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# **Plurality of Religion - Plurality in Religion (Christianity and Islam)**

**Part II: Islam**

## **Islamic voices on social, cultural and religious pluralism Introduction**

In this essay we shall evoke a handful of contemporary Islamic voices addressing the question of social, cultural and religious pluralism. I deliberately name them Islamic and not Muslim voices, because they situate themselves in the context and parameters of the great, living religious tradition of Islam, that is, of the normative sources feeding it and of the religious-legal sciences that developed in it. Hence these voices for me are Islamic and not only Muslim ones.

It will be wise right at the start to avoid the danger of overestimating the significance of these voices as to their representative quality. The voices are single ones and furthermore they are few, selected from among many others, equally relevant ones. They do not speak in the name of great parties and movements. They articulate - often courageously and farsightedly - sentiments, thoughts and concerns which certainly are shared by many other Muslims, however not by the majority and the religious and/or political establishment. All the five thinkers whose ideas we present here are intellectuals who expressly try to face questions that in their view arise from the encounter of Islamic civilisation and its long tradition of religious thought with the plural, secular "West" in various regional variations. At the same time they intend constructively as well as critically to articulate the positive contribution which, in their view, Muslims and hence Islam, could and should make to a peaceful living together of all persons in plural societies, ultimately in the one global as well as pluralistic world of our day. I consider a privilege the chance of having personally encountered during the past years and decades each one of the thinkers mentioned here and to be in contact with them.

### **The reassertion of Islam and Islamism**

In choosing the persons presented here I have given preference to those who consciously and decidedly view, and reflect upon, society as something to be shaped by all citizens together.

Roughly speaking one may be allowed to say that for more or less three decades now, that is to say, since the turn from the 14th to the 15th *Hijri* century (I am thinking in this context of two eminent events marking this turn: the Islamic Festival in London of 1976 and the Islamic Revolution in Iran under the guidance of Imam Khomeini in 1979) the Muslim world in both its sunnite and its shi'ite variant has been largely shaped by a vision which divided the world into two camps: that of the programmatically godless, Marxist dictatorships and that of the, not programmatically but actually, godless liberal-capitalistic states. In such Islamic thought one views Islam as alternative and complete and independent system, as a comprehensive *nizâm-i mustafâ*, as a "Third Way", with its own comprehensive ideology and way of life.

The protagonists of such a vision are bound together by the consciousness of the growing power of the *umma* reasserting itself. The latter - in the sense of an alternative system meant to encompass all aspects of individual and social life - is called to replace the other ideologies and social systems. It will reach this goal in the foreseeable future. The clear formulation of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) in his work *Ma`âlim fî t-tarîq* (Milestones) has become classical by now:

"Islam knows only two categories of society, the Islamic and the pagan one. The Islamic society (*al-mujtama` al-islâmî*) is the one, in which Islam is put into practice in all its dimensions: in doctrine of faith, cult, sharî'a, political system, morals and ethical behaviour. The pagan society (*al-mujtama` al-jâhilî*) is the one, where Islam is not practiced, i.e., a society ruled neither by its doctrines of faith, nor by its principles, its values and criteria, its political order and laws nor by its moral and ethical standards."

This pagan society finds expression not only in the social system that denies the existence of God and interprets history according to the principles of Dialectical Materialism and which applies so-called "scientific socialism" as a political-societal system; its is equally represented by a society which - whereas it does not deny the existence of God - yet "assigns" to him the dominion of the skies, in order to remove him from ruling over the earth. This society does not practice his divine Law (*sharî'a*), neither as to the ordering of human lives nor as to respecting the values which God has ordered as the unchangeable basis for social life ... Hence, this society does not live the religion of God, which he in his own words defines thus: "*The decision is due to God alone. He has commanded that you should serve none but Him. This is the true religion*" (Sure 12,40). This society therefore is a pagan society, even if it does recognise the existence of God and permit man to practice the religious rites in synagogues, churches and mosques."(1)

Such thinking is marked by a remarkable "simplification" as to the analysis of the West and of such realities and terms as secular society, secularization and secularism, including their intellectual and moral bases. The West and secularism are projected as total negation of that for which Islam stands. "In fact, the secular world view is the total negation of the Islamic faith", 'Abdullah Naseef the General Secretary of the Islamic World League, wrote in 1989. He considers it to be the foremost task of the Islamic thinker, whom he qualifies as *dâ'i* ("inviter", missionary), to destroy "the world view of secularism and its intellectual bases. This task includes not only the philosophical refutation of the basic position of secularism but the detailed analysis of all its manifestations, in the Islamic societies as elsewhere. The struggle of Islamic thought with modern secularism is part of the eternal warfare of Islam against *kufur*, against the powers of atheism, lie

and evil".(2)

However, soon, in fact already from the middle of the 1980's onwards, there came into prominence among Muslim intellectuals a disillusionment, linked with the premonition that the expectation one had invested in the cogency of the Islamic vision, would hardly be fulfilled. At the end of a critical analysis of the Islamic resurgence the Pakistani juridical scholar Kemal A. Faruqi wrote, already in 1985: "The Islamic Resurgence can well turn out to be an anachronistic and false spring, although it may also turn out to be the beginning of an inspiring and positive chapter in the history of humanity in this world of an ever more narrowing mutual dependence."

Let us listen now to the voices of some Muslim thinkers, who consider Islam, at least potentially, a positive force in the effort of forming a plural and just society. However, all of them put critical questions to their fellow Muslims as well as to their non-Muslim partners. They all have been rethinking Islam in terms of its potential for plural living in secular democratic societies.

### **Islam in a world-wide community of communities**

Mohamed Talbi, besides being a well-known, outstanding historian of the Maghreb, can well be regarded as the pioneer Muslim thinker and protagonist of intercultural dialogue. He is especially conscious of the cultural and religious problems which shape the contemporary Islamic world, especially of its attempts to respond to the challenges of the modern world.

Born in 1921 in Tunis, Talbi taught many years in the "Institut d'État d'Études Supérieures" in Tunis and obtained his doctorate at the Sorbonne in Paris. The study of the medieval history of North African-Islamic history, linked with a clear analysis of the cultural and political dynamics in the wider context of the technological and cultural developments in modern societies, led him as early as the late 1960's, to dedicate himself to the task of inter-cultural dialogue and to research into the conditions, demands and essential features of it. Dialogue for Talbi became a form of life. It led him to a protracted participation in systematically promoted initiatives in this field - especially among Muslims and Christians of the Mediterranean, as, for instance, in the *Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien (GRIC)*.

The whole of Talbi's thought is based on a conviction, which he had gained not least as an eminent historian of medieval Maghreb: no culture or religion must be regarded as a system totally closed upon itself or as an independent reality for that matter. On the contrary, openness linked with critical discernment has been and will be today the condition for the vital development of cultures and religions. In this sense dialogue between them is absolutely necessary.

Globalisation, i.e. that rapidly intensifying experience of world-wide plural living together in our day, compels, as it were, all to reflect anew about the content and the function of what community means.

"Today, the barriers disappear ... On a probably not too distant day the features which determined the physiognomy of certain cultures, will hardly be more than the local colours and the folklore of a lovingly and nostalgically kept-alive province. Has the believer in this situation

not to reflect critically about the direction, the content and the function of community, which after all occupies a central place in all expressions of religious faith and especially in Islam?"(3)

Contemporary women and men must not be content with merely harmonising their loyalties within a culture, comfortably furnished by the contributions of previous generations whose product and heir they are. Men and women today no longer enjoy such comfort. In the context of the astounding acceleration which marks the historical movement carrying us, alert women and men have to learn in all seriousness to situate themselves within this new universal field of forces, without however losing their own identity in the process of doing so. "Hence we must muster the courage", Talbi exhorts his fellow-Muslims, "to transcend the categories that merely protect us and provide us with security within the customary parameters. Each faith and faith community today has to ask as to what is its place and task within the new universal order, and it has to search for the resources within its own tradition that can be of positive help on the way ahead."(4)

In all this Talbi distinguishes between "*Islam-culture*" which provides the Muslim with roots and authenticity and "*Islam-conviction*", which consists of living faith, metaphysical engagement, conviction and cultic observance.

"One fact today is certain and irreversible: the frontiers of the *umma* no longer run along geographical-political lines, from now onwards they exist exclusively in the hearts of those who pray - whether these hearts live in Sweden, China or Cairo. The German and the Malay can belong to it; the Tunisian and the Egyptian can be excluded from it by their free and conscious decision (...) this is not to say, that *Islam-communauté* has to renounce playing its role within the state, however this role has to be constantly projected, invented and adapted to all the facts and needs of the historical moment. (...) *Islam-conviction* is not a nation; rather it is engaged in the nation (...) It is a community of the faith, that is to say, of the heart, in one geographical community."(5)

Which positive traits characterise then the *umma*, the Islamic community? Islam will always remain *dîn wa dunyâ* (heaven and earth). It exists definitely in this world, but it is not of this world. The difference between the temporal and the spiritual sphere cannot and must not be overlooked; rather, we have to do with two faces, as it were, distinct yet intimately linked, of one and the same reality.

"Cesar does not stand above God, nor does he command a private domain, of which he would be the sole and independent Lord. From the perspective of the believers he is - as all creatures are - subject to God and his Law. Islam is and remains essentially indivisible. It organizes both, the balance of the individual and that of the community. However, whereas the *sharî'a* in the past regulated the life of a community exclusively ruled by Islam, the Islamic community today has to make the effort to build up not only the Islamic community proper but also to build together with others the shared plural community, struggling for greater justice for all women and men. Is this contrary to the spirit of Islam? In no way! Islam certainly is an integrated whole in itself, but it is also open. It accepts and respects diversity."(6)

In the centre of the thinking of Talbi we find the human person and his or her freedom. The latter finds expression in modern times - and here Talbi has no room for any doubt whatsoever - its expression in fully accepting and furthering human rights. Among these the freedom of conscience for him is basic, because it is precisely the condition, which allows man to be conscious of their

freedom and to live according to their free choice.(7)

Since this position in the modern Muslim world is shared only by a few, and since the freedom of conscience and religion is limited and even at times prohibited, Talbi has returned again and again to this point which is so central to his entire thinking. He has backed up his position by means of a renewed or even new exegesis of the Koran and has asked for the translation of this new understanding into the social and political reality. The Koran, Talbi says, clearly teaches - if only it is taught correctly - that freedom is the basis of human nature. A correct interpretation consists in a - as he puts it - "*lecture finaliste*" of the Koran, which tries to make explicit the finality, the ultimate, overriding *maqâsid* (objectives) of the lawgiver by basing itself on the undeniable fact of historical evolution. In other words, Talbi takes the Koran as the basis for the modern principle of the freedom of religion.

About four years ago Talbi spoke at the Vienna Conference "One World for All" about "cultural identity and the problem of a world culture". His central concern he formulated in the following way: the right to difference and identity of a given culture must not serve as a pretext or even justification for simply rejecting openness, integration and pluralism. The culture of Islam and that of the West have lived, from the beginning in a tension, separating from one another and at the same time enriching one another. Today it is our task to counter the temptation to closed worlds, against an anti-humanism, which lives from the contempt of the other".(8)

The voice of the Muslims living as minorities: missionary instead of political Islam

Here we shall draw attention to the voices of two Muslim Indians - Syed Zainul Abedîn (1928-1993) and Maulâna Wahîduddîn Khân (b.1925) - whose thought was first shaped in the Republic of India, the home to the numerically largest Muslim minority in the world, a minority however, which comprises not more than 12 percent of the overall Indian population.

Both, the all too early deceased Dr. Syed Z. Abedin as well as Maulana Wahiduddin Khan grew up in undivided India. In their college and university days they experienced the passionate ideological and political disputes of the fight for independence of India and for, respectively against, the creation of a decidedly Muslim, and later Islamic, state of Pakistan. The development of the thinking of these two scholars was shaped by such far-reaching and decisive questions as e.g. the relationship of Islam to the modern - from the point of view of culture and of religion plurally composed and secularly constituted - national state; how Muslim could thrive as a minority within a democracy that, by definition, is largely ruled by majorities; how Muslims would relate to the caste system (perceived as structurally-cemented and religiously-justified injustice).

After studies at Aligarh Muslim University Zaiunul Abedin was close to the "*Jamâ'at-i Islami-i Hind*" and later in the United States, which he took during his student years in Philadelphia as his country of adoption, he became in the early 1980's councilor of the "*Râbitat al-'Alam al-Islâmî*" (Mecca). He established the "Institute for Muslim Minority Affairs" in Jeddah with a branch in London and founded and directed for many year its important organ, the "Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs". Abedin's thought merits to be kept alive, because he emphasized in

prophetic foresight the fundamental fact that today at least every fifth citizen of the world is Muslim and a third of the total number of Muslims live in non-Muslim states. Abedin was concerned with bringing the problems of this growing third of the Muslims that by now lives world-wide in minority situations, into the forefront of the consciousness not only of the Muslims but of all those who today and in future reflect about Islam.

The most important element of the minority situation for Muslims is that they have to live under non-Muslim jurisdiction, in a society, in which Islam is not the predominant religion or culture and in which, therefore, there does not exist positive incentives for the growth and strengthening of Islamic values and norms, and also, in which Islamic identity is in danger of being lost if the Muslim community as a whole fails to make a constant and intelligent effort to the contrary. Ultimately, Abedin is convinced, only an effective revival of the original qur'anic *umma*-consciousness will be able to secure the long-term well-being of Muslims in this new world-wide situation; this in explicit contrast to the vision and the basic aims of the pan-Islamic movement, which ultimately aims for an world-wide Islamic state.

In contrast to such Islamic-state-thinking, today, Abedin argues, a qur'anically-informed *umma* consciousness is demanded of the believers, together with the full recognition of the existing nation state identities in the words of Sura 103 (*al-'Asr*) "to exhort one another to truth and to exhort one another to endurance". The material side of the inner-ummatic solidarity, as e.g. the propagation of the Koran and help in building mosques and Islamic centres, of seminaries and the formation of Imams etc. fortunately in our day to a certain extent is being put into practice by Muslims on a world-wide level. "What, however, is likely *not* (italics by the author) to be forthcoming easily, is the perspicacity, the judgement and the will to engage in this venture within the framework of the Koran-derived concept of *umma* consciousness, and to monitor such consciousness from deteriorating into pan-Islamic consciousness, preventing the particular from determining the universal, the political from subverting the religious."(9)

It does not come as a surprise that Abedin again and again takes position against an islamistically-oriented Islam that accentuates one-sidedly political power. Yet in our context it would seem of major interest to know, how he relates to the Mekkan and Medinan phase of qur'anic revelation and of the career of the Prophet and how he estimates their relative importance, not least with regard to the minority situation of so many Muslims in single states as well as in the *umma*, globally considered.

"It has to be clearly understood, that the role of the Prophet at Makkah and his role at Madinah are amenable to quite a legitimate distinction. In Makkah the Prophet was a Messenger of God. In Madinah the turn of events had given him an additional role - he was now a head of state as well. Whereas in Makkah all his actions were determined by his role as messenger, a *ḍā'i*, in Madinah, besides this, he had the staggering responsibility that had been entrusted to him by the inhabitants' choice. It also happened that this state being the only one of its kind became identified with the survival and dissemination of the message as well. This again is a historical event. Even quite learned Muslims get confused here."(10)

Later generations cannot leave aside Mekka as a moral category, because Mekka is a moral

category. Medina, in contrast, is an option that may or may not come the Muslims' way. *Istikhlaaf* (i.e. the nomination of a caliph [as happened first in Medina]) is a gift; in modern terminology you would say it is a bonus. Mekka is a necessity. There is no escaping Mekka.

"Now, when a generation has passed its inevitable Makkah and if God in his wisdom decides to bestow on it a Madinah, it doesn't have to look upwards to Heavens: Now what? The Prophet's Madinah is there in history, *hâdha min fadl rabbi*, such are the blessings of my Lord."(11)

"Then the surrendered people (Muslims) who have been bestowed the grace of Madinah come forward and with Makkah at their side, acting as their vision, they set out to reenact a Madinah in their own spatial and temporal contexts."(12)

Abedin asks his fellow-Muslims,

"who can claim the mantle of Madinah: "Where is your Makkah? Where is the sacrifice, the suffering, the absolute sincerity of commitment to the pleasure of the Lord and subjugation of His will?, a commitment in other words to the uplift, the reform, the redemption of all God's creatures, of giving peace and tranquility to humanity at large, comfort and solace to all mankind?"(13)

And he adds significantly:

"There is a small historical fact that we all tend to neglect. The first, the original Medina, was not attained by conquest. The Prophet was invited to Yathrib/Medina by its inhabitants."(14)

At this point the behaviour of the believer towards unbelief and the unbeliever is relevant. Depending on whether the Muslims in a given country constitute the majority or the minority, quite different goals and objectives result for them from this constellation.

"Naturally in Madinah, i.e. in the situation of a formally organized Islamic state, rights and duties have to be defined and prescribed. Distinctions have to be made. There exist juridical and administrative imperatives for the structure and the smooth functioning of the machinery of the state. However, in situations where this does not apply, the Muslims have to continue to determine their thought and behaviour from the presupposition, that *kufur* [arab. unbelief] is not a once and for all determined category. The deniers of today can be the believers of tomorrow. This applied in Mecca, the historical Mecca, on a daily basis. Why should it be different in today's Mecca, i.e. in contemporary situations where Muslims frequently are a persecuted and despised minority."(15)

In other words, as long as a person is alive, the Muslims should see in him the potential believer. Condemned are in the Koran only "those who disbelieve, and who die in the state of disbelief; on them is the curse of Allah and of Angels and of men combined." (Sura 2,161)

Also from this point of view the duty to *da'wa*, to invitation, to mission in the Islamic sense, is not a time-bound but rather an enduring duty. Nothing can free a person from it or can replace it.

"Whatever may be the answer of the one invited, however discouraging, frustrating or apparently hopeless the situation may be, there can be no giving up."(16)

The voice of **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan** (b. 1925) is significant, far beyond the borders of his homeland India. He received his theological-juridical formation in the *madrassa*-system of South-

Asian Islam and hence writes throughout in Urdu, the literary language of the Muslims of Northern India, of Pakistan and even of many religiously educated Muslims in Central and South India and even Bangladesh. Right into his mature years Wahiduddin was a committed adherent of the already mentioned, today globally influential, Islamist thinker and leader Maulana Abul A'la Maududi (d. 1979) and member of the Jama`at-i Islami Hind. First he was shaped by and actively propagated the kind of thinking we find in Syed Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwân al-Muslimûn*; short the *Ikhwân*) in Egypt. However, by the beginning of the 1970's he disengaged himself from the movement of Maududi. Arguing from the Koran first he demonstrated how in his view Maududi and his followers depart from the ethos and spirit of qur'anic revelation.

Wahiduddin in no way puts into question the traditional faith of Muslims in Koran and *sunna* as divinely revealed sources of Islam. He develops in this respect also no new ideas. He does not believe, that the post-medieval, in the meantime globally effective, developments in thought put into question the central traditional Muslim vision of God, history, revelation and eschatology. Other religions, corrupted with regard to the text of their Holy Scripture and its interpretation, may indeed need such a radical reformulation, not so Islam as it is the religion that alone has been preserved from error and that is final.

However, Wahiduddin, like Abedin, takes very seriously the minority situation of Islam in India as well as in many other parts of the world. He draws from this fact far-reaching, drastic conclusions, which for him result from the essential nature of Islam and the central task entrusted to the Muslims by God. Islam has to be studied in the spirit of *ijtihâd*, that is to say, of a creative, original thought, i.e. without being dependent upon the modern world. He advocates, in other words, openness for the chances that offer themselves to Islam in the modern world. Thus Islam will be seen and lived once again as the religion of the witness for the truth (*shahâdat al-haqq*) and as invitation (*da'wa*) to a life in conformity with the will of God on the path to unrestricted encounter with him, the Creator and Judge.

From the basic task to "invitation" (*da'wa*) result the following emphases of his thought, which, by the way, has found expression in a comprehensive, stylistically appealing body of writing in Urdu and in manifold translations: priority to the inner dimension of the Muslim life of faith, the right to religion accruing to all men, non-violence as a condition for the free invitation of women and men and their free decision in matters of faith and, last not least, the separation of religion and politics according to the model of the Constitution of the Indian Republic. Wahiduddin tries to demonstrate in his writings that all these doctrines and principles of religio-political action correspond to the original message of Koran and Sunna. No doubt, because of the limitations and the failures of Muslim believers and their community, for centuries they have been obscured or/and not fully developed in Muslim societies.

At the same time Wahiduddin is firmly convinced that the Muslims' duty to practice *da'wa* (i.e., Islamic mission) in the past has never been as powerful, urgent and promising as it is in our day. The qur'anic verse: "*Remind them, for thou art but a remembrance!*" (Sura 88,21f.) is of basic importance. Invitation excludes any kind of violent confrontation. Rather there is question of

winning over by argument and convincing in liberty: hence his sharp criticism of the Islamic idiom and the political activism of the Islamist movements. The Islamic message is directed towards the free decision of men and women and on the basis of its own essence is to be communicated in peaceful ways. Violent efforts to erect Islam are utterly mistaken.

Islam as a political system may be introduced in qur'anically legal ways by way of the free decision of the population but never through imposition from above. *Jihād*, the effort in the way of God, of which speaks verse 78 in Sura 22 (*al-Hajj*), signifies the quality and intensity of the giving of witness (*shahâda*). So, for Wahiduddin, *jihād* moves clearly within the limits of witnessing and invitation. It excludes any kind of use of force and political oppression.

It is revealing and significant, how Wahiduddin tries to prove on the basis of Koran and *sira* (biography of Muhammad) the principle of the separation of religion and politics. In a lecture on the theme: "A policy for peace in Islam" delivered in August 1995 in Jerusalem, he took clearly position against the *fatwa* of the Al-Azhar University dated May 19th of the same year. This *fatwa* stated: As long as the Al-Aqsà mosque and the city of Jerusalem are subjected to foreign, i.e. non-Islamic domination the Muslims are not allowed to go there and be it only in order to pray there as pilgrims. Doing so, they would ratify the occupation of the temple and of the city.

Wahiduddin explains, why in his view this decision is totally mistaken. On the one hand, from the beginning of Islam onwards it has been the natural desire of every Muslim to pray there; on the other hand, the Muslims share the holy place with other, non-Muslim, believers, for whom the place is holy in the same way, holy as the essential element of their very ancient rites of worship. Now, according to the rules of logic, one and the same place cannot at the same time be under the political control of the three faith communities.

Here, Wahiduddin argues, the life of the Prophet taken as *sunna* for all Muslim believers, offers a solution: choose in such cases the *'ibâdatî* aspect and put the political aspect in second place. Follow the principle - contained in the *sunna* - of *al-fasl bayn al-qadiyyatayn*: the separation of the two matters, i.e. of religion (more precisely, of *'ibâda*, d.h. worship, in other words, all relating to the cultic-moral dimension of religion) and of politics (*siyâsa*). In this important issue three events in the life of the Prophet have to be interpreted as deliberate options. They have normative character.

- Until the end of the year 623 (i.e. up to one and a half years after the Hijra) Muhammad and his *umma* continued to pray in the direction of Jerusalem. Then, in the beginning of the year 624, Muhammad received the divine order, from now on to pray in the direction of the Ka'ba, which - and this is significant - remained full of idols until the conquest of Mekka. From this we learn about a basic principle of Islam: "the separation between the two things (areas)". The Ka'ba and the idols certainly are two quite different things. Practice patience (cf. Sura 2,153) with regard the idols in the Ka'ba, and simply continue to pray in the direction of the Ka'ba.
- The night journey (*isrâ'*) and the ascension (*mi'râj*), too, support this principle. Muhammad entered Jerusalem, performed the prescribed ritual prayer in the Al-Aqsà mosque at a time,

when Jerusalem was still ruled by the pagan Persians. Here, again, the prophet separated ritual-moral and political issues (*'ibâda and siyâsa*).

- Finally, the Prophet performs the *'umra* (small pilgrimage) when Mekka is still heathen. This again he did on the basis of his separation of religious and political affairs.

From all these facts Wahiduddin draws this conclusion: the principle of holding apart religion (understood as *'ibâda*) and politics is of a generally valid nature. Disregarding it has caused damage to Islam and the witness for Islam and has hindered *da'wa*, the "invitation" to it. Viewed strictly from the perspective of faith Islam comprises indeed religion and politics. However, with regard to the planning of action in the world of today, we should by all means take account of the prevailing situation. Any rebellion, whether in the name of Islam or not, against an established non-Islamic or Islamic government is forbidden, because rebellion leads to common disorder and turmoil (*fitna o fasâd*).

Wahiduddin explicitly rejects in this connection political-military activism, as it is practiced by Islamist groups in the name of Islam, for example in places like Kaschmir, Chechnia, Bosnia, Burma, the Philippines and Egypt. Also, in his opinion the forced introduction (implementation) of the *shari'a* equals the spread of disorder and revolt (*fasâd*). It is not legitimate anywhere to impose the Islamic order in the form of the *shari'a* in any place (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria) without the overwhelming majority of the population wanting this definitely. "The necessity of separating religion and politics concerns all Islamic prescriptions. If the Muslims keep to this principle, no door in the contemporary world to life and hence the witness to the truth of Islam, will remain closed."(17)

### **For a qur'anic perspective of interreligious solidarity against suppression**

Farid Esack (b. 1958) belongs to the category of socially and politically committed researchers and teachers. His writings are scientifically solid, thoroughly researched and at the same time informed by a passionate search for social justice. Very probably his biography is partly responsible for this. He was born in a suburb of coloured people in Cape Town and already at school began to be active in the anti-apartheid movement. Thus, from early on he was active for solidarity beyond the limits of the Muslim community, which in South Africa forms a small yet not unimportant minority. There followed years of Islamic-theological formation in one of the big *madrasa*-s in Karachi. There, Esack together with Pakistani Christians fought for the poorest, the marginalized and the excluded.

After his return to South Africa he co-founded the "Call to Islam", the most active and firm Muslim movement against apartheid. All this led to the "search for a South African qur'anic hermeneutic of pluralism for liberation", rooted in the fusion of the nation's crucible and in his own commitment to comprehensive justice.(18) On this search he came in the middle of the 1980's to the "Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations" (CSIC) in Birmingham, U.K. His main endeavour was to define from the bases of Koran, Sunna and classical Islamic thought his position

(and that of Islam) in the new, independent Republic of South Africa. From this emerged the book *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford 1997). We propose to point out here a few salient points of the work.

Esack first analyses the context, i.e. the economic and social situation of the Muslims of South Africa, past in present. Then he discusses the relationship between text and context with regard to the interpretation of the Koran. In this he is especially interested in understanding and in making understood the Koran as a living document. The addressee of the Koran not only has the liberty but also the duty, to ponder anew the meanings and statements of Holy Scripture, in order to promote liberation and the cause of justice: "I argue for the freedom to rethink the meanings and use of scripture in a radically divided, economically exploitative and patriarchal society and to forge hermeneutical keys that will enable us to read the text in such a way as to advance the liberation of all people."(19)

Central keys for the interpretation of the Koran are *taqwa*: the integrity of the relationship to God; *tawhîd*: divine fullness and unity; 'adl wa qist: balance and justice; *jihâd wa 'amal*: struggle and praxis. These keys are applied within the framework of a qur'anic theology of liberation. Such a theology of liberation is developed and formulated through and in solidarity with those, whose personal liberation becomes real through participation in this process.

Liberation theology takes on a specifically Islamic character when it takes the measure of the Koran and of the struggle of all the prophets. To practice qur'anic hermeneutics in a situation of injustice means to do theology and to experience faith as solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized, in a battle for their liberation. The implicit message of Islamic liberation theology is: Islam can be experienced only as what it really is, if it is lived as a liberative praxis of solidarity.

Which shift in understanding results, when it is taken seriously that according to the Koran (as also according to the Bible) there does not exist saving faith without works, whereas one can certainly imagine a faith without an explicit assent to dogmatic formulations? Such questions are not of a mere theoretical nature, they are in fact linked closely to attitudes towards the South African apartheid regime. At the time of apartheid there were Muslims who fitted flawlessly into the thoroughly unjust regime, whereas some non-Muslims gave preference to prison and contempt over military service. This shows, how misleading it is to conceive of Islam first and primarily as a reified religion or system.

Islam proclaims God as the ever greater, greater than any conception or institutional service of it can ever be or be conceived. Islam calls to ever new submission to the ever greater God.(20) If for a committed interpreter truth can never be absolute, then it has to do with this. Whereas the methods of interpretation constantly develop, the interpreter is guided in the direction of ever growing authentic truth, a truth that leads on to ever more intensive praxis of liberation.

"There is no point at which God has disclosed the truth to the interpreter, but it continues to be disclosed, for there is no end to jihad and thus no end to His promise to disclose."(21)

Another emphasis of the theological approach of Esack is the new theological definition of the

other. How does the Koran view the other? One cannot reproach Esack for avoiding difficult issues in trying to answer this question. So he asks: "How does the universality of the Qur'an relate to the exclusivism and virulent denunciation of the other?"<sup>(22)</sup> The answer to this question, Esack argues, has to recognize that the qur'anic teaching with regard to the religiously other has developed gradually and within a specific context or contexts. In other words, there does not exist a final qur'anic position towards the other; rather, the Koran offers merely indications that have to be interpreted in and from the respective context.<sup>(23)</sup>

According to Esack the "people of the Book" - a group of people, the Koran privileges - today are "of questionable relevance". Instead he demands the elaboration of "a qur'anic hermeneutic concerned with interreligious solidarity against injustice ... [that] would rather opt for more inclusive categories which would, for example, embrace the dispossessed of the Fourth World."<sup>(24)</sup>

Esack wishes to distance himself clearly from a purely liberal theological position, which holds coexistence and freedom to be identical with absolute equality of all. In his view the Koran claims the ideological leadership of the community of the Muslim faithful. But how does this go together with pluralism and justice? The eminent importance of "the just" does not mean that the Islamic society can claim a permanent position of socio-religious superiority. The Koran does not place the Muslims as a social group above the others. Were this the case, then there would apply to the Muslims the criticism which the Koran directs towards the Jews of his time, accusing them of arrogance, of a faith in election understood in exclusivist terms and of the attempt to instrumentalise God for their own particularist (exclusivistic) objectives. The Koran states clearly (Sura 2,134), that there does, and must, not exist any superiority on the basis of the merits of one's ancestors.

The Koran teaches an inclusive understanding of the faith in election and presupposes the teaching that the idea of inclusiveness is superior to that of exclusivity.

"In this sense the advocates of pluralism had to be 'above' those who insisted that the religious expressions of others counted for nothing and that theirs was the only way to attain salvation. The relationship between the inclusivist form of religion and the exclusivist form can be compared to that of a democratic state and fascist political parties."<sup>(25)</sup>

Inclusiveness however does not mean that we can leave any idea and practice whatsoever untouched. Rather, it wishes to include the excluded, the marginalised, the suppressed, i.e. it wishes to struggle for their liberation, so that they can adore and serve God integrally and freely. The Koran teaches that the Muslim, the Muslim community, on the basis of their responsibility before God have to oppose actively any unjust conceptions of faith and morality that exclude or marginalize the poor. In other words, it must not attribute to such ideologies, in false liberalism or tolerance, a position of equality.

"The responsibility of calling humankind to God and to the path of God will thus remain. The task of the present-day Muslim is to discern what this means in every age and every society. Which is to be invited? Who is to be taken as allies in this calling? How does one define the path of God? These are particularly pertinent questions in society, where definitions of Self and

Other are determined by justice and injustice, oppression and liberation and where the test of one's integrity as a human being dignified by God is determined by the extent of one's commitment to defend that dignity."(26)

Who then are the allies of the Muslims in this commitment in the struggle for integral justice? Do we have to define anew, who are allies and who are enemies? The qur'anic prohibition of *wilâya* (pact) with Jews and Christians (Sura 5,51) has to be interpreted in context. It prohibits "collaboration" in the negative meaning of the term, however certainly not true (i.e. interreligious) solidarity. In the South-African context this means, for instance: There was a number of Muslims ready to collaborate with the apartheid regime, yet in contrast to these there existed white Christians, who were not deterred from struggling for race equality and justice by prison and discrimination.

The exodus paradigm as the Koran propounds it, insists on solidarity prior to preaching and proclamation and, further, on the rejection of any (foul) compromise with the oppressor. In other words, it demands an ecumenism of liberative praxis.

"Humankind, especially the marginalized and oppressed, need each other to confront these dangers and challenges of liberation. Let us hope, that, because of, and not despite, our different creeds and worldviews, we are going to walk this road side by side. Let us hope that we will be able to sort out some of the theological issues whilst we walk this road side by side. Let us hope that we will be able to sort out some of the theological issues whilst we walk the road. If not, then at least we will get another opportunity after we have ensured our survival and that of our home, the earth."(27)

### **From "Muslim in Europe" to "European Muslim"**

Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962 in Geneva) is on his mother's side the grandson of the founder of the Moslem Brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and the son of the Egyptian diplomat and jurispudent Said Ramadan. He took his doctorate in Islamic Studies in Fribourg/Switzerland and today teaches philosophy in the universities of Fribourg and Geneva. However, as the president of the «Association des Musulmans, Musulmanes de Suisse» he is intimately acquainted with the life and problems of the younger generation of Muslims in the mosque organisations and communities of French-speaking Switzerland and France.

Ramadan concentrates above all on two issues: 1) the place of the Muslims in the West and 2) the reawakening and resurgence of Islam in the context of the encounter of the Western and the Islamic civilisations. The titles of Ramadan's numerous publications demonstrate the emphases of his thinking: e.g. *Les musulmans dans la laïcité* (1994); *Islam, le face-à-face des civilisations. Quel projet pour quelle modernité?* (1995); and: *To be a European Muslim* (1998).

Here we shall be able to deal only very succinctly with the development of Ramadan's ideas as to a European-Muslim identity. Ramadan is one of the first, if not the first, among the Muslims born in contemporary Europe who decidedly tries to set into motion a process of mutual questioning and common searching for genuine and realistic juridical solutions for the new generations of Muslims in Europe. In this he is essentially concerned with the question, as to which specific contribution

could and should Islamic life and thought make to contemporary Europe?

Ramadan's basic conviction is this:

"Islam is an affirmative faith which carries within itself a global understanding of creation, death and humanity. This understanding is, or should be, the source of Islamic rules of thinking and behaviour."(28)

The Muslims living in Europe have the task to make this understanding and its immediate consequences for human life "understandable in the light of our new context within European society."(29)

One presupposition for this is that the Muslims really accept Europe as their new home. Of recent there exists, says Ramadan, a growing number, if not a majority of Muslims in Europe, who are conscious of the fact that their own future, and especially that of the young generation, will be European, i.e. that they will be European citizens - European and Muslim at the same time. After an early phase which was shaped by fear, even panic and reaction, vis-à-vis the new, secular environment, now has begun a period of quiet and creative development.

Ramadan observes changes in the basic tenor of the sermons and legal decisions of the *ulamâ*: whereas formerly everywhere in the forefront there stood the appeal to keep a distance from the surrounding society, by no means to accept the citizenship of a western state, not forgetting ever soon one would return to the homeland, by now, in contrast, everywhere the conviction has gained general acceptance that for Muslims there does not exist a real alternative to conceive of, and to shape, their future in Europe. Because for millions of young Muslims Europe has already become the first and only homeland.

Until now the Muslims - not least also because of the rejection they experienced on the part of the long-established Europeans - have concentrated on the solution of certain legal problems and in doing so they have almost forgotten the preservation of their deeper identity through change. They are in danger of becoming discretely invisible, in other words, to be Muslims without Islam

Today, however, especially with the growth of the second and third generation, there has begun a kind of counter movement, marked by the desire to detect anew the Islamic identity and to live according to Islam. A new consciousness of themselves arises which is based on Islam. We have to do here with an Islamic identity which breaks off from the identification with the respective homeland and is based rather on Koran and *sunna*.

For Ramadan it is an urgent task to help the European Muslims - together with the *ulamâ* who guide them in religious matters - to respond to the new reality in Europe with a decidedly constructive thought. They have to develop a clear mental outlook. Part of this will be to think and act from an essential basic core of Islamic prescriptions, which will allow them to develop a balanced Muslim-European identity which - free from false and unfounded fears - understands itself as part and parcel of the European societies.

For Ramadan, a special problem consists in that the young Muslims in Europe conceive of Islam

in Europe almost exclusively in the categories of "permitted" (*halâl*) and "forbidden" (*harâm*). They are hardly aware of the fact, Ramadan observes, that their own European experience has a positive contribution to make in the elaboration of a properly Muslim and yet also genuinely Muslim identity. The elaboration of a juridical framework, which allows Muslims in Europe to be European without having to give up their Muslim identity, should lead to a dialectical process of mutually challenging exchange between the mosque communities and the competent and at the same time creatively thinking scholars of Law (*mujtahidîn*). Only in this way will it be possible, Ramadan argues, to find adequate juridical answers. A genuinely Muslim-European identity is defined not only by the mere number of legal prescriptions, it is an ensemble of emotions, life styles, manners and morals, touching also food and dress and forming, last not least, a mentality.

In order to understand the true nature of identity it is necessary to live it, to live in it, to be part of it. Hence every *'âlim*, who has to deduce and formulate specific legal prescriptions for those Muslims who live in the West, should make use of the problems, experiences and questions of all the Muslims who live there. For Ramadan the participation of the young in this process of a European-Muslim search for identity is of central importance. With their specific experience and their understanding of the European context the young should formulate the questions that emerge from their life situation in order thus to enable the *ulamâ* to arrive at adequate answers. This younger generation therefore has the task, in dialogue with the *ulamâ* and their expert knowledge to find in the area of religious education and formation adequate legal answers and to put the emphasis on contents that fit the situation.

Ramadan is not a naïve, unrealistic dreamer. He knows that a debate between the Muslim communities in the West and the *ulamâ* for the time being remains hardly more than a hope. However there are clear pointers to the fact that in this area too things begin to move in the right direction. What are, according to Ramadan, the special chances that result for the Muslims from the encounter with their European context?

- The neutral space that exists inside secular societies often has been - mistakenly, Ramadan argues - identified with the total abstinence from religiosity. However, precisely in this "space" those aspects of Islamic life which emphasize religious experience and that are alive in Sufism, find a new echo, especially among the young Muslims. In other words, a new consciousness of the importance of spirituality is being born.
- An enormous chance consists in the fact that the new context forces, as it were, the Muslims and their *ulamâ* to return to Koran and Sunna and to take serious in this a twofold distinction. On the one hand, that between Islamic doctrine as such and its historical realizations. Because the latter are based on an analysis which responded to specific past historical contexts, which have become irrelevant now. On the other hand, the opportunity now offers itself to remove the Islamic legal system as such from its culturally-conditioned traditional interpretations. In other words, the new situation makes it almost inevitable to return to the essential core message of Islam.
- In this new, contemporary context the venerable concepts of *dâr al-islâm* (space of Islam) and *dâr al-harb* (Raum des Krieges) are being discussed with new intensity. These

concepts are found neither in the Koran nor the Sunna, and they do not fit into our contemporary reality which is marked not least by the process of the globalization of ideologies, religions and by plural coexistence almost everywhere in the world. Ramadan proposes to designate instead the whole of the globe as "spaces of the witness for Islam" (*dâr shahâdat al-Islam*).

- The massive pressure of modernity in fully industrialised societies and especially the power of the ideology of modernism impose on Muslims the task, to contribute from an Islamic perspective to the contemporary debates about values, morals and ethics, within the framework of secular plural societies. Suffice it here, to mention the questions recent biotechnical and medical development pose in modern societies and in fact everywhere in the world.
- Furthermore, the European context makes it indispensable to define anew content and method of Islamic education. Islamic education does not only concern the transmission of knowledge about Koran and Hadith, but also that of the religiously relevant results of modern natural science and humanities. The all-pervasive ideology of modernism which according to Ramadan is composed of individualism, unbridled capitalism and consumerism, renders difficult the keeping alive of the religious dimension and of the basic values in the life of the individual as well as of the communities. Here, Ramadan asks the Muslims to recognise plurality within a secular society at least as a fact and to understand that not only Islam but in fact all the other religions and religious groups are equally put into question by them. The family and the question of how to conceive of, and organise, the teaching of religion, the establishment and financing of Islamic schools and further related questions, are other core questions. Finally, it will be of decisive importance for the younger generation of Muslims in Europe, whether they succeed in developing in the modern secular social contexts genuinely modern, Islam-inspired forms of cultural life.

However, with regard to the success of a shared future of Europe, Ramadan argues, the non-Muslim population, too, has to allow itself to be critically questioned.

- Are the old established populations in Europe capable and willing to recognize the contribution, which Islam has made to its civilization? Can they conceive of their identity as one co-shaped by Islam (besides the formative influence of Greek-Roman and Judeo-Christian elements) so that Islam will no longer be seen as a cultural-religious tradition that is alien to Europe's identity?
- Islam primarily and essentially is a faith, a religion, a way of life and not primarily a problem. The massive presence of the Muslims in Europe in our day raises the fundamental question: can one practice in this Europe a religious conviction (and this includes socially effective practice), without immediately being labeled individually or corporately as representative of fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism? Linked with this the question, whether Muslims can be so-called Europeans, without having to submit to the "ideology of modernism". Can one regard a practicing Muslim as an authentic European or are with regard to the practicing Muslim and Islam doubts inevitable and automatically justified?

## Outlook: Common tasks in Shaping the Future

We have been able here to present only a few Islamic voices. Among many other voices in our context I think, the following further ones would be of particular interest: Prof. Dr. Hüsein Atay from the Faculty of Theology of Ankara University and Prof. Nuri Öztürk of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Istanbul (both accept as Islamic thinkers the secular order of modern Turkey and each one in his own way stands for a radical return to the Koran. From Iran especially Abdol Karim Soroush (mediation between religion and true, plural democracy) and the U.S. American Shi'ite scholar Abdulaziz Sachedina (Islam and democratic pluralism). From Indonesia the former Prime Minister Abdurrahman Wahid (Islam as supporting non-violence and national transformation towards pluralism and social justice). But we could have listened also to voices from the Arab world, e.g. the Tunisian Ahmuda an-Naifar (secularisation in Islam as religious reform) and the Egyptian Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, living in exile in Leyden/Holland (God's word as the word of men - a new approach to the Koran) and, finally, the Lebanese scholar Ahmad S. Moussalli (the seeds of the notions of democracy, pluralism and human rights are in harmony are embedded in many notions of government and politics found in Islamic religious thought).

Even if each of these thinkers departs from quite different experiences and perspectives and takes quite different paths in trying to come closer to a realization of their objectives, yet all of them are mainly concerned with making the message of the Koran in its historical and at the same time trans-historical dimension an answer to contemporary challenges to Muslims, in the diverse regions of the world.

We in Germany, especially those who as Christians confess together with Jews and Muslims the God of Abraham, are called to common responsibility. This would seem to imply:

- Together with the Muslims and with all believers and people of good will through living witness to give new room, in our increasingly plural and secular societies, to the spiritual dimension of life - respecting the freedom of religion and of conscience of each person. In this way they will all contribute to better information and create conditions for all citizens to make their free choices as to the basic questions of ultimate meaning and of religious-ethical import.
- To learn viewing the differences in our plural societies as an enrichment and to live in mutual respect.
- To renew moral and religious education in plural harmony in such a way that the sense of shared responsibility for the greater whole, before God, may be awakened and strengthened.
- To enable the younger generation more effectively, actively to co-shape the plural future, on the basis of their respective corporate identity.
- To open the space more widely for the dialogue of religions and world views.
- In the spirit of the spiritual-moral competition of which speaks sura 5,48 to struggle together against social exclusion and marginalisation, poverty and violence and, finally, thus to

contribute to a discourse with and about one another, that seriously seeks to avoid simplifications and clichés.

The honest collaboration of Muslims, Jews and Christians and of many other believers and people of good will within the framework of a plural-democratic constitution based on human rights, would constitute the proof that the Muslims and their Islam have arrived and have been accepted as a further dimension of our irretrievably religiously and culturally plural modern societies.

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- 1 Quoted in Andreas Meier, *Der politische Auftrag des Islam* (Wuppertal, 1994), pp. 203f.
- 2 "Muslim Intellectuals and the Future of the Ummah. An Agenda for Thought" in: *Ziauddin Sardar (ed.), An Early Crescent. The Future of Knowledge and the environment in Islam* (London: 1989), p. 224.
- 3 Mohamed Talbi, "Une communauté de communautés. Le droit de la différence et les voies de l'harmonie" in *Islamochristiana* 4 (1978), p. 11:
- 4 Ibid., p. 12.
- 5 Ibid., p. 14.
- 6 Ibid., p. 15.
- 7 Mohamed Talbi, *Plaidoyer pour un Islam moderne* (Casablanca 1996), p. 25.
- 8 We can observe here, in Talbi's thought, the creative coming together of malekite thought with the evolution thinking of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).
- 9 *Islamochristiana*, vol. 16 (1990), p.7.
- 10 Syed Z. Abedin, "Islamic Fundamentalism, Islamic Ummah and the World Conference on Muslim Minorities" in *Encounter* (Roma), no. 204-205 (April-May 1994), p. 11.
- 11 Ibid. p. 11.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., pp.11f.
- 14 Ibid. p.12.
- 15 Ibid., p. 12-13.
- 16 Ibid., 13.
- 17 Christian W. Troll, "A significant voice of Indian Islam: Maulana Wahiduddin Khan" in: *Encounter* (Rome), nr. 254, April 1999, p. 19.
- 18 Farid Esack, *Qur'ân, Liberation and Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, p.9.
- 19 Ibid., p. 78.

20 Cf. Ibid., p. 134.

21 Ibid., p.111.

22 Ibid., p. 146.

23 Cf. Ibid., p. 147.

24 Ibid., p. 153.

25 Ibid., p. 175.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 261.

28 Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), p.3.

29 Ibid.