

## ***Bridging the Gulfs between Occidentalism and Orientalism***

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### **Abstract**

*Islam believes in essential unity of mankind, invites people of Book on the platform of monotheism to strike an ethical world order that ensures justice, peace, progress and prosperity for mankind. But when forces of history assumed inimical attitude towards this end, keeping this invitation intact, Islam unilaterally took the plunge. Later Islam and the world of Christianity remained locked on realm of political hegemony for centuries well until our times. The crusades and after Renaissance western aggressions against Muslim Asia and Africa and other historical biases rent asunder a wide artificial gulf between Islam and West. Recent tectonic shifts in the crisis-stricken world politics demand an elimination of historical biases between Islam and Judaic Christian West. This is an exploratory research to find unalloyed truth from an ore of prejudiced history that leads to bridging the gulfs between Occidentalism and Orientalism.*

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Judaic Christian, Occidentalism, West and Islam

Islam's relationship with the West is fraught with ancient potholes and modern mines. Strewn with the history of vying with each other, over the centuries both have built and evolved pyramids of notions and misperceptions rather than true ideas or appraisal of each other. Intermissions of mutual accommodation proved too ephemeral to be of any value. Yet, throughout their history, both have spared no moment to be engaged, or more often locked with each other. The Islamic civilization is the only one with which the territorial, religious, and cultural boundaries of the West have fluctuated for fourteen centuries. A century after the Prophet, vast expansion of Islam at the expense of Christendom, seven centuries of Muslim rule in Spain, unsuccessful invasion of France, inconclusive occupation of Sicily, bitter and long experience of Crusades and latter Ottoman domination of the Balkans are historical facts that developed adversarial perceptions and



menacing image of Islam and Muslims in the West. On the other hand, along with the said events, later exodus of Islam from Spain in 1498, after European Renaissance, Western encroachments on Muslim Asia and Africa (almost all the Muslim world submerged in European colonialism) in 18th and specially 19th century, last but not the least disintegration of Ottoman empire, the last Muslim stronghold at the hands of Allied forces in 1920 are the unhappy developments which went deep into the Muslim's psyche against their arch-rival West which well until today, to majority of Muslims, even after decolonization of Muslim countries is handling the affairs of Muslim world through the installation of puppet regimes. When scars of ancient and present political and military rivalries are on both sides abound, bridging the gaps and striking reconciliation between the two is a hard nut to crack.

To unlock the locks between Islam and West, perusal of their religious élan regarding each other is worth-study. First of all, Quran calls itself a Book in truth that confirms and protects the Book that existed already before it<sup>1</sup>. Say o Muhammad I believe in any and every Book that God has revealed<sup>2</sup>. Book here not specifies a specific scripture but as a generic term for the totality of revealed scriptures. For all scriptures stem from and are parts of a single source, the Heavenly Archetype called "The Mother of Books" and "The Hidden Book", "The Preserved Tablet". If this being the case, it was absolutely natural for Muhammad to expect that all communities should believe in the Quran, as he and his followers believed in all the Books, in addition, Prophet through this experience cultivated a direct community with earlier prophets and became their direct witness: you were not [O Muhammad] upon the western side, when we decreed to Moses the Commandment, nor were you of those witnessing [at the time]. But We have raised up [many] generations [afterwards] who have lived too long [to keep the original experience alive] .Neither was you a dweller among the Midianites<sup>3</sup>. In actuality, Quran not only transformed the points and lessons of the prevalent stories of the people of the Book but content as well. It was revival, renewal and revitalizing the old, with an inductive logic carving out the contours of fresh culture and civilization; it was perfecting the old rather than substituting or supplanting the earlier. Therefore, the thrust of Muhammad's Prophetic career was to strike One God-one humanity paradigm: if God is one, essentially the mankind is also one. Polytheism, gross socio-economic inequalities and rigidity of Judaic-Christian religiosity emerged to prove major obstacles to this task. Prophet has taken the plunge, is insistent and adamantly persistent on his lines, and Quran is equally advocating the same. If God is one; and His Message is also one and fundamentally indivisible; surely mankind should be one community. So, though polytheism and socio-economic imbalances were destined to be addressed, submergence of Judaic-Christian religiosity in a single religion was not going to be, yet Prophet left no stone unturned to bring them in a single religious community. Hence, Quran seems adamant to recognize them as

separate communities, addresses them as people of Book, at this point, Jews and Christians are called al-ahzab (sectarians, partisans, people who are divisive of the unity of religion and disruptive of the line of prophetic succession), each sect rejoicing in what it has to the exclusion of the rest.

Though, in Meccan phase by the stark awareness of diversity of religions, despite the unity of their origin it began to dawn at Prophet that Jews and Christians were not going to believe in him, it sets him a theological problem of first order, in Madina, it only solidifies rather than originates as orientalist believe. So, here in Madina the drift of the Prophetic career takes a gentle curve, the terms sectarian and partisans are dropped, with Torah and Gospel instead of the Book being frequently quoted Jews and Christians are recognized as communities, thanks to revelation it resolved Muhammad's theological problem by declaring Muslim also a community about eighteen months after Hijra<sup>4</sup>. "Even so have We constituted you as a median community [i.e. between the imperviousness of Judaism and the liquidity of Christianity] that you be witness to mankind that the messenger be a witness over you<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, they are defined as the best community produced for mankind<sup>6</sup>. Those, if given power on earth, establish prayer, pay Zakat, command good and forbid evil<sup>7</sup>. Again, establishing somewhat different identities of Muslim community, goodness does not lie in turning faces east or west but stays a generic term;<sup>8</sup> for each one of you [several communities] a law and a way of conduct has been appointed ...He may test you in what he has given you; *so compete in goodness*<sup>9</sup>. Muslims are not a darling community of God, He will find a substitute; they will not be indispensable for his plan<sup>10</sup>. In face of stark ground realities of seven century Arabia, this was the way out that Quran and Prophet chose regarding Jews and Christians. Though inviting them to Islam continues well until the last days of Prophet's life and Quran abounds with inviting them on common platform of Oneness of God on universal plane; it was precisely pragmatic approach to recognize them as communities, and to compete them on criterion of general goodness. In this Divine framework, survival and success will belong to, who excels in goodness.

However, on part of Muhammad and Quran, it was a workable strategy, without any loss or compromise of spirituality. Quran describes Muhammad as a *hanif*, a true monotheist, and his religion as the straight religion [al-din al-qayyim] from which paganism and schismatic character of Jews and Christianity are nothing but deviations. Prophet is asked to: set your face to the straight religion;<sup>11</sup> set your face to the religion as a *hanif*; this is the primordial religion on which God has originated mankind... do not be [o Muslims] associationists like pagan or schismatic who split of their religion into sects, each sect rejoicing in what it has<sup>12</sup>. In such a situation, Muhammad is insistent to succeed, for to him only deliver the message, to suffer frustration and not to succeed, is immature spirituality. "Instead of wandering in unworldly fashion round the hills of Galilee preaching and healing, like the

Jesus of the Gospels, Muhammad had had to engage in a grim political effort to reform his society, and his followers were pledged to continue this struggle. Instead of devoting all their efforts to restructuring their own personal lives within the context of the *pax Romana*, like the early Christians, Muhammad and his companions had undertaken the redemption of their society, without which there could be no moral or spiritual advance<sup>13</sup>. Machiavelli rightly put it: "all armed prophets have conquered, and unarmed prophets have come to grief"<sup>14</sup>. So the man who was widely ignored, almost hounded to death or destroyed, now at Medina was determined to play his role in history. Then, what else best strategy would have been available to him, than to withdraw from herculean task of striking one-God one-humanity paradigm, to recognize Judaism and Christianity as separate communities, then to enter the historical arena to compete in an open-ended goodness. Latter historical formulations aside, this is how Islam treated Judaism and Christianity on Theo-political realm.

Now, cast a cursory glance to the response of Judaism and Christianity to Islam. Both, knowing the veracity of its message belied Islam\*. They were all set to oppose Islam, though time and again Quran set their purported prevarications and obfuscations aright regarding revelations of earlier prophets. History had those scriptures corrupted; Quran was removing the dust of time from their eyebrows. But it did not go down well in their respective religious authorities, for their monopoly rather than religion was on stake, and in history, more often, former rather than latter had prevailed. Allegations were that Muhammad learnt stories from Jew rabbis and Christian monks, and concocted a new religion, all what he says is an outcome of epileptic fits, he puts peas in his ear, dove comes to collect, he pretends she reveals, so on and so forth. Truth lost in the labyrinth of historical rivalries to such an extent that in 1120, William of Malmesbury was the first European who told Europe that neither Islam is paganism nor Muslims venerate Muhammad as God<sup>15</sup>.

After European renaissance and colonization of Muslim Asia and Africa, when orientalism emerged as a serious discipline, it was hoped that charges against Islam would be abated in light of genuine scholarship and modern research methodologies, but such values often are sacrificed on the altar of political considerations. Of course, quality of knowledge about Islam improved, orientalists did great service to resurrect Islam from the debris of past, stood pioneer of modern studies on Islam, but historical biases reigned supreme on their intellectual integrity. On some issues scientific research methods and intellectual prowess proved manipulating and maneuvering tools. A veritable arm of orientalists, presented cannily an old wine in new bottle-which is an even worse *tour de force*. They are obsessed with religious conditions of pre-Islam Arabia, the one way or the other, proving the thesis that whether Islam developed in the womb of Christianity or Judaism, in relationship of Quran to their religious documents. The field is sharply

divided into two schools. Richard Bell credits the genesis of Islam to Christianity; C.C. Torrey is insistent that Judaism was the chief historical antecedent of the Quran. This stayed patriarchal academic legacy for Western Islamicists who have elaborated it further, or it became the norm of Western Orthodoxy to treat Islam on such a premise. When scholarship, instead of truth finder, becomes an instrument of political maneuvering, it is to walk on a steep rock, coming down easier than going up. Thanks to the interests of Imperial West and expertise of the orientalist, Islam began to be warped and forged exquisitely, into the crucible of Western acquisitiveness and megalomania. Hence, see the crafty, adroit maneuvering of facts regarding Islam.

In the beginning [wrote Snouck Hurgronje], Muhammad was convinced of bringing to the Arabs the same [message] which Christian had received from Jesus and the Jews from Moses etc., and against the [Arab] pagans, he confidently appealed to "the people of knowledge" ... whom one has simply to ask in order to obtain the confirmation of the truth of his teaching. [But] in Medina came the disillusionment; the People of the Book" will not recognize him. He must therefore seek an authority for himself beyond their control, which at the same time does not contradict his own earlier revelations. He, therefore, seizes upon the ancient Prophets whose communities cannot offer him opposition [i.e. whose communities are not there or no longer there: like Abraham, Noah, etc.]<sup>16</sup>.

This is because, legacy of their intellectual underpinnings that pivot around the thesis that Islam either developed on Judaism or Christianity or both. Extending the same argument, they portray Prophet of Islam playing Machiavellian tactics; He invoked Arab Nationalism when religion fails as a unifying force in Medinan milieu. Hitti puts, "in this Madinese period the Arabianization, the nationalization, of Islam was effected. The new prophet broke off with both Judaism and Christianity; Friday was substituted for Sabbath, the *adhan* was decreed in place of trumpets and gongs, Ramadhan was fixed as a month of fasting the qibla was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah, the pilgrimage to Kaba was authorized and the kissing of the black stone- a pre-Islamic fetish- sanctioned"<sup>17</sup>. In field of scholarship, when conclusions are pre-drawn, taking destiny takes no time. Hitti extends further, "in Medina, the seer in him now recedes into the background and the man of politics comes to the fore. The prophet is gradually overshadowed by the statesman"<sup>18</sup>. These intellectual contrivances aside, close and deep observations of his revelatory experience and his resultant conduct amply reveal that Medinan is nothing but the continuation of Meccan phase, but Western academic orthodoxy yearns for something else. Their patriarchal academic traditions are rich enough to reach the conclusion that the preacher of Mecca had turned pugnacious in Medina. Intellectual gasps and grunts like these are quite probable when terms treating Islam are already set.

But unprecedented Western scientific and technological advance (fruit

of European renaissance that sets in 15<sup>th</sup> century and Enlightenment movement from 18<sup>th</sup> century onward ) and control over natural laws added to the crisis, viz a viz see-saw hegemonic struggle between East and the West. The complex and highly integrated system of industrial West proved alienating and dehumanizing experience for others, it either destroyed pre-industrial pastoral civilizations(as was the case with the great civilizations of the western hemisphere) or subjugated (as were the countries from East Asia to Western Africa) to serve the needs of mercantilist and industrializing Western metropolis. Now, symmetry of fighting in same weaponry, trading in same commodities, art and craft, outlooks was trans versed. But thanks to universal moral values which science and technology could never replace. So, to keep its imperialism intact and justified, West needed a new narrative to be built upon sound moral grounds. First, in their utter contempt Asia and Africa stayed the lands of un-people. Moral principle of white Man's burden was brought forward with an unhealthy belief that Western were superior to other races: it was up to them to redeem the barbarous world of Asia and Africa in a *mission Civilis trice*. In this campaign major volleys of allegations were shot at Islam, a religion which once had given Europe a real exit from the *dark ages*.

Now, hubris of western critics of Islam shows no sign of abating. E. Renan and sir William Muir set the trump card saying that social and economic backwardness of late medieval Muslim society was due to the inherently inferior character of the Islamic civilization, and that stem from the inferiority of Islam as a religion alien to 'reason' and tolerance. Thrust of this discourse was and is to establish Islam as an anti-science and anti-civilization religion. Arguments like these are intended to strip character away from individual or a society; a worth Sordellian dialectic. The worst of all was the ghost of racial superiority of the west. E. Renan spurts such out nonsenses as: "Man's spiritual race is the Northern and the Western race<sup>19</sup>". Hegel the great genius, says, "God was a 'subconscious' that entered nature. He developed and entered plants; he developed further and entered animals... into man...into Eastern man... into Western man... into Germans, and he evolved further and entered into German government, and finally it entered the kingdom which rules us now"<sup>20</sup>. This crisis brought forth a gigantic personality of Syed Jamal-al-Din Afghani who in a true sense emerged as an Islamic response to Western Imperialism with a dual force; on one side he refuted the plea of E. Renan and his ilk that Islam is an incurable enemy of science and civilization, on the other side by consolidating political power of Islam he was erecting bulwark against Western aggressions. If to state that Islam was not against reason and science was the task of al-Afghani, it fell to the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh and the Indian Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan to take the plunge and prove the statement. Sayyed Ahmad Khan hearing the distant hoof-beat of the horse of history said that if religion is not adjusted to the sciences of today, Islam will become extinct in India.

However, Sir Sayyed and Muhammad Abduh took different ways to

treat the problem of modernity. Trained on traditional lines, Abduh (1845-1905) asserted that science and faith of Islam cannot conflict, but faith and scientific reason work on different levels. His major thrust remained on presentation of basic tenets of Islam in terms that would be acceptable to modern minds. Though he introduced no new ideas, his interpretation opened the door for new ideas and acquisition of modern knowledge. Being a trained theologian on traditional lines he was intelligible to Ulema, so he got popular in Middle Eastern milieu. But these attempts on modernizing or revitalizing Islam have been termed “shifting bones from one graveyard to another” in Western circles<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, to Sir Sayyid (strongly influenced by European rationalism and natural philosophy) reason stayed as an overriding principle. To him, conformity to nature was the criterion to judge the validity of religious belief. So, he entirely refuted the doctrine of miracles on this touch-stone, though Abduh maintained that miracles are limited to prophets only. Sir Sayyid found the body of Hadith a great obstacle to his religious interpretations, first drew the lines between genuine and ingenuine hadiths but latter refuted the entire body of Hadith, a legacy inherited by Chiragh Ali, is still alive in sub-continent in a group called as Ahl-al-Quran. Whereas Abduh tenaciously clung to medieval orthodox traditions Sayyid Ahmad Khan fell into the lap of medieval philosophers. But there is no denial that Sir Sayyid and Abduh left greater effect on subsequent reform movements in India and Middle East.

However, rigged, over-assertive yet supposed to be ontological statement in Muslim intelligentsia, *Western moral epistemology* succeeded in stealing the confidence of their subjects and proved their lesser existence and diminished humanity by debasement of their cultural heritage, distortion of their histories. As a corollary Muslims wasted three centuries (late 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>) of initial encounter with the West apologetically explaining this and that of their distorted histories, and instead of creative and critical impulses, porcupine posture dominated their attitude towards intellectual encroachments of their colonial masters. It was at the onset of 20<sup>th</sup> century that appeared to unfold with good omens for Afro-Asian communities, defeat of Russia in Russo-Japan war (1904-5) dilutes the hangover of Western megalomaniac racial superiority, and First World War gushes forth from beneath the policies of cannibalistic capitalism, that activates freedom impulse in Muslims, here stands Iqbal as a light house, well versed in Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, his on the mark analysis of Muslim predicament, his poetry proves elixir of life and imparts fresh impetus to the bewildered Muslim community in South Asia. It was not a sob of caged bird (Sir Sayyid), but a song of rather free bird from roof atop. Equipped with high calorized intellectual nectar from the flowers of Eastern and Western civilizations, Iqbal was a far cry from apologetic lot. Neither content with Muslim indolence and their intellectual stupor nor oblivious of Western achievements in science and technology he was an ambassador of hope for

freedom, reconciliation between Judaic Christian West and Muslim world, last but not the least an integration of mankind the ultimate destiny of human beings. Unperturbed by the dazzling exterior of Western culture he exposes its inner hollowness, spiritual lassitude, disorientation that had blotted its moral vision. To him, Rene Descartes's thesis that "reason can stand on its own" has gone deep into the psyche of European mind, and though crowned him with unprecedented scientific and technological advance yet robbed him of his far more precious asset of 'moral consciousness'. Deification of science led Europe to pure rationalism that is preposterous in its claim to encompass the world and its mysteries. So, being sympathetic and empathetic to Western society whom pure rationalism cut adrift from her religious unity, mournfully says Iqbal.

"Natural Science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus religion, which demands the whole of Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural Science is by nature sectional; it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality"<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, Iqbal never fails to acknowledge Europe's dominion over laws of nature and stays European renaissance direct descendent of Islamic culture in Spain and Sicily. "The liberation of the European mind from the intellectual bondage to which the Christian church had subjugated it took place in the time of the Renaissance and was to a very large extent due to the new cultural impulses and ideas which the Arabs had been transmitting to the West for several centuries"<sup>23</sup>. In nutshell, Europe used the Arab influences only as a fertilizer upon its own soil, just as the Arabs had used Hellenistic influences in their time. Ghazali had perceived universe as al-kitab al-manshwr (outspread book) a theological as well as physical mirror of Quran, the "written book" (al-kitab al-mastwr). " this theme was common in early renaissance European literature and gradually changed the outlook of the world, which was seen as a space to be deciphered, interpreted, and understood: a horizon open to reason, learning, and science"<sup>24</sup>. So, Europe took serious attitude towards universe and her relationship with nature was up for a turn to the best only because of strong influences of Islamic culture.



So, at least in exact sciences and other some valuable social ideas taking back from Europe is actually what we had given her. This serious soul search turns as yet defensive mode of oriental approach to an aggressive and offensive one. Then Russo-Japan war (1904-5) detoxifies European lifelong notion of white man's racial superiority when an Asian power defeated mighty Russia, Lord Curzon, then viceroy in India, in his memorandum to 10-Downing Street writes that reverberations of Japan's victory over Russia were like a thunderclap through the whispering galleries of the East. This plus world war led to decolonization of Asia and Africa. As a corollary, Europe's need to justify domination over natives lessened a détente in the organized libel against Islam and Muslims was expected. It began to dawn on European mindset that they share the planet with equals not inferiors. From the flowerbed of this outlook sprouted "revisionist" school which included scholars of Islam such as Jacques Berque, Maxime Rodinson, Yves Lacoste, and Roger Arnaldez. In Britain and the United States, their counterparts were to be found in H.A.R Gibb, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Norman Daniel. But unfortunately, this welcome trend was overwhelmed by the resurgence of European imperial designs and mushrooming of martial law regimes in oriental lands soon after freedom.

However, in the post-world wars period Islam was moribund, mere entangled in internal crisis of self-pity rather than a challenge to Occidentals due to the emergence of Bi-polar world phenomenon, Marshal Plan rejuvenated European economies, now Europe and America were dead-set to remove the evil of Red menace the communist Russia, Islam gets respite, for a gigantic enemy needed full attention. Then Soviet entry into Afghanistan first time in history renders Christian West and Muslim world bedfellows against Godless Russia. Mujahidin of *medieval looks and attitudes* are being termed as "moral equivalent of our forefathers" by American president. But the Soviet collapse in 1989 reversed that trajectory of their mutual relations. Soviet defeat ratchets up the morale of Islamic mujahidin and world see the surge of Pan-Islamism in their worldview details. However, full of mineral sources Muslim world again lured American and Western interests, but the currency of mission civilization, white man's burden or survival of the fittest was outdated now. A specious phrase "clash of civilization" coined by Bernard Lewis come to full bloom in Huntington's thesis "The Clash of Civilizations" in which after defeat of Red menace, green menace (Confucius civilization) and brown menace (Islamic civilization) are portrayed as possible enemies of America and the West. Apparently, he stays fault lines between civilizations responsible for future wars between civilizations, though in history civilizations grew side by side and give and take on intellectual plane among communities is the recurrent theme of the spiral movement of history. In

actuality with wide open eyes Lewis, Huntington and scholars of their ilk in service of imperial interests were seeing threat to their world hegemony by Confucius and Islamic civilizations. So, modern Europe and America with medieval mindset sought clash rather than peaceful co-existence or mutual accommodation on the realm of creativity that leads to peace, progress and prosperity. After 9/11 from the ruins of world trade towers crusades was launched by Bush Junior a voice of his subliminal views, but for some Muslim lands were to be occupied with others' surrender and collaboration crusades was substituted by "War on Terror". Either way, it is an expression of "Clash of Civilizations" doctrine. Bush commenced it from Afghanistan and Bush Blair partnership took it into Iraq, Obama a Noble laureate for peace extended it into Libya with French cooperation under the guise of UN's R2P protocol. Obama eclipsed into history that catapults Trump into white house. Opponent of One-China grouchy Trump now seems dead bent on strangulating so called Islamic radicalism in alliance with former evil empire red menace Russia under Putin considered instrumental in Trump's electoral triumph. The move unfolds historical fact, that as capitalism and communism are both materialistic philosophies, being obverse and converse of the same coin entertains cultural affinities stronger than Islam vis-à-vis. the Western world. Moreover, in racist Trump the "dangerous others", the "superfluous others, the "barbarian others" the "wretched others" the sum total of the Greek and Roman legacy is more than visible, for Greek and Roman civilizations for millennia treated people living on the East of Mediterranean sea as "barbarian others" and it has become atavistic instinct of European civilization . Trump is an archetype of that moral legacy of timeless import.

What then is the fulcrum of problem? Soul-body dualism, direct descendent of Greek thought cleaves life asunder into flesh-body dichotomy in Christian theology that interprets 'Fall' a hereditary sin committed by Adam and Eve. Since life is a battlefield between two opposing forces, the evil represented by Satan, and the good represented by Jesus, Satan misguides by bodily temptations to halt soul's march towards the light eternal, the world of material is essentially satanic, while the world of spirit is divine and good. Therefore, to obtain solace and salvation, one must turn his heart away from this world of the matter. It finds full expression in "My kingdom is not of this world". Conversely, to Islam "soul is an aspect of personality, and not an independent phenomenon in its own right. Consequently, to the Muslim one's spiritual growth is inexplicably bound up with all other aspects of his nature. Physical urges are an integral part of this nature: not the result of an 'original sin' - a concept foreign to the ethics of Islam- but positive, God given forces,

to be accepted and sensibly used as such: hence the problem for man is not how to suppress the demands of his body, rather how to co-ordinate them with the demands of his spirit in such a way that life might become full and righteous"<sup>25</sup>. This almost monistic life-assertion pivots to Islamic view that man's original nature is essentially good as opposed to Christian idea that man is born sinful, or of Hinduism that he is originally low and impure and must painfully stagger through a long chain of incarnations towards ultimate goal of perfection.

On this premise of flesh and spirit dichotomy Christian Church kept Europe plunged in Dark Ages for centuries to the time Islam enriched its soil with positive outlook to the universe that culminated in *European Renaissance*, for the *Modern Scientific Age* in which we are living at present was not inaugurated in the cities of Christian Europe, but in such Islamic centers as Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Cordova, Nishapur, Samarqand. And though once Church had provided impulses of collective consciousness for unity of Europe in crusades against Islam, yet subsequent achievements of the West became possible only through an intellectual revolt against almost everything the Church stood and stands for. Partially it owes to Islam, and partly in reaction to church's hidebound narrative of de-development. Meanwhile science progressed by leaps and bounds lagging religion far behind due to Church's sterile reliance on tradition. Religion fails to respond social cogency. Torrents of scientific rationalism lay bare the very roots of the gigantic tree of European civilization. The approach that 'reason can stand on its own' shelving religion built temples around 'science', truncated, piecemeal, atomistic and glittering half-truth of science catapulted Europe into an intellectual lap of Old Roman conception of life as a purely utilitarian proposition without any transcendental outlook. With the loss of transcendental anchoring point Europe became victim of ontological insecurity, its materialistic schizophrenia concluded: "As we do not know anything definite- that is, by means of scientific experiments and calculations- about the origin of human life and its destinies after the bodily death, it is better to concentrate all our energies on the development of our material and intellectual possibilities without allowing ourselves to be hampered by transcendental ethics and moral postulates based on presumptions which defy scientific proof"<sup>26</sup>. As a corollary, material comfort stayed acme of European life with legitimizing principle that God created this universe with *fatherly instinct*, from beneath this conception of life gushes forth a civilization enmeshed in carnal pleasures, rapt in utter materialism with thin veneer/cast

of utilitarian morality.

As opposed to European utter material outlook on life, Islam appears a perfect work of architect, matter and spirit in its program are balanced with a finesse that defies description, all its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure. Even its worships are integral whole of physical and mental devotions. Prayer, particularly circumambulation (*Tawwaf*) plays out what the gravitational point of physical human endeavors must be, such a simplest complex structure of Islam like David freaks out Goliath of materialism in Washington and Masco, therefore having soft corners in their breasts for Buddhism, Hinduism and other oriental religions, prophets of materialism in western capitals with blood shot eyes zero in on Islam, for it renders real threat to their *values system*.

So the Russia and America foes of near past, press 'reset' button, Trump and Putin in tandem are all set to eradicate brown menace, the bungled and botched world of Islam, euphemistically it is a campaign against Islamic radicalism, in which so called Islamic terrorists stupid friends of Islam are mere pawns in the game. This Frankenstein monster has more often, interestingly legitimized western imperial leitmotifs to trample Muslim lands, though Europe is also in its crosshairs, which seems now intent on its roll up, but addressing symptom rather than problem is a palliative measure bound to invite nemesis. Today, the world of Islam and the West stand in the worst need to reorient their civilizational outlook to each other, but the malignant narcissism of Europe and orthodox hidebound medieval view point in Islam is inimical to this reset, for nagging historical biases linger on both sides. But time and tide wait for none, if both do not see the writing on the wall, would fail to touch the pace of history on their own perils. For Chinese One Belt One Road policy vision along with CPEC and BCIM projects of US\$4-8 trillion investment in contrast with US's two withering trade centric initiatives of TPP and TTIP bodes shift of the axis of world power from Atlantic to Pacific. Under Trump TPP is torn apart, NATO a relic of the past, CJPOA with Iran seems blown to bits, once instrumental for the fall of Wall of Berlin USA appears hell-bent on erecting wall along Mexican border, after Brexit, Frexit is on the cards, Trump travel ban is a move to edge out Muslims from USA, if succeeds Europe would follow the suit, that is akin to putting the clock back and whipping the history backward which history defies arrogantly. When Civilizations losing zeitgeist relinquish touch with reality, gradually comes the moment history scribbles their epitaphs. At such moment only strong will,

an intense spiritualism with rigorous pragmatism of communities bends the flow of history to their favor; otherwise they peter out in the unlit pathways of history.

It is over to the West and the world of Islam whether they devise *modus operandi* to seek their joint role in global affairs or opt for the *modus vivendi* with historic development. At present juncture Muslims have no qualms with imminent change of guard, for their intellectual stupor for centuries kept them serving the history of others; it is a shift of job for them, but mere economic concerns in absence of socio-religious and cultural ties with China are bound to create fissures in the long run in this much touted relationship. Resilient Europe has survived the crisis of world wars and other upheavals, had been responding well to the exigencies of time by entering the uncharted realm of fresh ideologues, yet again could play vital role in world arena, provided it sloughs off nationalism galvanizing efforts towards Europe's unification and bridges artificial gulfs with the world of Islam, otherwise history would render it spent force.

Then how to strike harmony between Judaic-Christian West and Islam, while to Western Observers Islam is pale copy of either Judaism or Christianity and being Bedouin phenomenon could not pass through the Laundromat of modernity and world of Islam perceives them as sworn in eternal enemies. Same patriarchal academic tradition catapults Jews to portray but for Prophet's bitter experiences with the Jews in Medina, Mecca would have been religiously subordinated to Jerusalem, Christians insinuate the idea of Trinity presented to Prophet was crude one, had Jesus instead of physical or quasi-physical son of God been set forth as spiritual son, Muhammad might not have rejected it. Both views imply that Islam is an unoriginal and concocted version of Judaic Christian religio-moral tradition. However, Quran at pretty initial stage in Mecca in an unequivocal term terms itself the continuation or, indeed revival of the earlier prophets<sup>27</sup> and sets aright whatever had been distorted in the ever hot hands of history, saying you (people of the book) are spiritual progeny of Abraham. But when their stubbornness shows no respite in their Procrustean bed orientation<sup>28</sup>; Quran proclaims that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian and that those with most claims to him were those who really followed him<sup>29</sup>. So, if Jerusalem had *ab initio* permanent position in Prophet's program, the bitter experience with Jews at Medina could not have changed it, just as they could not change the status of their religious personalities in Islam. They (Jews) could have been exiled or crushed, as happened in Medina, yet Jerusalem could have retained

after religiously being dissociated from them, as Quran more than once declared Palestine as 'blessed land', But taking Mecca was master plan with the Prophet, for due to Kaaba it had centrality in socio-religio-economic cum political affairs of Arabia and could prove the best launching pad for a new crystal clear religion of Islam. On the other hand Quran refutes divinity and Trinity of Jesus in the strongest possible terms: at it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin that they should invoke a son for God<sup>30</sup>. Still, Quran mysteriously entertains soft corner for Christians as against Jews, perhaps precisely because the Jews claim proprietary right over truth and revelation, Christianity believes in universality of revelation, only in love of Jesus they overstep the bounds of truth, "when they listen to the revelations sent down to the Prophet, you see their eyes flowing with tears because of the Truth they have recognized in it.."<sup>31</sup>. Quran asks the Prophet to seek solace from them when needed.

But despite the harshest possible critique of Judaism and Christianity, riddle rapped in mystery, inside enigma is that Quran still continues to say "those who have believed, and the Jews, the Christians and the Sabaeans, whosoever believe in God and the Last Day and act righteously, they shall have their requital from their Lord and shall neither fear nor grieve<sup>32</sup>. Majority of Muslim commentators inferred the Jews, Christians and Sabaeans here addressed are those who turned to Islam while Muslim constitute the first category of the four, either they say here those good Jews, Christians and Sabaeans are meant who died before the advent of Islam, what a worse *tour de force*. But perhaps there is a key. That key is Islam with a breadth of vision unparalleled in history of religions stays salvation conditional on three elements only: Belief in God and the Last day, and righteous deeds. So, from here evolves the concept of universal goodness and Shah Wali Allah aptly says "Islam is not the name of any particular group or section. Any man irrespective of his birth, caste and creed, if he believes in God, His Apostles, has faith in the life to come and does good works, is certainly within the bounds of Islam <sup>33</sup>". Quran even ethers the very indispensability of Muslims, if not deliver on the realm of goodness, God will bring their substitute<sup>34</sup>. Real worth of religious communities lies in *virtue and competing in goodness*<sup>35</sup>, an ultimate cause and fruit of multiplicity of religions.

On this premise Quran invites self- proclaimed monotheism of Jews and Christians: "O People of the Book! Let us come together upon a formula which is common between us- that we serve naught except God<sup>36</sup>. It is not like ecumenism. Here "Oneness of God" is a platform rather than task,

wherefrom flow the details of that cherished task which is the establishment of *Just Moral order* on the earth that entails socio-economic cum political justice for all. This *ethico-social world order* is bound to fill the world with power, peace and prosperity, has a bandwidth to bridge gulfs between Orientals and Occidentals for human integration, an ultimate destiny of mankind. In the early creative phase of Islam, Zoroastrians were too deemed like the people of Book, “the Caliphal courts of Damascus, Baghdad and Cordova witnessed countless meetings of Jews, Christians and Muslims in which the learned adherents debated the three faiths. The reigning culture gave such honor to the three religions, such respect to their principles and institutions that inter-religious debate was the subject of salon conversation, a public pastime”<sup>37</sup>. So other religions are entitled to be invited on this platform of “Oneness of God” a steppingstone towards the final integration of humanity. This historically had been part and parcel of Islamic attitude towards other religions. Out of same desire, caliph Haroon Al-Rashid had sent his embassy to Emperor Charlemagne, but Europe at that time was culturally too primitive to appreciate this opportunity to its full extent but showed no dislike for it. Later on crusade appeared on the horizon and smoked the relations between Islam and West, hence mutual accommodation between Saladin and Richard the Lion Heart proved ephemeral, for the evil created by crusades was not mere a show of clang of weapons, but a full spectrum war of intellectual constructs that still haunts across the board.

The Quranic Ideal of “the final unity of humanity” to Karen Armstrong could not be realized so far, because of “the wars of Islam and Christianity, and later, European aggression in its various forms could not allow the infinite meanings of the Quranic verses (29:46; 2:136; 3:64 etc.) to the countries of Islam<sup>38</sup>, who remained exclusively tenaciously clung to the idea that Jews and Christians are an eternal enemy, while meticulousness demands otherwise. So, the élan of harmony, mutual accommodation between Abrahamic family of monotheistic religions oft quoted in Quran and previous scriptures get dissolved in the *aqua regia* of historical biases.

Then, can gulfs between Orient and Occident be bridged? To resurrect the élan of harmony on the basis of One God one mankind paradigm dumping the historical garbage on the Mars would be the first step forward. In view of as yet unheeded invitation<sup>39</sup> dream of essential unity of mankind or at least positive cooperation between Occidentals and Orientals can be materialized, provided the Muslim hearken more to the Quran than to the historic formulations of medieval constructs and provided that recent

pioneering efforts continue to yield a Christian doctrine more compatible with universal monotheism and egalitarianism. In 1956, Wilfred Cantwell Smith had pointed out the 'fundamental weakness of both Western Civilization and Christianity in the modern world... "Unless Western civilization intellectually and socially, politically and economically, and Christian church theologically, can learn to treat other men with fundamental respect, these two in their turn will have failed to come to terms with the actualities of the twentieth century"<sup>40</sup>. Karen Armstrong rightfully suggests "if Muslims need to understand our Western traditions and institutions more thoroughly today, we in the West need to divest ourselves of our old prejudice"<sup>41</sup>. Before, 19<sup>th</sup> century honest European thinkers like Carlyle, Goethe and Gibbon also entertained same proclivity for Islam. George Bernard Shaw appreciating the wonderful vitality of Islam says "it is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age"<sup>42</sup>.

Now, when new realities are taking roots, Russia seems interested in multipolar world, Putin dead-set to disintegrate EU bloc, China is all-set to assume world leadership, mere calls for rearmament spiral in Washington and Western capitals cannot checkmate the shift of axis of power from Atlantic to Pacific. Though China's proposition to the world is "to build a community of shared future for mankind and achieve shared and win-win development"<sup>43</sup> under the banner of One belt One Road policy vision with its two components, land based silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), and oceangoing Maritime Silk Road (MSR), plus closely related networks of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar corridor (BCIM), still its potentials to impart *universal values* to our crisis-ridden world are dubious. The values like *equality, liberty and fraternity* essentially sprouted from the flowerbed of monotheistic religious tradition, and only the family of Abrahamic faiths can safeguard the same. Before the history should take its own course, gulfs between Orientalism and Occidentalism must be bridged under the banner of Millat-I-Ibrahim that leads to the "essential unity of humanity" sooner or later an ultimate destiny of mankind.



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- <sup>1</sup> Al-Quran, 5:51
- <sup>2</sup> Al-Quran, 42:15
- <sup>3</sup> Al-Quran, 28:45
- <sup>4</sup> see Al-Quran, 22:78
- <sup>5</sup> Al-Quran, 2:143
- <sup>6</sup> Al-Quran, 3:110, 3:104
- <sup>7</sup> Al-Quran, 22:41
- <sup>8</sup> Al-Quran, 2:177
- <sup>9</sup> Al-Quran, 5:51
- <sup>10</sup> Al-Quran, 47:38, 5:57
- <sup>11</sup> Al-Quran, 30:43
- <sup>12</sup> Al-Quran, 30:30-32
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- <sup>27</sup> Al-Quran, 87: 19
- <sup>28</sup> Al-Quran, 5:66, 5:68, 2:113
- <sup>29</sup> Al-Quran, 11:113
- <sup>30</sup> Al-Quran, 19:90-91

<sup>31</sup> Al-Quran, 5:82-83

<sup>32</sup> Al-Quran, 2:62, 5:69

<sup>33</sup> Iqbal, Saeeda, *Islamic Rationalism in the Subcontinent*, Islamic Book Service, 1984, p.129

<sup>34</sup> Al-Quran, 47:38

<sup>35</sup> Al-Quran, 5:51

<sup>36</sup> Al-Quran, 3:64

<sup>37</sup> Iqbal, Saeeda, *Islamic Rationalism in the Subcontinent*, Islamic Book Service, 1984, p.190

<sup>38</sup> *The Guardian*, London, Thursday, June 20, 2002. Karen Armstrong

<sup>39</sup> Al-Quran, 3:64

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong, Karen, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, Phoenix Press, London 1991, p.266

<sup>41</sup> Armstrong, Karen, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, Phoenix Press, London 1991, p.266

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