

Part I

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Who is a Muslim?

OUT of a world population of 6.9 billion, 1.3 billion are Muslims. Both these figures are approximate since no exact statistics are available. They are, however, reasonable since the former is based on United Nations assessments, and the latter on the calculations by each country of its Muslim population. Every sixth man, woman, and child on earth, therefore, is a Muslim.

Muslims constitute the majorities of the fifty seven members of the Organization of Islamic Conference. They constitute significant minorities in a number of other countries: India (161 million), China (22 million), Russia (16 million), as well as lesser minorities in practically every country in the world.

In North America, Muslims count about eight million persons, most of whom live in the big cities. New York, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, Montreal, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington and Boston are home to thousands of Muslims. Many an American town has a number of mosques (Arabic: *masjid*, pl. *masājid*) or houses of prayer, where Muslims worship. The largest and most beautiful of these is the Mosque of Washington, D.C. located on Massachusetts Avenue. It was completed in 1957 under the patronage of a number of Muslim Governments. 6,000 worshipers attend Friday prayer there every week.

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The Muslims belong to practically all world ethnic groups. The Arabs, as ethnic group, lead the list with some 316 million, followed by the Javanese (239 million), Bengalis (147 million), and the Turanians, i.e., Turkmen in Central Asia and Asia Minor (61 million). Although black people constitute an ethnic group in America, they do not do so in the world where they are divided into a number of properly “ethnic” groupings. Nonetheless, there are 241 million Muslims of African descent.

The map of the Muslim World looks like a solid rectangle running over the great land mass of Africa-Asia. It stretches from Dakar, the westernmost corner of Africa all the way to Sinkiang in northwest China. The “rectangle” seems also to have three long and heavy fingers stretched over the east coast of Africa, a second along the great river plains of northern India and reaching to the Bay of Bengal, and a third, stretching over the whole archipelago of the East Indies and including part of the Philippines and New Guinea. By area, the Muslim World includes two of the largest countries in the world, Kazakhstan and Sudan. By population, it includes four of the most populous, namely, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria with a combined population of over 600 million.

Muslims speak many languages. Those of them for whom Arabic is the mother-tongue make up over 316 million. The Javanese group is next in size and counts some 239 million; the Bengali, 147 million; the Turkish 70 million; the Persian, 69 million and the Hausa groups, 35 million respectively. Arabic is also a *lingua franca* to many more millions of non-Arabic speaking peoples. All Muslims know some measure of Arabic, since Arabic is the language of worship. Many have achieved varying degrees of mastery of the language since it is the first language of Islamic religious thought and culture. A person speaking and writing nothing but Arabic could easily find himself at home anywhere around the wider world belt, Dakar to Mindanao, among Muslim communities.

A very prominent and visible aspect of universal occurrence among Muslims consists in Arabic calligraphy and arabesque decoration, found in all places where Muslims congregate, especially in the houses of worship. Equally ubiquitous are various architectural features of

those buildings, whether inside, as in the case of the Qur'an's verses rendered in beautiful calligraphy, or outside, such as the minarets, from which five times a day, the *muadhdhin* chants the call to worship in Arabic. This call to prayer, as well as the chanting of the Qur'an, constitutes aural features of universal occurrence in the Muslim World. Certainly, there are other features binding the Muslim World together, but they are not as conspicuous. They reveal themselves to the investigator, if not to the casual tourist.

Besides these foregoing aspects of quick identification, Muslims constitute a great diversity of appearances. They are divided into a multiplicity of cultural groups, each carrying its own dress, customs, and ways of life.

In the past, the Muslim World has witnessed a great deal of mobility among its peoples. The brotherhood, racial tolerance and lack of color discrimination, the common institutions of the Muslims, once made it possible for anyone to move from one end of the empire to another without estrangement. As a direct effect of this mobility, the Muslim urban populations are very polyglot. No feast is greater to the eyes of the anthropologist than that of sitting at any sidewalk cafe in Rabat, Tripoli, Cairo, Damascus, Jeddah, Baghdad, Tehran, Lahore, Delhi, or Jakarta. Passing him are automobiles as well as camels, veiled women as well as women in saris and mini-skirts, jeans and sarongs, fair and blue-eyed northerners as well as people of dark skin, West African Hamitic, Chinese or Mongols, small-built Malays or large bodied Afghans, men with parted hair and men with fezzes, and turbans, men in Savile Row clothing and men in flowing robes. All of them are Muslims.

The same diversity is beginning to characterize Muslim presence in North America. Whereas half of the Muslims of this continent are black people, the other half are caucasian, and consist of immigrants (and their descendants) from all over the Muslim World. The same variety of ethnic and cultural types can be witnessed in any convention of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the dominant and guiding Muslim organization in the North American continent.

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EVERY law court of Islam is bound to recognize as a Muslim in good standing, and hence as entitled to all privileges and rights appertaining thereto, and standing under all duties and obligations of Islamic law, every adult male and female who consciously and solemnly witnesses that “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” Fulfillment of this simple definition of “Islamicity” is all that Islamic law requires in order to ascertain membership in the Muslim community. Once a person is put to the test, and he witnesses responsibly to the twin facts of God being the only God and Muhammad (ṢAAS)* being His Prophet, no more can be legally required of him to prove his faith and, in consequence, all his rights and duties under Islamic law.

The reason why “Islamicity” is so simple to define, so simple to attain and so simple to establish, is that Islam is neither an ethnocentric nor a sacramental religion. One does not have to be born a Muslim; nor does one have to have any Muslim parent, guardian, family or people. Every person in the world may become a Muslim if he so chooses, by his personal decision alone. His initiation into Islam needs no partaking of any sacrament, no participation by any clergy and no

* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*: May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

confirmation by any organized body. As to “Islamicity,” therefore, all men are absolutely equal in that the house of Islam may be entered by all and everyone upon his satisfying the simplest of requirements. In the matter of men being Muslims or non-Muslims, there is no middle ground, no ambiguity, no complication.

Great as it may be in the eye of Islam for any person to make the decision to enter the faith, his entry constitutes no guarantee of personal justification in the eye of God. Since Islam has no sacraments, there is nothing the new initiate can do which, if his life were to terminate at its very moment, he would be assured of salvation. Augustine’s terrible case of the two newborn babies, the one going to Paradise because he received baptism and the other condemned to eternal fire because he did not, is not a problem for Islam. In Islam, justification in the eye of God is a function of man’s deeds or works, not of any sacrament of which he may have partaken. Is justification, on the other hand, a function of man’s personal faith? No, answers Islam. Faith is presupposed in the man’s entry into the community of Islam. But faith may be a mere statistical feature, a mark of social self-identification. It may and may not produce the works of virtue, the deeds of righteousness. Only the latter, therefore, constitutes justification.

On the scale of virtue and righteousness, men occupy varying positions. The scale itself is infinite; and there is no point at which a Muslim may carry his title to Paradise, as it were, in his pocket. Everyone strives and some strive more than others. Judgment by God of any man’s fate is not pre-empted by anything any individual can do, whether for or against salvation. For God may reject the greatest deeds because of lack of faith and seriousness on the part of their doer; and He may forgive the greatest sinner. Likewise, He is not determined to pass favorable judgment on anyone by virtue of his partaking in any “sacrament.” The Muslim is hence a person who, having joined the ranks of Islam by his solemn witnessing, is engaged in the pursuit of righteousness the rest of his life. The simple test of Islamicity provided by Islamic law, designed to make entry into Islam the easiest religious passage ever devised, is balanced by a salvation requisite, after entry, which is by nature infinite and hence never fully satisfied. Religious justification is thus the Muslim’s eternal hope, never his complacency, not even for a

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fleeting moment. The Muslim, therefore, is a person who, as his solemn witnessing has indicated, believes that only God is God and Muhammad is His Prophet. That only God is God makes of him at once the humblest and proudest creature. He is humble, and rubs his proud forehead against the ground in prostration, before God. God is to him, the One Creator, Provider, Ruler, Forgiver and Judge, the First Cause and the Final End of everything, the Ultimate Reality. He is the object of adoration and praise, of thanks and worship, the One Master to Whom all one's life is devoted in dedication and service. The Muslim is the proudest of people precisely because of this loyalty to God. Besides God, no thing and no man is worthy of his loyalty, of his service and work. The Muslim may not submit to any ruler, and much less to any tyrant, because his submission is all due to the One Master. Some Muslims indeed do submit to rulers and tyrants; but they do so at the cost of violating their very definition as Muslims. In this submission to God, the Muslim places himself on a par with the whole of mankind, which he regards as equally obliged to recognize the Creator of all. He is touched by a feeling of strongest brotherhood to any person so submitting himself to the divine Sovereign; for *vis-à-vis* the Creator, there is no perspective or category, no bond or definition, mightier and more proper than that of creatureliness. Here all human beings stand absolutely identical.

Equally, and on account of his acknowledgment of God alone as Master, the Muslim is a sort of revolutionary who champions the cause of human freedom against human masters everywhere. Nothing is more hateful to him than *shirk* or associating other beings with God. When a person sets up money, sex, power, or pleasure as his God besides God, it is indeed bad. But when a Caesar or a tyrant so sets himself up and demands absolute loyalty from the citizens – loyalty belonging exclusively to God – then rebellion against that ruler and his ultimate overthrow become for the Muslim a prime religious objective.

The Muslim believes that God has created man and the world not in sport, and certainly not in vain, but for a purpose. This purpose is that man may fulfill his ethical vocation; that he may do the good deeds. The scripture of Islam pictures the life of man *in* the world as a

free competition among men for doing the better, the nobler, the greater deeds. On this account, it called man “*khalīfah*” or vicegerent of God, i.e., he who acts and fulfills, on behalf of God. The world God created is one which fits this moral vocation of man, one in which man is efficacious, where the realization of goodness, truth and beauty is actually possible.

This purpose is what gives meaning to the Muslim’s life. And there can be no greater meaning than to serve as the actualizer of God’s will on earth, as the realizer of goodness and value in space and time. It is the source of his dignity and self-esteem. In fact, it does assign him a cosmic status to see himself, on a par with all other men, as the bridge through which the moral good must pass to be actualized on earth. Realization of the moral good requires that it be achieved in freedom, i.e., under conditions where it is equally possible for man to realize as well as to violate the moral imperative. Only the human being, of all creatures on earth, is so equipped.

To be a *khalīfah*, or vicegerent of God on earth, is no little burden. First, the task the position imposes is world-wide. Everything in creation is object of improvement. This means that the task involves the turning of every corner of the earth into all that it ought to be, namely, into a Paradise. Equally, it means that upon the Muslim falls the task of educating and transforming mankind, not only himself, his children, next of kin or compatriots, and to arrange for them the fulfillment by each of all his personal potential. All the problems of mankind are hence the Muslim’s problems. To accept them, to seek morally-worthy solutions of them and to work out these solutions in history, is the Muslim’s obligation and destiny – as well as his pride. Islam wants man to confront these problems head-on, and assures him that God will grant merit, and hence reward and felicity, in direct proportion to man’s commitment to the task, to his engagement in the job, to his success in achieving the divine purpose of creation – namely, the universal and highest good of all men, of all peoples, of all things. All of the Muslim’s life is to be lived in service to God; that is, in educating and disciplining himself, in discovering the laws of nature so as to make his usufruct of it possible and easy; and finally, in living and enabling every person and thing to live the divine pattern which is God’s will. The

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Muslim is he who interferes with every natural process so as to make it serve man's needs and fulfill his joys; who interferes with the life of everyone on earth so as to enable that person better to fulfill his potential, to realize to the full his noble destiny as God's vicegerent. Obviously, to live the life of Islam is to live dangerously. But it is also to live with the highest expectation, the greatest promise, the deepest joy of which man is capable.

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THAT God is sole Creator and Master of the world, that He is the First Cause and Final End, that man is His servant, that human service is the kneading and molding of the world and of man into what it and he ought to be, and that such work is possible and upon its completion depends man's felicity and bliss – all this is Islam's view of reality. This view is not without grounds and justification; nor is it devoid of problems.

The first striking characteristic of Islam is that its view is wholly positive. It seems to prescribe the doing of the good, and trusts that the moral imperatives can and would be obeyed. But isn't man by nature inclined to do the opposite, to do evil? Isn't his nature to sin, defy God and disobey the moral commandments? Isn't he a "fallen" creature in need of ransom and salvation before he can be expected to do the good?

That man is by nature inclined to sin, defy God and disobey Him is certainly true, answers Islam. But it is equally true that man's nature is also to obey God, to do the good and act ethically. The two are possible for him, and he inclines to the one as much as he does to the other. The fact that he can do evil when he does the good, and can do the good when he does evil, adds a new dimension to his worth or

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unworth when he does either. If he were compelled, i.e., without freedom, to follow a single course, his action would be neither moral nor immoral, though it might have realized a material value or disvalue. No man is hopelessly bound to one or the other course of action; and if he were, no one in his senses would consider him morally responsible.

Man, therefore, is no more “fallen” than he is “saved.” Because he is not “fallen,” he stands in no need for a savior; and because he is not “saved,” he stands in need to do the good works and do them ethically, which alone would earn him the desired “salvation.” Indeed, “salvation” is an improper term, since one must be in a necessary predicament beyond the hope of ever pulling himself out of it, to need “salvation.” That is precisely what man does not need. Man is not impotent ethically; nor is he a helpless puppet capable of neither good nor evil. He is capable of both. To “save” himself by his deeds and works is his pride and glory. To miss his chance and pass all the opportunities by, is pitiable neglect; to miss the calling deliberately and to do evil is to earn punishment, to deserve damnation.

Islam teaches that man is born innocent, and remains so until he makes himself guilty by his own deed. It does not believe in “original sin;” and its scripture interprets Adam’s disobedience as his own personal misdeed; a misdeed for which he repented and which God had forgiven.

Rather than demoralize man by declaring him born with necessary, inescapable sin, Islam reassures him, that God Who does not work in vain has created him fitted for the job of vicegerent. He has given him his eyes and ears, his senses of touch and taste and smell, his discerning heart and mind, his imagination and memory, all to the end of discovering and understanding the divine pattern in creation. He has built him as He did, with grasping fingers, hurrying feet, springing muscles and supporting bones, to the end that he may manufacture, grasp or produce what he needs. He placed him on an earth receptive to his efficacy, where he can get things done. Finally, He gave him mastery over the whole of creation, for He made everything subservient to man. Even the sun, the moon and the millions of far away stars were created expressly for his benefit. Instead of being damned before he walks on earth, Islam teaches that man is blessed with all these

“perfections,” with life and mastery over all things, and is hence all the more expected to fulfill the divine will in his life.

Islam denies therefore that God had to ransom man by means of oblation and sacrifice. Such view, it holds, does violence to both God and man, compromising the transcendence of the former and the moral status of the latter. It regards Jesus as God’s prophet, sent to teach identically the same message as all other prophets and to reform the Jews who had gone astray from the same teaching delivered to them by those prophets. It holds the Christians, not Jesus, accountable for what is being taught in his name. But it reassures them that they are essentially in the right, especially when they call men to worship God and to serve Him by doing the good works. Moreover, Islam explains their “mistake” as due to the loss of the authentic texts of revelation. Profiting from their experience, Islam preserved the absolute integrity and authenticity of its own revealed text, explaining that God Himself has sent it down, and He alone is its guardian and keeper.

If all prophets have conveyed one and the same message, whence come all the religions of history? Islam answers, there can be no difference in the message since their source is one, namely God, and since in their creatureliness, that is *vis-à-vis* God, all men are alike. Revelation through the prophets constitutes a fiduciary fund of truth for every people, since God had made His will known to every people in their own language. Variations of space and time, acculturation by alien influences and the whims and passions of men did the rest. The result was the religions of history, none of which has preserved the original text of its revelation. In their pristine purity, the revelations were one and the same and contained the same principles of religion and ethics. If they differed at all, they did so in the concrete prescriptions they imposed as implementive of those essential principles. They were one in their “what,” but many in their “how.” The former is their core and essence and is universal and eternal; the latter is accidental and is relative to the circumstances of history, to the peculiarities of the specific people to whom it was sent.

Paralleling the eternal “what” is a built-in capacity in every human being to recognize God and grasp His will as the good and ought of morality. This is not merely man’s endowment with the senses and

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reason we have mentioned earlier. Besides all these, there is a sixth sense, which all men share in common, a genuine *sensus communis*, which enables them all to perceive God. Awareness of the holy is innate to man. There is no man without religion, and no religion without the holy. If men saw the holy in different forms, that is due to their upbringing, their legacies of culture and religion. In its pure form, the *sensus numinis* in every man makes him aware of God, the Holy One, and of His will as the moral imperative. It is hence for more than one reason that God holds all men equally responsible before Him.

Conversely, man ought to regard and treat all other men as his equals. In acting morally, i.e., in fulfilling the divine will, man should aim at the whole of humanity. Certainly considerations of nearness and strategy impose upon him to start his good “works” at home, beginning with himself. But granted these necessities, he cannot discriminate between the human creatures of God. Whether as subjects of moral action, or as objects of moral action by others, all men are equal because they are all equally creaturely, their creatureliness being the ground of their obligation to serve God. Universalism is God-given as well as God-enjoined.

Within the Semitic family of nations in which Islam was born, the Jews have admirably preserved the revealed teaching that God is transcendent and One. However, Islam charged them with misunderstanding divine transcendence when they thought of God as related to themselves in a way other than He is related to all other creatures. Their teaching of a doctrine of divine election which put them ahead of all men in receiving God’s favors, Islam found objectionable. They held themselves to be God’s children and elect regardless of their deeds. In so doing they were the object of Islam’s castigation and chastisement. Islam regarded itself as the religion of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David as each of them conveyed the revealed message in its pure and unadulterated form. In consequence, the Muslim identified himself with the Jews as worshipper and servant of one and the same transcendent God and regarded his own religious doctrine as Judaism purged of all ethno-centrism and especially, of the doctrines of election and of the “remnant.” As far as Jewish law and ethics are concerned, Islam confirmed the revelation of Jesus insofar as it

removed the yoke of literalism and legalism which the Jewish tradition had spun around the Law of Moses, and revoked the laws which the rabbis had added to it.

Religious authority, Islam held, belongs only to God. As tyrants are condemned and men are enjoined to shake off their tyranny, the road to God should be an open and free highway, admission to which has only one requisite, namely creatureliness. Away, therefore, Islam taught, with priesthood and all its orders and men. The tasks of teaching the truth, of guiding the young and counseling the erring, will last as long as man. But they constitute universal duties equally incumbent on all men. Prestige in the discharge of these tasks belongs to whomsoever has acquired the most and highest learning which is itself accessible to all. The ages-long occupation of priests as intermediaries between God and man has in Islam come to an end. God is the Forgiver, Punisher, Judge and Master, not the priest. He does not delegate these functions to any creature because that would violate His transcendence and role as sole governor and judge of men. He is close, near, fully responsive to every man's prayer. His mercy and care for mankind, along with His omnipotence, demand that all men address themselves directly to Him. God needs no bureaucracy.

Priesthood fulfills the function of administering the sacraments. Sacrament, however, is precisely what Islam, like Judaism before it, denies and condemns. A sacrament is a celebration through which man's prayer is addressed to God, and an aspect of God's power which is channeled back to man, through the mediation of a priest. Islam holds both avenues to be false: man's prayer reaches to God without need for intermediaries; and no aspect whatever of God's power or divinity is channeled anywhere without threat to divine transcendence. God's power and sanctity are solely God's. They are not dispensed to any creature because Creator and creature are two absolutely disparate kinds of being which never fuse into each other. Perhaps one can say that life as a whole is one sacrament insofar as God is the source of life, and man's life is a song of praise to God, a discharge of His commandment, a sort of "return" to Him. But even that is the end of sacrament in the meaning of fragmentation and diffusion of divinity. Doing away with the priesthood obviates the sacrament of

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ordination, and doing away with the sacraments obviates the need for priests. Without original sin, there is no need for baptism; and with God being in direct control of human affairs, worshippers, thanksgivers, confessors and supplicators can all address themselves directly to the divine Presence.

It is God who indeed is the Master, the sole Master. He alone is the Judge, and He knows all since nothing escapes His Mastery. It is not in any man's hand to dispense His power. Judgment of a man's whole life, or of any of his deeds, is God's prerogative, not man's. And it is the consummating conclusion of human life when, on the Day of Judgment, every man is meted out the exact reward or punishment he has earned in his life. In the view of Islam, the "other world" or the "other kingdom" has no other meaning than this consummation. It is not another world, another space-time, designed to supplant this world, this space-time, and to make up for us all the deficiencies and shortcomings of this world. Inheriting the view from Zoroastrianism, Judaism maintained that in the other world, the absolute good would be realized which was lost forever in this world, and which would never be realized in this world. Such is based upon the view that the Kingdom of David was itself the Kingdom of God, and that God would send a messiah to restore it cataclysmically at the end of time. Following in the same path, Christianity went one step further by indicating this world and all time as hopelessly fallen and depraved, and hence utterly impossible to be a realm where the absolute good might be realized. It projected the other world as an idealized substitute, where nothing but sweetness, joy and bliss would befall the "saved." Islam rejected both views as demoralizing to man's faith in himself, in this world. Reasserting the essential innocence and goodness of both man and the world, Islam taught not only that the realization of the absolute is possible in this world but that to bring it about here and now is precisely the duty of every man and woman. It warned mankind that there is no world other than this; that there is no space-time other than this; that all man's duties and hopes are to be fulfilled in this world – if they are to be fulfilled at all.

This world, the Muslim believes, is the realm of God, the Kingdom wherein utopia is possible of actualization if man performs his duty and

responds to the divine call with obedience. God wishes for man to do the good deeds, and the good deeds do actually transform this world into the ideal; that this was from the beginning the whole purpose of creation, rather than the fall or defeat of that original purpose. The other world, Islam holds, is not “another” world, an alternative to this world, but merely a consummation of judgment passed on whether or not we willed to transform this world and succeeded in so doing. It would be totally different from, and hence “other” than, this world, not because our present frustrations and deprivations will be satisfied, but because it will be transcendent, i.e., beyond this space and this time. It is not, however, a “world;” it has no dimension; and it is not a replica of this world with its sorrows turned into joys. It is Paradise or Hell in the sense of reward or punishment, a consummation of reward and punishment meted out in judgment.

Only such a view, Islam holds, is consistent with loyalty to this world. Without it, this world would become merely a bridge or passage on which we are transients, advised neither to tarry nor to build but quickly to get to the other shore. This is denial of this world. Islam, on the other hand, is world-affirming, stressing this as the only world. We either succeed or fail in it, doing the right or the wrong. Being free and responsible, everything we do in this world counts for us or against us. On the Day of Judgment, which will also be the termination of this world, we would be given what we have deserved, blessedness or damnation. Piety and morality, that is, obedience to God, should be our choice in this world for a double reason: they do bring us happiness and acknowledge utopia in this world; they also and at the same time promise us blessedness on the Day of Judgment, for they are indeed obedience to God. That is why Islam, Muslims hold, achieves for man two happinesses: happiness here and happiness in the hereafter. (Qur’an 2:201)

Since When is Anyone a Muslim?

ISLAM began as a world religious movement in the first decade of the seventh century of the Common Era, in the city of Makkah in Arabia. It was taught by Muhammad, son of ‘Abdullāh, of the tribe of Quraysh, who at the ripe age of forty, began to have visions in which God, through the instrumentality of Angel Gabriel, sent down a revelation. The revelation was from God, not of God. It was a disclosure of His will, or commandments, in sublime Arabic form. It came piecemeal, sometimes in a problematic situation which called for a solution, dispensation or guidance for the given circumstance, sometimes without, the situation being the wider religious context of the unbelievers, or of the Christians and Jews of whom there were many in Arabia and the adjoining countries. At first, Muhammad himself did not believe, and thought the matter to be an illusion, a devil’s temptation or possession. As the visions persisted, he became convinced that God was truly calling him to rise and teach the new faith.

The first convert was Muhammad’s wife, whose faithfulness to her husband made her a Muslim before Muhammad’s conviction of his own prophethood. Other relatives and friends followed and a nucleus community was formed. The Arabs, whose traditional faith denied the unity and transcendence of God as well as the Day of Judgment and who based life on some chivalry values, hedonism and materialism

were not responsive. At first, they subjected the new teaching to scorn; but when Muhammad and his companions stood firm, they countered with subversion, public vituperation and persecution. The fledging community bore its travail with patience and determination and continued to grow. Soon, the Arab hierarchy in Makkah decided that there was no escape from total war against the new Muslims if their and Makkah's position in the religious, social, political and economic spheres were to be saved. They offered Muhammad wealth, kingship of Makkah and cure of his "madness" by the greatest physicians of the world. But he refused. Then they sought to break up the tribal solidarity of Muhammad's clan of Hāshim on which the Muslims depended for inter-tribal security, by appealing to the Prophet's uncle and personal protector, the non-Muslim Abū Ṭālib, Hāshim's elder statesman, to relinquish his tribal solidarity with Muhammad. The old uncle pleaded with his nephew to cease to raise trouble which the clan could no longer bear. But the Prophet answered: "If the sun was put in my right hand and the moon in the left in exchange for God's religion, I would never yield – not even if I were to perish in preaching it!" When that too failed, the Makkans put in operation a plot to assassinate Muhammad.

Sensing danger, Muhammad had contracted with Muslim converts from Madinah to furnish protection in case of need. When danger came close, he outwitted his enemies and slipped out of Makkah to join the Muslim followers of Madinah, now reinforced with the Muslims of Makkah who had emigrated to Madinah, one after the other, at the advice of the Prophet. In Madinah, the danger did not disappear, but took a more ominous turn. Now it became a real war between Makkah and Madinah and all the tribes of the countryside which the two powers could rally to their sides.

Upon arrival in Madinah, Muhammad integrated the Muslims of all tribes into one solid body, and integrated this body with the Jews of Madinah into an Islamic polity. He gave it its constitution and assumed its leadership. The revelations continued to come providing guidance in the social, political, economic and judicial affairs with which Muhammad had to deal. The war with Makkah began with skirmishes, which were followed by two main rounds of battle, one of which was

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gained by each party, but neither of which was conclusive enough to enable the victor to put a final end to the hostility. A truce followed, before and during which Islam won the adherence of thousands. When allies of Makkah violated the truce, the Muslims mobilized and marched on Makkah, conquering it without a fight. In a magnanimous gesture, Muhammad forgave the Makkans; and they converted to Islam *en masse*. The Prophet entered the Ka'bah, the House which Abraham and his son Ismail built for worship of the One God and which had by then become filled with idols. He destroyed the idols and images, cleansed and reconsecrated the House to God.

One campaign after another was now launched to bring Islam to the remaining tribes of Arabia. Some felt now free from the might of pagan Makkah, and free to give conscientious consideration to the call of Islam. These joined the ranks of Islam voluntarily. Others felt strong enough to continue the fight without Makkah, and had to be brought into line by force. Converts to Islam, however, did not come only from pagan Arabian religion. Arab Christians and Jews converted in significant numbers. Those who rejected Islam and stood firm by their old faith, whether Judaism or Christianity, were not molested. On the contrary, under divine sanction revealed in the Qur'an, the Prophet had recognized Christianity, Judaism and the religion of the Sabaeans as revealed and valid, fraternized with their followers, and integrated them within the Islamic state even while they preserved their religion, their culture, their customs and their non-Muslim identities. The Islamic State was their protector. They lived under its aegis as religiously, culturally and legally autonomous units, complete communities with their own schools, temples, law courts and leaderships. The whole of Arabia, however, stood at the death of the Prophet in 632 CE – ten years after the hijrah (emigration) of the Prophet to Madinah – united and poised to carry the message of Islam to the world. Muhammad had previously sent messengers to the leaders of the then-known world inviting them to join Islam; or, if they wished, to keep their religion but join the new world-order of Islam which was built on the principle of free movement of man, ideas and wealth anywhere. Some answered with friendship and sympathy; others, by beheading the messengers.

The next one hundred years saw the most spectacular conquests history has ever witnessed. The Muslims stood in France and Spain after a sweep across North Africa; in Central Asia and the Indus River basin in the East, after a lightning sweep across the Persian Empire. The two greatest empires of the time, Persia and Byzantium had crumbled and failed. More spectacular yet was the tremendous appeal of the new world view of Islam to Christians torn apart for centuries by Byzantine theological controversies, and Persians broken with suffering under the yoke of caste and a very unjust socio-religious system. Within a generation men and women converted to Islam by the millions.

The great appeal of Islam consisted in the reasonableness of its theological claim. The world was created by God, the One and only Transcendent Being, Who implanted therein His pattern, thus making it an orderly cosmos. He also created man rational, free and responsible, that by exercising his faculties, he may achieve the good in this world, in all the world, and for all men in equality and brotherhood. That all men are equal means that there shall be no heretication, no coercion in religion, as well as no imperialist colonization of one people by another. God does not want man to mortify himself, nor to lead the ascetic or monastic life. Rather he should lead an abundant life, full of joy and happiness, but realizing the moral laws of purity, faithfulness to God, equity and fairness, love and brotherhood. Man is destined to serve God in His earth, to build it up and fructify it; for it is good and capable of actualizing man's idealistic vision. To do so and persevere is to guarantee success and happiness in this world as well as on the Day of Judgment. There is neither vicarious sin, nor vicarious guilt, nor vicarious suffering, nor vicarious punishment, nor vicarious merit and salvation. Blest or unblest, every soul gets exactly what it has deserved, according to its personal deeds.

Moreover, what left the worldwide audience of the Islamic call utterly armless and won their hearts to Islam without resistance was the fact that the Muslims really practiced what they taught. There was no splitting of personality, no double conscience, no hypocrisy, no racialist inequality however camouflaged. The Muslim readily intermarried with the citizens of other lands even before their conversion to Islam, a measure which raised the vanquished to the status of in-laws of the

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conqueror. Muslim rationalism and pragmatism knew few bounds, as Muslims pursued knowledge and wisdom at the feet of non-Muslim masters without shame or self-conceit. They paid double attention to prove their faith true, that is, that Islam indeed gives its adherents two happinesses, here and in the hereafter. (Qur'an 2:201)

This avid pursuit of the two happinesses resulted in worldly wisdom and success for the Muslims as well as moral felicity. It caused Muslim science, engineering, arts and letters to prosper and flourish; their empire to succeed; and their moral record to remain, on the whole impeccable. This instilled in the hearts of non-Muslims a deep sense of respect and admiration for Islam's followers, and a yearning to emulate or join them. When a decision to join was voiced by any non-Muslim, of however lowly an origin or status, to enter Islam, he was instantly raised to the highest level, declared a brother to all the believers, intermarried with them, and received with open arms in genuine brotherhood. For these reasons, the state income from the *jizyah*, the poll tax all able, lay, adult, male non-Muslims paid to the Islamic state in lieu of the zakah tax and military service imposed on all Muslims, dwindled in the first fifty years after the conquests from numerous millions of dinars to a trifle – because of these massive conversions to Islam!

The spring and summer of the Islamic Empire lasted five hundred years, during which the Muslims led the world in everything – astronomy to spices. They discovered new lands and established new disciplines. In the meantime, their energies were spent, and they began to decline on many fronts. Internal division weakened them before their foes; individualism, and preoccupation with personal salvation weakened the internal cohesion of state and society. Finally, misunderstanding of spiritual welfare as the gnosis of the mystics dulled the Muslim's rational powers, removed him from empirical and pragmatic enquiry, and delivered him to the esoteric whimsy of the *shaykh*, *pir* or mystic elder.

At the same time, the greatest holocaust of history was unleashed by the Mongols of Central Asia against the world. Unfortunately, the Islamic Empire was the first obstacle standing in the way of the rampaging hordes. They fell on it with fire and fury, razing city after city

and ravaging province after province. At the same time, European crusaders fell on the Empire from the West. While the Empire managed finally to repulse the crusaders, islamize the Mongols and acculturate all invaders who chose not to return whence they came, the majority of Muslims became conservative out of fear for the extinction of their faith, and withdrawn from history out of preoccupation with “eternity.” As the reconquest of Spain by Europe became imminent from the beginning of the fourteenth century, islamized elements of the eastern invaders, still stirring with energy and power, took to the field to rebuild the stricken empire. Within a generation, the empire was on its feet, marching again in the direction of Europe as Europe was marching through Spain. The Muslims conquered Asia Minor and Constantinople fell in 1458 CE Europe stopped in Spain; but the Muslims pushed forward until, a century later, they laid siege to Vienna, having appropriated all the territories in between as well as the whole of the Caucasus, southern Russia and Poland.

The mystic disease was kept at bay during two or three centuries, but it was not uprooted. The new empire fell easy prey to it, and the same drama of internal and external weakness was repeated. Europe not only recovered, but grew strong enough to repulse the Muslims from its territories (except for the Muslim communities of Albania, Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries). Europe’s forces occupied the whole Muslim World except Central Arabia and Yemen, and divided it among themselves. The Muslim World groaned under colonial rule for a century at places, and for three centuries at others.

The wind of reform and reconstruction stirred within the heart of Arabia, as it did in earlier centuries. Out of the desert came calls to repudiate mysticism and return to the life-and-civilization-giving views of pristine Islam. The Muslim World responded with a whole series of movements designed to cleanse and raise Islamic society. These movements soon became political, as colonialist Europe mobilized to stop them. Quickly, the battle lines were drawn: On one side stood Europe, fighting to spread the religion of Christ with the imperial sword, and to protect its exploitation of Muslim lands and labor as well as the colonialist settlers which had been planted among the Muslims. On the other side stood the Muslim World, defending the traditional

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native faith of the fathers against foreign aggression, protecting the land and people against alien invasion, occupation and colonial settlement.

Today the competition has barely shifted from military confrontation to economic, neo-colonial, and other more subtle means of subversion and exploitation. The Muslim World is modernizing and industrializing at a furious pace, leaping over centuries. The Western Christian World is overdeveloped and needs both the material and human resources of the other. What was a handful of Muslims in the Christian West fifty years ago, is now a considerable stream of immigrants taking up positions in factories as well as in universities. Today there is an Islamic presence in Europe and America that has become native and is certain to grow.

The next door neighbor in any metropolitan center in Europe and North America might well be a Muslim. He may be caucasian or colored; he may speak any one of a dozen Islamic languages besides English. And he may be so Westernized and acculturated that one may not easily become aware of his presence without communicating with him.