. It is only that the first half of *kalima* has divested the forces of nature of that divine character bestowed on them by earlier cultures, and henceforth mystical experience too should be regarded as a normal experience open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience.

Rejection of the Greco-Hellenic legacy of thought and its static Concept of the universe

But it was in tapping Nature and History as sources of knowledge that the spirit of Islâm is seen at its best. *«The Qur'an sees signs of the ultimate Reality in the sun and the moon, the lengthening out of shadows, the alteration of day and night, the variety of human colour and tongues, the alternation of the days of success and reverse among peoples, in fact in the whole of nature as revealed to the sense-perception of man... This appeal to the concrete, combined with the slow realization that according to the teachings of the Qur'an, the universe is dynamic in origin, finite and capable of increase eventually brought Muslim thinkers into conflict with Greek thought and its speculative philosophy which in the beginning of their intellectual career they had studied with so much enthusiasm».*⁶

This intellectual revolt against Greek philosophy manifested itself in all departments of thought and gave birth to the method of observation and experiment in Islâm, thus laying the foundation of modern culture in some of its most important aspects. Europe had been rather slow to recognize the Islamic origin of her scientific method, Iqbâl comments, but full recognition has now come. He quotes from Briffault's Making of History:

*«The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consists in startling discoveries; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre-scientific....The Greeks systematized, generalized and theorized, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to Greek temperament...What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs».*⁷

With his perception of life as an organic unity, Iqbâl naturally rejected Spengler's theory that each culture constituted an specific organism with no point of contact with the preceding or following culture, leading the German thinker to the wrong conclusion that the European culture with its basically anti-classical spirit was solely The result of the specific genius of Europe and owed no inspiration to the culture of Islâm.

Ibn Khaldouîn's concept of the process of change

Side by side with the progress of mathematical thought in Islâm we find the idea of evolution gradually shaping itself. As a study of Muslim progress in various branches of knowledge shows, all lines of Muslim thought including religious psychology, converged on a dynamic conception of the universe. This view is reinforced by Ibn Maskawiya's theory of life as an evolutionary movement and Ibn Khaldouîn's view of history. History or 'the days of God, is the third source of human knowledge according to Qur'an. It is one of the most essential teaching of the Qur'an that nations are collectively judged and suffer for their misdeeds here and now, and the people are urged to reflect on the past and present experience of mankind.⁸

Iqbâl finds the growth of historical sense in Islâm a fascinating subject. The Quranic appeal to experience, the necessity to ascertain the exact sayings of the prophet, and the desire to furnish permanent sources of inspiration to posterity were the main forces behind men like Ibn-Ishaq, Tabari and Mas'ûdi. But the development of history from an art to a genuine science demands a wider experience, a greater maturity of practical reason and finally a fuller realization of certain basic ideas

regarding the nature of life and time. These ideas are in the main two and both form the foundation of Qura'nic teaching: first, the unity of human origin and a keen sense of the reality of time and the concept of life as a continuous movement in time.

But the perception of life as an organic unity, says Iqbâl, is a slow achievement and depends for its growth on a people's entry into the main current of world events. This opportunity was brought to Islâm by the rapid development of a vast empire. Though much earlier Christianity had brought the message of equality to mankind, but neither Christian Rome, nor Europe could make the idea a practical reality. On the other hand, the growth of territorial nationalism has tended to kill the broad human element in the art and literature of Europe. *«It was otherwise with Islâm. Here the idea was neither a concept of philosophy nor a dream of poetry. As a social movement it was the aim of Islâm to make the idea a living factor in the Muslim's daily life and thus silently and imperceptibly to carry it to further fruition»*⁹

Second, the idea and a keen sense of the reality of time and the concept of life as a continuous movement in time, it is this conception of life and time, Iqbâl says, that forms the main point of interest in Ibn Khaldou'n's view of history, and which justifies Flint's eulogy that *Plato, Aristotle, Augustine were not his peers, and all others were unworthy of even being mentioned along with him.*¹⁰ Considering the direction in which the culture of Islâm was unfolding itself, observes Iqbâl, only a Muslim could have viewed history as a continuous, collective movement, a real inevitable movement in time. *«The Qura'nic view of the 'alteration of day and night' as a symbol of the ultimate Reality which 'appears in a fresh glory every moment' the tendency in Muslim metaphysics to regard time as objective, ibn-Maskwiya's view of life as an evolutionary movement, and lastly, Al-Bayruni's definite approach to the conception of nature as a process of becoming, all this constituted the intellectual inheritance of Ibn-i Khaldou'n. His chief merit lay in his acute perception of, and systematic expression to, the spirit of Muslim culture of which he was a brilliant product».*¹¹

Iqbâl found Ibn Khaldou'n's concept of the process of change of infinite importance because of the implication that history as a continuous movement in time is a genuinely creative movement, and not

a movement whose path is already determined. It marked the final victory of the anti-classical spirit of the Qur'an over Greek thought for which time was either unreal or moved in a circle. Whatever may be the criterion by which to judge the forward steps of a creative movement, says Iqbâl, the movement itself, if conceived as cyclic ceases to be creative, resulting in eternal repetition rather than eternal creation. Because of his conception of the nature of time, Iqbâl regarded Ibn Khaldouïn as the forerunner of Bergson.

Iqbâl reiterates his belief in an organic, rationally directed life while discussing the concept of God. He viewed Divine omnipotence as intimately related to Divine wisdom and found the infinite power of God revealed not in the arbitrary and the capricious, but in the recurrent, the regular and the orderly: «...*Our intellectual constitution is such that we can only take a piecemeal view of things. We cannot understand the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc and at the same time, sustain and amplify life. The teaching of the Qur'an which believes in the possibility of improvement in the behaviour of man and his control of natural forces is neither optimism nor pessimism. It is meliorism, which recognizes a growing universe and is animated by the hope of man's ultimate victory over evil....*»¹²

Bennabi: Civilization and the cyclic phenomenon

The same organic concept of life as a continuous, creative process a gently ascending path across the millennia that humanity slowly scales in its onward march underlies Bennabi's exposition of history and civilization.

According to Bennabi, one can study the historical phenomenon from different points of view. From the view of individual, it is above all a psychology, i.e., a study of man regarded as psycho-temporal factor of a civilization. But it is also a manifestation of social life and collective thought. That is to say, it is a sociology that studies the conditions of development of a social group, mainly defined by a complex of affinities, corresponding to the place or space of this civilization. But this social group is not isolated and its evolution is interlinked with the human ensemble. From this point of view, history is metaphysics, since its perspective extends beyond causality to finality of the phenomena.

It is difficult to trace the origin of this movement in a certain time and space, nor does it matter much. One can only ascertain, Bennabi

says, its continuity through the ages. Whenever one seeks to establish its historical co-ordinates, one perceives that they designate a space that changes its abode. Hence the continuity that one sees in the general perspective of history, can be masked by a discontinuity if one concentrates on the succession of the aire or spaces of civilization.

In other words, history has two aspects, that of a general design, i.e., cosmic or metaphysical, and the properly sociological and historical, i.e., of a chain of causes. Under the latter aspect civilization presents itself as a numerical series, following its course in similar but non-identical terms. Thus appears an essential notion of history, the cycle of civilization.

In contravention of Iqbâl's strictures on the subject, but at the same time in opposition to the mechanistic conception of the Greek philosophers, Bennabi uses the cyclic phenomenon as the basis of a fascinating theory of the perpetuation of civilization in a permanent exodus. According to him, this phenomenon is marked in history by two essential aspects: the metaphysical or cosmic, that of a general design, of a finality; and the historical or sociological—that of a train of causes. *«Under the latter aspect, civilization presents itself as a numerical series, following its course in similar but non-identical terms, giving birth to the essential notion of history, the cycle of civilization. Each cycle is defined by the psycho-temporal conditions proper to a group, that is, it is a civilization in the above conditions Then this civilization migrates, shifts its abode and transfers its values to another area. It thus perpetuates itself in an indefinite exodus, across successive metamorphoses, each of them being a particular synthesis of man, soil and time»*¹³

The Algerian thinker ascribes to Ibn Khaldouîn the notion of cycles as presented in his theory of the three generations, and like Iqbâl believes the latter to have been inspired by Islamic psychological factors. *«It accentuates, he says, the transitory aspect of the civilization which is viewed as a succession of organized phenomenon, each of them necessarily possessing in a determined area a beginning and an end. The importance of this aspect lies in that it allows one to discuss not only the conditions of progressive development but also the factors of regression and decadence. For the evolution in the social order does not follow, as in the biological, an inevitable course. Here the fatality of life and death is limited or rather conditioned, since its direction and term is dominated by certain psycho-temporal factors on which an*

organized society could operate in some measure by regulating its life and pursuing certain ends in a coherent fashion...»¹⁴

Cosmic view of history

For seizing the integral sense of history, The Algerian thinker contends, one must adopt the cosmic point of view. He refers to the Swiss historian Gustave Jecquier, who after studying a four thousand years span of history arrived at certain significant conclusions. He discerned on one hand, a civilization that follows a path rising in gentle ascent, a harmonious line traversing smoothly the millennia, and on the other, the political upheavals, the human drama with all its contingencies of joy and sorrow. The distinction between the two orders of facts, Bennabi comments, in no way breaks their unity. The link between the two is of a dialectical nature : Man is the fundamental condition of all civilization, and the latter fixes the human condition. Seized in their total human perspective, even the most ordinary fact acquire a significant complexity. Likewise certain historical events surpass the framework of simple rational interpretation founded on immediate factors. For example a rational study of the life and character of Tamerlane fails to explain why he chose to destroy the Golden Horde as well as the army of Bayazid, thereby defeating the latter's plan to conquer Europe. To understand what Toynbee terms blindness of the great warrior that defied all considerations of dynastic rights, personal ambition and religious sentiment, one would have to envisage these events not in terms of their causality but of their finality in history, that is, to demand what would have happened if Toghtamish and Bayazid had been allowed to pursue their intentions.

In such a case, Europe would have passed under the triumphant scepter of Islâm and more significantly, the nascent renaissance of Europe would have melted into the Timourid renaissance. But though equally brilliant, the two did not possess the same significance. *«One was the commencement of a new order, the other, end of an order drawing to its term. Had Tamerlane followed but his personal impulse, nothing would have saved the entire world from the night that was slowly stealing over the Muslim lands...the saga of the Tatar emperor illuminates a finality of history, since it had a conclusion that conformed to the continuity of civilizations so that its cycles may succeed each other and therelay of genius continue on the path of the progress. It is this law which traces across the millenniums of history this path mounting in*

gentle ascent that humanity slowly scales. The finality of history mingles with that of the man»¹⁵.

One could here apply to Bennabi with equal justice, what Iqbâl said of Ibn Khaldouîn, that only a Muslim with his inherent and inherited sense of unity of human origin and dynamic nature of the universe could present such a universal and staggering panoramic view of history.

Truncation of History : Cult of the Empire and the Myth of the Dominant Race

Sometimes, however, writes Bennabi, *deceived by the apparent discontinuity that masks the real continuity of civilization, one truncates this concept of history, as did Thucidyde, by his assertion that before his epoch, no important event was produced in the universe, annulling thus the entire past of humanity, and creating the culture of empire, with the myth of the dominant race and the civilizing mission of colonialism.*¹⁶

It will not be out of place here to point out that this denial of the unity of human origin and of human experience is by no means confined to the ancient writers. Indeed this thesis has been advanced in one form or another all along to advance the racist, colonial agenda. As mentioned above, Spengler in his *Decline of the West* presents the thesis that each culture is a specific organism, having no point of contact with cultures that historically precede or follow it. Indeed according to him each culture has its own way of looking at things which is entirely inaccessible to men belonging to a different culture. In his anxiety to prove his thesis, he marshals an overwhelming array of facts and interpretations to show that the spirit is entirely due to the specific genius of Europe and not to any inspiration she may have received from the culture of Islâm which according to the learned writer is thoroughly magian in spirit and character, a charge that does not stand the test of serious scrutiny.¹⁷

Besides the monstrous distortion of history, religious and profane, by the Nazis and Zionists to eliminate or displace peoples wholesale, on racist grounds, there are quite a few living 'historians' in our times who have produced attractive theories, with an air of inevitability, to support the most latest neo-Imperialist push for domination of world economy and culture. Just as Thucidyde believed that history began with Greek civilization, today we have Francis Fukuyama who is as determined to prove that its conclusion will remain categorically white. As the latter

explains in his *End of History and the Last Man*, (1992), history possesses a structure and direction, that the direction is up, and that we in the liberal West occupy the final summit of the historical edifice. In proclaiming the end of history, it conveniently ignored the fact that his «end of history» equates, in fact, with racist appropriation of the final word via crude power and intimidation, denying the other his or her own testimony on their own reality and destiny.

There is also Fukuyama's mentor, Huntington. Like Spengler, he divides humanity into a number of different and conflicting civilizations. Since his own culture is obsessed with power, Huntington believes that all cultures aspire to imperial power; hence, instead of intercultural relations and intercultural democracy, he speaks of the inevitable clash of civilizations. He has repeatedly warned that it is pointless to expect people who are not at all like us to become significantly more like us; this well-meaning instinct only causes harm. «In the emerging world of ethnic conflict and civilizational clash, western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: It is false, it is immoral and it is dangerous». His only answer is greater militarization and the abandonment of liberal, democratic values in matters of foreign policy and defence. Like Spengler, his chief obsession seems to be the Islamic civilization, and no wonder. Because it is the Islamic moral and universal world-view poses the strongest and most dangerous challenge to their narrow, material and supremacist, view of history, culture and civilization.¹⁸

In his article *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1993), he reminds his reader that the «Cold War was a fleeting event compared with the age-old conflict between West and Islâm. In the Middle Ages, Muslim armies advanced through Iberia as far as France, and through the Balkans as far as the gates of Vienna. A similar process of advance, demographically rather than militarily, is now under way in Europe».¹⁹

Evolutionary concept of history not identical with scientific Determinism

As may be noted, the evolutionary concept of history presented by Iqbâl and Bennabi has nothing in common with the scientific determinism governing Western historical method. Iqbâl also rejected, as totally alien to the Qura'nic spirit, the idea of the universe as the

temporal working out of a pre-conceived plan. where destiny takes the place of rigid determinism, leaving no scope for human or even Divine freedom. However, he believed the nature of Reality to be teleological in the sense of a *«progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes and ideal scales of value as the process of life grows and expands. We become by ceasing to be what we are. Life is a passage through a series of deaths. But there is a system on the continuity of this passage. Its various stages, in spite of the apparently abrupt changes on our evaluation of things, are organically related to one another. The life history of the individual is, on the whole, a unity, and not a mere series of mutually ill-adapted events...»*²⁰

According to Iqbâl, time regarded as destiny forms the very essence of things. However, it is no unrelenting fate working from without like a task master: *«It is the inward reach of a thing, its realizable possibilities which lie within the depth of nature and serially actualize themselves without any feeling of compulsion...»*

Iqbâl goes on : *«...Life is one and continuous, Man marches always Onward to receive ever-fresh illuminations from an infinite reality which every moment appears in a new glory. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient : «It is the lot of man to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around him, and to shape his destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own ends and purposes. And in this process of progressive change God becomes a co-worker, provided that man takes the initiative: «Verily God will not change the conditions of men, till they change what is in themselves.»(s13-v.12)²¹.*

Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islâm

As described above, as a cultural movement Islâm rejects the old static view of the universe and reaches a dynamic view. As an emotional system of unification it recognizes the worth of individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship, which is earth-rootedness, as a basis of human unity. The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin. Such a perception is creative of fresh loyalties without any ceremonial to keep them alive, and makes it possible for man to emancipate himself from the earth.

Islâm appeared on the stage of world history at a crucial point in time. The great Roman civilization that had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of disintegration. The old imperial sanctions had lost their sanctity and power and could no longer operate and the new sanctions created by Christianity were working division and destruction instead of unity and order. Mankind seemed on the verge of returning to that condition of barbarism where every tribe and sect was against the next, and law and order were unknown. It was at this crucial moment in the history of mankind that Islâm flashed across the consciousness of a simple people untouched by any of the ancient cultures and occupying a geographical position where three continents meet.

«The new culture» says Iqbâl «finds the foundation of world unity in the principle of Tauhid. Islâm as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle, a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile in its life the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life, but they must not be understood to exclude all possibilities of change which according to Qur'an as one of the greatest signs of God. The failure of Europe in political and social sciences illustrates the former principle,²² the immobility of Islâm during the last five hundred years, the latter».²³

Ijtihad: the Principle of Movement in Islâm

Iqbâl finds in *ijtihad* the «principle of movement» in Islâm that means to exert with a view to form an independent judgement on a legal question. Its exercise enabled Muslim thinkers and doctors of law to meet the necessities of a growing civilization. Thanks to the ceaseless activity of early Muslim thinkers, in the sphere of religious thought alone, no less than one hundred systems of theology appeared in Islâm from 800 to 1100 AD, Horten, Professor of Semitic Philology at the Bonn University, to remark: «The spirit of Islâm is so broad that it is practically boundless. With the exception of atheistic ideas alone, it has assimilated all the attainable ideas of surrounding peoples and given them its own peculiar direction of development.»²⁴ Iqbâl, pp.163-164

This assimilative spirit is even more visible in the sphere of law. In the first three centuries alone, at least nineteen schools of law and legal opinion had appeared in Islâm. With the expansion of conquest and the consequent widening of the outlook of Islâm, these early legists had to take a wider view of things, and to study local conditions of life and habits of new peoples who came within the fold of Islâm. With the political expansion of Islâm, systematic legal thought became an absolute necessity and early doctors worked ceaselessly until all the wealth of Muslim law found a final expression in the four recognized schools of Muslim law. Henceforth though the theoretical possibility of *ijtihad* was still admitted, it was so hedged round with conditions that its exercise was practically made well-nigh impossible. Iqbâl mentions the growth of the Rationalist movement in Islâm, the rise and growth of ascetic Sufism and on top of all the (the first) destruction of Baghdad, the centre of Muslim intellectual life in the middle of the 13th century responsible for closing the door of *ijtihad*.

Muslim Renaissance: Factors of progress and retrogression

Whatever the causes of this tendency to over-organization by a false reverence of the past, it was contrary to the inner spirit of Islâm and consequently invoked the powerful reaction of Ibn Taymiyya, who was born in 1263, five years after the fall of Baghdad. «*One of the most indefatigable writers and preachers of Islâm*», he rose in revolt against the finality of schools, and went back to the first principles in order to make a fresh start.

The spirit of Taymiyya found a fuller expression in a movement of immense possibilities -Iqbâl terms it 'the first throb of life in modern Islâm which arose in the 18th century in Najd. The great reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab succeeded in spreading the fire of his soul throughout the world of Islâm. He was similar in spirit to Imam Ghazzali's disciple Ibn Tumart- the Berber puritan who appeared amidst the decay of Muslim Spain and gave it a fresh inspiration. The essential thing to note says Iqbâl, is the spirit of freedom manifested in the movement, though inwardly it too was conservative in its own fashion. Its vision of the past remained wholly uncritical and in matters of law, it mainly fell back on the Traditions.

It was Jamal al-Din Afghani who fully realized the enormity of the problem facing the Muslim world. His deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life combined with his

broad vision could have made him a living link between the past and present. Iqbâl believes that if could have devoted himself entirely to Islâm as a system of human belief and conduct, the world of Islâm would have been on much solid ground today.

Iqbâl himself found no justification for closing the door of *ijtihâd* either in Qur'an or the Traditions. In fact, the teaching of the Qur'an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitated that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of his predecessors should be permitted to solve its own problems. Hence he found the way in which the idea of *ijtihâd* was working in the religious and political thought of the Turkish nation of great interest and promise for the future course of Muslim renaissance. Even though Iqbâl was critical of the idea of the separation of Church and State envisaged in Turkish nationalist thinking and feared that the underlying race idea might wipe off the broad human outlook which Muslims had imbibed from their religion, on the whole, he pinned great hopes on the Turkish experiment. He fully supported the contention of the Grand National Assembly that the *khilafat* or *imamat* could be vested in a body of persons or elected assembly and believed the republican form of government to be not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islâm, but also a necessity in view of the new forces set free in the Muslim world. Indeed he saw in the replacement of the universal imamate by a multiplicity of free independent units with their racial rivalries adjusted and harmonized by the unifying bonds of a common spiritual aspiration, the slow realization of that vision of international Islâm glimpsed by Ibn Khaldoun centuries ago when driven by the hard realities of his age he had declared that since the power of the Quraysh was gone, there was no alternative but to accept the most powerful man in the country where he happens to be most powerful. *«It seems to me»* Iqbâl says, *«that God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islâm is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members»*.²⁵

Bennabi traces in almost identical terms the evolution of the reformist current in Islâm from Ibn Taymiyya to Jamal al-Din Afghani. The latter sought to cure his rotten milieu through a suppression of its institutional framework rather than through a transformation of the post-al-Muwahhid man. It was his disciple Shaykh Abduh who realized that a reform of Muslim society could come about only through the reform of

the individual. But how to transform the soul? The dogmatic spirit of Abduh led him to conclude that a re-formulation of theology was indispensable. But theology touches the problem of the soul only in the realm of credo, of dogma. However, as pointed earlier, it was not the credo that the post-al-Muwahhid man lacked, but its social radiation and efficiency. Had a synthesis been attempted between the dogmatic views of Abduh and the political and social views of Afghani, Bennabi says, the Reformists would have found quite another path than that leading to a mere re-formulation of theology. Bennabi finds himself in agreement with Iqbâl who posed the problem on quite other terms, demanding not a science but a consciousness of God, not a theological concept but an immanence. Growing self-criticism within the Reformist milieu. The set-up of various associations all over the world and above all, the movement of Hasan al-Banna, all show that Muslim consciousness is in search of a new path, conforming more to Iqbâl's wishes.

But even if it did not know how to transform the man, Bennabi says, the Reformist movement at least broke at least the static equilibrium of the post-al-Muwahhid epoch by introducing in the Muslim consciousness the notion of its secular drama. Since Siffin the Muslim civilization did in fact represent the accommodation of doctrinal Islâm to the imposed temporal order. Now, the reconstruction of Muslim culture demanded the re-establishment of the pure doctrine over *le fait de prince*- that is, the extrication of the pure Qura'nic text from its triple gangue of theology, jurisprudence and philosophy.

Bennabi did not share Iqbâl's enthusiasm for the Modernist movement in Islâm and believed that it had belied the expectations of the latter And his contemporaries. Compared with the Reformist movement, Bennabi finds it less profound, more fortuitous and more particularly connected with the aspirations of a new social category, the social outcome of Western school.

If the salafi did not realize it methodically, he did not lose sight of the notion of renaissance and was conscious enough of his milieu to demand only the duties, leaving rights to the Modernist. He was thus able, across his reformatory effort however naive, to reach an understanding of his milieu. With the Modernist, on the other hand, the very notion of renaissance made default, the primary question before him was not the re-generation of the Muslim world but of pulling it out of its present political predicament. For him it was not a Muslim

problem of man, but a European problem of institution and he never arrived at an understanding of his milieu.

Bennabi contests Iqbâl's assertion that *«the most remarkable Phenomenon of modern history is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islâm is spiritually moving towards the West»*,²⁶ since neither did Europe bring its soul to the world of Islâm nor did the latter go out to discover it on the spot. Instead Europe came to the East as the bearer of a civilization, but as a colonizer; and the young Muslim bourgeois who went to Europe for study or pleasure could only grasp a superficial knowledge of the West. His unconscious materialism made him insensitive to the most generous as well as the most odious aspects of Western civilization. Being content to learn rather than understand he also remained ignorant of the history and evolution of European civilization and its incompatibility with the laws of human order since racism and colonialism had changed its culture from that of a civilization to that of an empire. As he had not even acquired even the sense of real efficiency at the Western school, he more readily borrowed the bourgeois brand of European materialism, that is materialist tastes rather than its proletarian tendency, that is a dialectical discipline. Ignoring the ontological liaison of European products with their natural framework he did not bother to see if these tastes had any relation with Muslim life. This disposition to accumulate indiscriminate borrowings denounces the rudimentary aspect of the Modernist movement.

Nevertheless, Bennabi finds in the crystallization of a collective consciousness lacking since Siffin, a positive achievement of the Modernist movement. It has constituted in these countries a sign-post which designates if not the essential objective, at least certain more or less practical ends capable of drawing the masses from their indifference and apathy. On the intellectual plane, if the movement had not brought elements of a culture, it had nevertheless, given birth, through its borrowings from the West, to a current of ideas which though debatable, still have the merit of bringing into question all the traditional criteria.

One may mention here that like Malek Bennabi, Iqbâl, believed that without reforming the individual, all attempts at a reform of the Muslim society would prove fruitless. In the wake of the destruction of Baghdad, he notes, the conservative thinkers of Islâm, fearing further disintegration, focussed all their efforts on the point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by a jealous exclusion of all

innovations in the law of shari'at as expounded by the early doctors of Islâm. It is true that organization does to a certain extent counteract the forces of decay. But they did not see and our modern Ulama do not see, that the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men. In an over-organized society, the individual is wholly crushed out of existence. He gains the whole wealth of social thought around him and loses his own soul. The only effective power that counteracts the forces of decay is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals who alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which, we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision.²⁷

The organic relation between thought and intuition: unity of the ideal and real, temporal and spiritual

Iqbâl emphasizes again that the life of man and the onward march of his spirit depend on the establishment of connection with the reality that confronts him. It is knowledge that establishes these connections and knowledge is sense perception elaborated by understanding. But man's relation to nature in view of its possibilities as a means of controlling her forces must not be exploited in the interest of a desire for domination but in the nobler interest of a free upward movement of spiritual life. In order to ensure a complete vision of Reality, therefore, sense perception must be supplemented by the perception of heart which as mentioned above, along with nature and history, forms one of the sources of knowledge mentioned by the Qur'an. It is a kind of inner intuition or insight that brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to sense perception. Nor are thought and intuition opposed to each other. They spring from the same root and complement one another. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness; the one fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of Reality. Both seek vision of the same Reality that reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life.²⁸

This organic relation between thought and intuition is realized in the unity of the ideal and real, temporal and spiritual. The problem of Islâm according to Iqbâl was really suggested by the mutual conflict and attraction of the two forces of religion and civilization. Early Christianity confronted the same problem by a search for an independent content for spiritual life through revelation of a new world within the soul. Islâm on the other hand, sought the affirmation of the

spirit not by renunciation of the external forces already permeated with the illumination of the spirit, but by a proper adjustment of man's relation to these forces in view of the light received from within: «...As may be surmised from the above, in Islâm the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains. This ancient mistake, says Iqbâl, arose out of the bifurcation of the unity of man into two different realities which somehow had a point of contact but were in essence opposed to each other. In truth, however, matter is spirit in space-reference. ...In Islâm it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another The Unity called man is body if one looks at it as acting in regard to the external world; it is mind or soul when one looks at it as acting in regard to the ultimate aim or ideal of such acting. An act is temporal or profane, if it is performed in a spirit of detachment from the infinite complexity of life behind it; it is spiritual if it is inspired by that complexity...»

«The essence of Tauhid as a working idea is equality, solidarity and freedom. The state from the Islamic standpoint is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. It is in this sense alone that the state in Islâm is a theocracy, not in the sense that it is headed by a representative of God on earth who can always screen his despotic will behind his supposed infallibility ...There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the realization of the spirit....As the Prophet so beautifully put it: the whole of this earth is a mosque' The state according to Islâm is only an effort to realize the spiritual in an human organization. But in this sense all state, not based on mere domination, and aiming at the realization of ideal principles, is theocratic» .²⁹

The same thesis regarding the wholeness of human life and experience in a dialectical unity of the ideal and real, temporal and spiritual that Iqbâl philosophically presents as a cardinal point of Qur'anic teaching, finds as forceful an expression on the sociological context in Bennabi's analysis of the ruptures and contradictions that finally led to the disintegration of Muslim society.

The Muslim world, says Bennabi, knew its first rupture at the battle of Siffin (37 Hijra), since it already contained an internal contradiction, the jahilian spirit opposed to the Qura'nic spirit.³⁰ It was Mu'awiya who broke a synthesis established on the equilibrium between the spiritual

and the temporal.³¹ Though one owes to this 'deviated' civilization that flourished in Damascus, the first landmarks in scientific thought, yet from the bio-historical view, this brilliant civilization was but a *«de-naturalization of the original synthesis realized by the Qur'an and founded on the equilibrium between spirit and reason on the double moral and material base, necessary for all durable edifice»*.

The Muslim world could only survive this first crisis in history, continues Bennabi by reason of what remained in it of the Qur'anic living force and impulsion. It was men like Uqba, Umar Ibn-Abd al-Aziz and Imam Malek who maintained it not because of their distinguished positions, but because they incarnated under different titles the simple and great virtues of Islâm-contempt for the glory offered, refusal of the power when it was undue, and defiance opposed to it when it became unjust-that have maintained in the Muslim world the ferment deposited in it by the Qur'an.

One can well understand the importance that the great sociologist, Muhammad attached to moral values as the essential force of civilizations. But in periods of decadence, the scale of values is reversed. Frivolities then appear as great things, and the social edifice that could not solely on props of technique, science or reason, must need collapse. For it is the soul alone that allows humanity to soar; when it makes default, it is the fall and the decadence.

This unity of spiritual and temporal is inextricable linked to Bennabi's cyclical notion of civilization, since moral paralysis is bound to result in intellectual paralysis leading to the end of a cycle. When The breath that gave a society its first impulsion ceases to animate it, it is the *«exodus of the civilization to another area, where another cycle commences in a new bio-historical synthesis. But in the space thus left vacant, the work of science loses all significance. Where there ceases the radiation of spirit, there ceases also the rational effort. It would seem that the man loses the thirst to understand and the will to act, the moment he loses the elan, the tension of the faith. It is thus that the work of Ibn Khaldouïn seems to have come too late or too soon; it could no longer impress itself on the Muslim genius that had already lost its plasticity, its aptitude to progress and renew itself...»*³²

No temporal expansion could, in the course of history, replace this unique source of energy, that is faith. Neither the «timourid renaissance» around Samarkand, nor the Ottomon Empire could give the Muslim

world a 'movement' that no longer has its source within itself. The internal contradictions reached their culminating point in the disintegration of a world and the appearance of new societies with new characteristics and tendencies.

Faith as an active, living truth not false renunciation

It must be noted that when Iqbâl and Bennabi speak of faith, they do not have in mind the faith of the recluse that provides him a kind of cowardly escape from the facts of life but faith as an active, living truth, a source of energy that galvanizes the wills.

The Prophetic experience, according to Iqbâl was essentially social in nature and productive of world-shaking psychological forces calculated to transform the human world. He was highly critical of ascetic Sufism that gradually developed under influences of a non-Islamic character a purely speculative side. The distinction between *zahir* and *batin* created an attitude of indifference to all that applied to appearance and not to reality, and resulted in a spirit of total otherworldliness, thus obscuring man's vision «*of a very important aspect of Islâm as a social polity*».

Bennabi is as anxious to dissipate the same equivocation. It may be noted, he says that faith considered in terms of an eschatological estimate of spiritual values never lost its empire in the Muslim world even in its period of decadence. But if one wished to consider the problem from a sociological and historical point of view, one must not confuse the salvation of individual soul with the evolution of societies. Religion is a catalyst of social values but in its «*nascent, dynamic state when it expresses a collective thought. The moment faith becomes centripetal, without radiation, that is individualistic, its historic mission on earth is finished where it is no longer fit to promote a civilization. History commences with the integral man, constantly adapting his effort to his ideal and needs, and accomplishing in a society his double mission as actor and witness. But history ends with the disintegrated man, the corpuscle deprived of centre of gravitation, the individual living in a dissolved society the no longer furnishes his existence with either moral or material base*».

It is then the escape into maraboutism or any other form of escapism.³³

Problems faced by the Muslim Renaissance

The Muslim world was passing through a period similar to that of the Protestant revolution, Iqbâl said. The net outcome of Luther's essentially political movement was the gradual displacement of the universal ethics of Christianity by a plurality of nation, hence narrower systems. While the best European thinkers were at last realizing the initial mistake of the separation of the spiritual and the temporal, her statesmen were indirectly forcing the world to accept it as unquestioned dogma.

While Iqbâl welcomed the liberal movement in modern Islâm as an inevitable element of Muslim renaissance, he was fully alive to the fact that the appearance of liberal ideas constituted at the same time, the most critical moment in the history of Islâm. For liberalism had a tendency to act as a force of disintegration, and the race idea which appeared to be working in modern Islâm with greater force that ever could ultimately wipe off the broad human outlook which Muslim peoples had imbibed from their religion. He feared that in their zeal for liberation, Muslim religious and political reformers might overstep the proper limits of reform.

*«No people could afford to reject their past entirely, Iqbâl said, for it is their past that has made their personal identity. And in a society like Islâm the problem of a revision of institutions becomes still more delicate, and the responsibility of the reformer assumes a far more serious aspect. Islâm is non-territorial in its character, and its aim is to furnish a model for the final combination of humanity by drawing its adherents from a variety of mutually repellent races, and then transforming this atomic aggregate into a people possessing a self-consciousness of their own. This was not an easy task to accomplish. Yet, Islâm, by means of its well-conceived institutions, has succeeded to a very great extent in creating something like a collective will and consciousness in this heterogonous mass. In the evolution of such a society even the immutability of socially harmless rules relating to eating and drinking, purity or impurity, has a life-value of its own, in as much as it tends to give such society a specific inwardness, and further secures that external and internal uniformity which counteracts the forces of heterogeneity always latent in a society of a composite character. The critic of these institutions must therefore, try to secure, before he undertakes to handle them, a clear insight into the ultimate significance of the social experiment embodied in Islâm».*³⁴

Iqbâl was also greatly concerned with the idea of territorial nationalism and its implications for Islâm, particularly in India where the presence of a non-Muslim majority further complicated the issue. He opposed the idea not because its application in India was likely to bring less material gain to Muslims, but because he saw in it the germs of atheistic materialism which he considered the greatest danger to humanity. A European with his concept of Christianity as a monastic order, could look upon religion as a private affair. The Prophet's experience, however, was an individual experience creative of a social order. The religious ideal of Islâm was, therefore, organically related to the social order it had created, and the construction of a polity on national lines if it implied displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity was simply unthinkable for a Muslim.³⁵

In Muslim countries outside India, however, with their almost wholly Muslim populations or where there are no social barriers between Muslims and minorities that belong to the *«people of the Book»*, the idea of nationalism seemed to be working itself in conformity with the inner catholicity of Islâm. Indeed, the first practical step that Islâm took for *the realization of a final combination of humanity was to call upon peoples possessing practically the same ethical ideal to come forward and combine*. The Qur'an declares: *O people of the Book. Come, let us join together on the word (unity of God), that is common to all*. The wars of Islâm and Christianity, and later, European aggression in its various forms, could not allow the infinite meaning of this verse to work itself out in the world of Islâm. Today it is being gradually realized in the world of Islâm in the shape of what is called Muslim nationalism.³⁶

Muslims and the great crisis in the history of modern culture

The modern man with his philosophies of criticism and scientific Specialism Iqbâl says, finds himself in a strange predicament. His Naturalism has given him an unprecedented control over the forces of his nature but has robbed him of his faith in his own future. It is strange how the same idea affects different cultures differently. The formulation of the theory of evolution in the world of Islâm brought into being Rumi's tremendous enthusiasm for the biological future of man, On the other hand, the formulation of the same view of evolution led to the belief that 'there now appears too be no scientific basis for the idea that the present rich complexity of human endowment will ever be materially

exceeded. That is how, Iqbâl says, the secret despair of modern man hides itself behind the screen of scientific terminology. Nietzsche, although he thought that the idea of evolution did not justify the belief that man was unsurpassable cannot be regarded as an exception in this respect. His enthusiasm for the future of man ended in the doctrine of eternal recurrence-perhaps the most hopeless idea of immortality ever formed by the man.

Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, that is, from within. In the domain of thought, he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life, he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness. Absorbed in the fact that is to say the optically present source of sensation, he is entirely cut off from the unplumbed depths of his own being. In the wake of his systematic materialism has come that paralysis of energy which Huxley apprehended and deplored.

The condition of things in the East, Iqbâl continues, is not better, Iqbâl says. The technique of medieval mysticism, by which religious life in its highest manifestations, developed itself both in the East and West has now practically failed. In the Muslim East it has perhaps done far greater havoc than anywhere else. Far from reintegrating the forces of the average man's inner life, and thus preparing him for participation in the march of history, it has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom.

Disappointed of a purely religious method of spiritual renewal which alone could bring him in touch with the everlasting fountain of life and power, the modern Muslim in Turkey, Egypt and Persia, is led to seek fresh sources of energy by narrowing down his thought and emotion by the creation of new loyalties, such as patriotism and nationalism. *«Modern atheistic socialism which possess all the fervour of a new religion»* Iqbâl goes on, *has a broader outlook, but having received its philosophical basis from Hegelians of the left-wing, it rises in revolt against the very source that could have given it strength and purpose. Both nationalism and atheistic socialism, at least in the present state of human adjustments, must draw upon the psychological forces of hate, suspicion, and resentment which tend to impoverish the*

*soul of man and close up his hidden spiritual energy. Neither the technique of medieval mysticism, nor nationalism, nor atheistic socialism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. The modern world stand in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future, his whence and wither, that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values.*³⁷

While Europe constituted for the present the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical development, Iqbâl firmly believed that Islâm could yet act as a living force for freeing the outlook of man from its material and geographical limitations. Humanity needs three things today, a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe too had built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone brings. The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole purpose is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. The Muslim, on the other hand was *«in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which speaking from the inmost depth of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. With him the spiritual basis of life is a matter of conviction for which even the least enlightened man among us can easily lay down his life; and in view of the basic idea that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realize the true significance of the basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve out of the partially revealed purpose of Islâm that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islâm»*.³⁸

Iqbâl did not live to see his worst fears concerning the direction the European civilization was taking. Come true. It was Malek Bennabi who lived through the second world war and witnessed the disintegration of old European colonialism. He saw as clearly as Iqbâl the malaise of the Muslim world and the moral and cultural crisis of the European civilization that was leading the entire world towards disaster.

As mentioned above, the Algerian writer sums up under colonisibilité and colonization the factors responsible for the chaos in the Muslim world. It was but logical that for liberating oneself from an effect, that is colonialism, one must first get rid of its cause, that is colonisibilité. However instead of seeking to transform the fundamental rudimentary means at his disposal soil, time and his own genius, into more perfect means through a self-transformation, the current politics in Muslim countries, addressed itself exclusively to the colonizer demanding from the latter the means to change the condition of the colonized, the paradox of a captive who asks his jailer for the key of his cell.³⁹

But while Bennabi emphasizes the decisive role of internal factors in the chaos of the Muslim world, he did not minimize the eliminating role of colonialism. Its technique of disorientation is directed against all dignity, nobility and modesty; it adapts itself continuously to new situations, sabotaging all initiative. Since religion remained the sole and ultimate means of rebuilding the moral health of a people that in the crisis of its history have lost all moral resource, the Muslim renaissance excites its most passionate interest and its unbounded power and ambition has inspired it with the mad and tragic idea of halting the march of civilization in the colonized country. To counter *tajdid* it has set up an artificial archaism, complete with its puppets, marabout, pasha or false 'alim.⁴⁰ At each instant colonialism shouts at the history of the colonized people the words of Joshua *Stat Sol* (Stop Sun). This singular pretension. Bennabi says, which never entered the brain of any Genghis Khan or Attila is today the formula of the most odious form of human despotism in this 20th century of Christian European civilization.

Colonialism has played as decisive a role in the chaos of the Western World, leading to a phenomenon common to all civilizations the retard of consciousness over science and the march of thought. The resulting ruptures in the European society on the social, political and moral plan, finally culminated in a confrontation of the practical materialism of the European bourgeois with dialectical materialism of its

proletariat. It was this period of European history marked by moral, political and social schism that coincided with the zenith of the colonial era and the first manifestation of Muslim renaissance, thus adding to a society burdened by its own dead and decaying ideas, the residue of another decomposition.

Drunk with the new forces that it had unleashed, Europe became enticed by its own genius. It was the era of quantatism and moral relativism when one lost all sense of the absolute. The unchained appetites of moral relativist found full vent in the colonized territory, and never was the thirst for gold so violent as after the discovery of a colony. These two factors of scientism and colonialism joined together to become the fatality of Europe as theology had become that of the post-al-Muwahhid man. Bennabi quotes the Prophet as saying: *«He who digs a well under the feet of his neighbour, shall himself fall into it»*.

And fearing more for a nation the injustice it commits, than the injustice it suffers, he added : «The power even of the unbelievers shall endure if it is just, but the power of the believers perishes surely, if it is unjust»⁴¹

The history of our period, the Algerian writer says, tragically illustrates these oracles, Europe that should have used its torch of civilization to guide the march of humanity, employed it to set aflame the colonial world. But it has harvested there from the same disorientation, and the same fatalism before the evil power of mythology on its own soil, that it has sown in the rest of the world.

But there is the return of the flame. Colonialism engenders a Hyper-nationalism in European consciousness, then moves on, passing through philosophical distillations, refining itself carefully, to become finally the myth of the chosen race that would justify the last degree of barbarism. The war of 1914-1918 was really an intermediary term between colonialism and Nazism.... At the time, each invoked for the best if his material interests the propitious entities of modern alchemy: God, the Right, the Man, thus found themselves intermingled with patrol and tin...«*And then one bright day, one is awakened by a formidable return shock Bah! It is Nazism, it will pass, and one waits and hopes and does not admit even to oneself the truth that it is a barbarity, but the supreme barbarity that crowns and resumes all the day to day barbarities; that this comes from Nazism, yes, but before becoming its victim, one has been its accomplice ; one has supported this Nazism*

before being subjected to it, one had absolved it, one had closed one's eyes to it, one had legitimized it, because up to now, it had only been applied to non-European peoples...»⁴²

And the ruptures and corruptions multiply and amplify each day in The West, distorting justice, destroying conscience and awakening in the colonizer the most brutal instincts of greed, violence and racial hatred.

While scientific and economic factors have put the world in a state of pre-federation, the ideas on the contrary have maintained their old ferment of discord. Marking at its most violent the imbalance between a retarded consciousness and a progressive science. The latter has abolished space, leaving only the distance of their culture between them, that has but increased to think only of an illiterate beggar in Africa and the man detonating the atom in US or USSR. This contradiction between facts and ideas is tragic. What could the declarations of human rights could signify to the native brute in Asia and Africa. Underlying it all is a materialist culture that could promote an empire but not a civilization.

Endowed with all the inertia of matter. This culture is incapable of following the evolution of its own products, immured in this contradiction by its own Cartesian method. One is preoccupied not with finality but only with causality. One knows how to fashion matter but not how to render it useful to man. Europe has become technician but ceased to be moral no longer able to discover the human perspectives beyond the limits of the world defined solely on material terms, numerical or quantitative. A civilization finds its equilibrium between the spiritual and the temporal, between causality and finality. A breakdown on this balance had plunged Muslim civilization into the metaphysical anarchy of the maraboutic chaos; one witnesses today another experiment ending in another imbalance: the Western civilization having lost its balance finds itself on the brink of disaster.

The disintegration of the colonial world has laid bare the profound sense of history, revealing at the same time, the unity of problems and needs in the world and the necessity of readjusting relations among peoples. Colonialism and nationalism are alike condemned as being incompatible with an international existence not based on force; one could not form part of a human order when one is colonized and colonizer. The world is on the way of realizing institutionally the direction of history. Liberalism cedes place to a rational order that tends

towards general harmony, not in accordance with utopian plans, but with the strict law of vital necessities. The Muslim world would have to take count of this decisive step of history in its evolution. Formulas such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism are henceforth obsolete, just as pan-Europeanism, that one seeks to resurrect in Strasbourg.

Though still grasped only on a spatial plane, *«the unity of the world has always been the essential phenomenon of history, while the divisions constituted mere accidents, the epi-phenomena. If it escapes the Cartesian spirit, it is because its formative culture ascribes the commencement of history and thought to the foundation of Rome and the establishment of Athenian academies»*. It is curious, Bennabi goes on, *«how even the greatest European minds seem incapable of rising above the Hellenic thought. As soon as they cross the frontiers of Greco-Latin Humanities, they seem to be wandering on another planet»*. Bennabi hopefully points to a new tendency evident in the work of a of some Western writers like Guenon and Huxley for highlighting the common foundationss of mystical thought in the world, though he finds it hard to determine the effects of such work on the daily relations and contacts between men and peoples.

In any case, Bennabi observes, the Muslim world by its very atavism is already half-way towards this new world. Despite his colonisability, the post-al-Muwahhid man has retained an essential sense of moral values. Even if backward, the post-al-Muwahhid man realizes better than the civilized man, the psychological conditions of the new man the citizen of the world or, according to the prophetic expression of Dostoevsky, of the Omni-man.

While the Muslim must still use all his faculties of adaptation to attain the technical level of the atomic age, his role remains, above all, spiritual as moderator of materialist thought and nationalist egoism. Already while tracing the path of its spiritual renaissance, the Algerian thinker points out, Iqbâl had called for the Muslim world a turn of spirit capable of considering things and institutions not from the standpoint of social advantage or disadvantage to this and that country, but from the point of view of disadvantage to this or that country, but from the point of view of the larger purpose which is Being gradually worked out in the life of mankind as a whole.⁴³ This metaphysics of Iqbâl, Bennabi comments may shock spirits warped by a rationalism for which all that escapes the ponderable dimensions of seems irrational, but is bound to command the attitude of the man in the new world.

Malek Bennabi continued his jihad against ignorance, bigotry and religious and racial intolerance all his life. All the while, he not only wrote incessantly, but also traveled widely. His close observation of the civilizational phenomenon in these countries helped him in his search for the causes of the dismal failure of most of the Third World countries to realize the fruits of independence. The remarkable economic recovery of Japan and Germany and success of the revolutionary experiment in China and convinced him more than ever of the importance of ideas as instruments of evolution in a given society. Already in 1959, Bennabi had emphasized importance of the ideological struggle that must precede and direct the struggle for social and economic emancipation. He pointed to the new stage in international evolution wherein the power struggle of the two super powers had been shifted to the ideological arena, making it all the more incumbent on Muslim and other Afro-Asian countries lagging behind in material means of power to devote utmost attention to the problem of ideas. He recalled how the Bandung Conference feared by Western political experts as most ominous development of post World War II period had failed to harnessing immense human and material potential to liberate itself from an economic, political and social system designed to serve the interests of Western imperialism, just because it lacked the ideological spark needed to trigger the required explosion. A series of lectures on ideology, culture and civilization in post-independence Algeria, show his continued pre-occupation with these subjects. The paucity of ideas was most glaringly reflected in the economic chaos reigning in most Muslim and Third World countries where, even after 30-40 years of independence, the majority of the population continued to swelter in abject poverty and ignorance. In his *The Muslim in the World of Economy* (1972) he treats the subject from a cultural and social angle and presents a programme of economic action that while benefiting from the experiment of other peoples, would draw inspiration from the Quranic notion of solidarity, social justice and human dignity.

On his way back from his last pilgrimage in the early summer of 1972, delivered two lectures in Damascus on the Role of Muslim in the Last Third of the 20th Century. He spoke of the momentous crisis that today faced the Washington-Moscow axis, that is to say, the axis of power, science and civilization, and traced it to a loss of old justifications that had hitherto motivated and validated its ideological, social and economic life, and the failure of subsequent efforts to replace

them. It is this fatal vacuum, this absence of a *raison d'être* that is driving the flower of its youth to desperation, on the path of bestiality, drugs and suicide.

History seems to have reached once again a point of no return, and Bennabi believed the moment ripe for realization of the Quranic verse : *It is He, who has sent his Apostle with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religions* (61:09).

But, the Algerian thinker warned, the Muslim can fulfill his mission only if he fulfilled its conditions. Before saving others, he must save himself. He must raise himself to the level of civilization and above it, so as to raise civilization to the sanctity of existence, divinity of existence that cannot exist apart from the existence of God.

Notes and References

¹. Bennabi, Malek, *Vocation de l'Islâm*, Paris, Editions de Seuil, 1954

². Bennabi regards the year 1369 A.D as the point of deflection of Muslim history and civilization. Since it coincided with the fall of the al-Muwahhid empire in North Africa and Spain, the writer uses the term 'post al-Muwahhid' to denote the era of Muslim decadence.

³. Ibid., Pp. 163-166. Bennabi's sentiments seem an echo of Iqbâl's own observations on the role of Islâm in the sub-continent. In his historic 1930 address that envisaged the creation of an independent Muslim state, Iqbâl said, "...India is perhaps the only country on the world where Islâm as a people-building force has worked at its best....What I mean to say is that Muslim society with its remarkable homogeneity and inner unity had grown to be what it is, under the pressure of laws and institutions associated with the culture of Islâm..." Claiming that the creation of a Muslim state would be in the interest of both Islâm and India he went on to observe that it would provide Islâm an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arab Imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilize its law, its education, its culture, and to bring them in closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times" Ahmad, Jamil-ud-din, *Historic Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement*, Lahore, Publishers United, 1970, Pp. 121-128

⁴. Gibb, H.A.R, *Modern Trends in Islâm*. University of Chicago Press, 1947. Bennabi probably refers to its French translation, Gibb, H.A.R., *Modern Trends in Islâm*, trad. Fr. De B. Vernier, Paris, G.P.Maison-Neuve, 1949.

⁵. Iqbâl, Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islâm*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, (Reprinted) 1944, p.126

⁶. Ibid., Pp. 127-128

⁷. Ibid., p. 141

⁸. Ibid., Pp.138-139

⁹. Ibid., p. 141

¹⁰. Ibid., p. 143

¹¹. Ibid., Pp.141-142

¹². Ibid., p. 81

¹³. Bennabi, op. cit., Pp.22-23

¹⁴. Ibid., p. 23

¹⁵. Ibid., Pp. 159-160

¹⁶. Ibid., p.22

¹⁷. Iqbal op. cit., Pp. 142-145

¹⁸. Indeed it is daily becoming more and more evident that the present world cultural crisis stems from a growing polarization between western civilization represented today by American culture and the Islamic culture. The US uses every available opportunity too good effect to increase or reinforce its political, economic and cultural hegemony in the world and enhance its global supremacy. The conditions for US in this sphere are currently excellent. The only national cultures that stubbornly refuse to submit themselves to US rule are in those countries where Islām is strong. No wonder the victims of the current so-called war against terrorism are all Muslims. The realization that in defending their own culture the Muslims are also fighting for the freedom of other cultures, including Western is manifested by mass multi-cultural and multi-religious demonstrators against the war against Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinians and against 'globalization'. Under the heading, *Islamic Extremism May Save Western Civilization*, An American commentator writes: *What may gall Americans specially those who call themselves Christian, is the idea that it may be the Arab and Muslim culture that will be not only the birthplace of Western Civilization, but the saviour of it as well.*" The war going on presently is superficially about things like 'terrorism' and 'freedom' while some blame it on oil and banking or Israel, but the 'real war here is between two world-views." Saying that to the 'New World' and by default, the New World Order, the Arab/Muslim world is backwards in values, but as a matter of fact, their cultural values are those once held dear by the Christian world, Mark Glenn contends that the religion of Islām resembles Christianity more than does the Christianity of the West today: *"The fact of the matter is, putting aside all the other reasons, what exists in the Middle East, or in the Old World, as some call it, is a culture still devoted to principles concerning basic moral values, values that have not yet surrendered to the corrupting influence of western media or Western money. Within the last 50 years every culture has fallen before this corrupting power that seeks to enslave all men in such a way that the individual is reduced to the value of what he produces and what he consumes and in pursuit of that method, the individuals behind this program have quietly but decisively removes every obstacle in their way, be it religious, culture, morals, tradition or world view, through the methods of media, academia, and financier that is, except the culture encapsulated in the Islamic/Arabic world.... They still view the family, the traditional family, with all its traditional roles as the most important building block of their society, and they take very seriously anything that threatens it. They recognize the value of their children, and how dangerous the moral relativism of the West has become threatening the stability of society directly. They recognize that if their children are subjected to ideas that promote moral decay for an extended period of time, what will eventually be produced is national decay."* Glenn says that *the New World order has used and is using all resources and influence to stifle and neutralize all opposition to its agenda in the world, and most institutions and groups have caved in.*" So, with the exception of a few pockets of token resistance, there is no one left standing in the way of the NOW except the Arab/Muslim world.

"If by some miracle the Arab/Muslim world is victorious against this onslaught, and the secular/atheistic influence of the NOW is reduced to such a level as to allow the Christian West to regain its foothold where it once stood. It will be necessary to credit the religion of Islam and the Arab world for not buckling under, in the face of extermination."

¹⁹. Kaplan, Robert D., Looking the World in the Eye, The Atlantic Monthly, Dec., 2001

²⁰. Iqbâl, op. cit., p. 54

²¹. Ibid., p.12

²². "American culture is criticized for its impermanence, its 'disposable products'. But therein lies its strength. All previous cultures, general and military, have sought to achieve an ideal form of life which, once reached, might endure in static perfection. American culture is not about the end, but the means, the dynamic process that creates, destroys, and creates anew. If our works are transient, then so are life's greatest gifts—passion, beauty...even life itself. American culture is alive." Peters, Major (P) Ralph, Parameters (US Army War College Quarterly) Summer 1997, pp 4-14

²³. Iqbâl, op., cit., Pp. 147-148

²⁴. Ibid., Pp. 163-164

²⁵. Ibid., p. 159

²⁶. Bennabi quotes Iqbâl from Gibb (Op. cit., p.78) who does not give the following lines that accord precisely with Bennabi's own estimate: "... There is nothing wrong in this movement for European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islâm. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European culture may arrest our movement, and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture..." Iqbâl, op. cit., p. 7

²⁷. Iqbâl, Ibid. p. 151

²⁸. Ibid., Pp. 15-16

²⁹. Ibid., Pp. 154-155

³⁰. Ibid., Pp. 154-155

³¹. Iqbâl too believed Siffin to be to be point of deviation in Muslim history that stultified the growth of the germs of an economic and democratic organization of society to be found in the Qur'an and the Traditions and led to Arab Imperialism. Further "the practical materialism of the opportunist Omayyad rulers of Damascus needed a peg on which to hang their misdeeds at Karbala and to secure the fruits of Amir Mu'awiya's revolt against the possibilities of a popular rebellion. Thus arose despite protests of Muslim divines a morally degrading fatalism and the constitutional theory known as the *fait accompli* in order to support vested interests. Since Muslims have always sought the justification for their varying attitudes in the Qur'an even though at the expense of its plain meaning, the fatalistic interpretation has had very far reaching effects on the Muslim peoples....." Iqbâl, op. cit. Pp. 110-111

³². Bennabi, op cit, Pp 25-26

³³. Ibid, Pp. 26-27

³⁴. Iqbâl, op, cit, p. 167

³⁵. Ahmad, Jamil-ud-din, op., cit, Pp. 121-124

³⁶. Ibid, Pp. 135-136

³⁷. Iqbâl, op., cit., Pp. 187-189

³⁸. Ibid., Pp. 179-180

³⁹. One is strongly reminded of Iqbâl's own call to the Muslims of the sub-continent in the course of an address delivered in Lahore, 21 March 1932. Saying that the whole community needed a complete overhauling of its present mentality in order that it

might again become capable of feeling the urge of fresh desires and ideals, Iqbâl said: "...The Indian-Muslim has long ceased to explore the depths of his own inner life, and the result is that he has ceased to live in the full glow and color of life, and is consequently in danger of entering into an unmanly compromise with forces which he is made to think, he cannot vanquish in open conflict. He who desires to change an unfavourable environment must undergo a complete transformation of his inner being.... the lesson that past experience has brought to you must be taken to heart. Expect nothing from any side. Concentrate your whole ego on yourself alone and ripen your clay into real manhood if you wish to see your aspiration realized... The flame of life cannot be borrowed from others; it must be kindled in the temple of one's own soul."

⁴⁰. The same triumvirate of *mir*, *pir* and *faqih*, against which Iqbâl waged a continuous struggle.

⁴¹. Bennabi, op., cit, p. 118

⁴². Ibid., p. 122

⁴³. Iqbâl. op., cit., p. 167