

The Muslims in the West

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Dr. Israr Ahmad may recall that, when I spoke to the Islamic Medical Association of North America some eighteen months ago, I said that it made little difference whether I entitled my talk "Islam in the Modern World" or, alternatively, "Muslims in the West." I explained the reasons for this statement, and I hope Dr. Israr will not mind if I start by repeating what I said at that time.

It seems to me that, today, with the exception of simple peasants and the few Bedus who still roam freely in the desert, all Muslims live "in the West." They live in the modern world, and that means a world built by the West from bricks fired in the factories of Western culture. Our wishful thinkers of whom we have, I believe, all too many, do not like to admit this. They try to make a sharp distinction between modernization and westernization, and this leads them to the claim — which seems to me absurd — that if the Muslims had not fallen asleep and "fallen behind" over many centuries, they would have constructed a world almost identical to the one that now surrounds us; the same worldly dynamism, the same science, the same technology. They are dreaming. Lions do not give birth to wolf cubs, and you are unlikely to pick mangos from a cherry tree.

Certainly, change is inherent in history, and, had Islam remained to this day the dominant world force that it once was, the life of the Muslim in the 15th century *Hijrah* would have been very different to the life he lived in the 5th century, let alone in the 1st. But he would still have lived within a setting, a framework, molded by the spirit of Islam and by the practical requirements of the religion. Change would have taken place within the bounds set by the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. The Muslim would still have felt

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at home in his world.

He is not and cannot be at home in the world as it is today. In the first place, the ground rules have been laid down in terms of beliefs and ideologies entirely alien to Islam. Take as only one example the Charter of the United Nations and the structure of International Law (in so far as such Law may be said to exist). The main provisions of that Charter may be acceptable to us in a general way, but this is coincidental. Not one paragraph, not even one sentence in any paragraph of the Charter is of Islamic origin or could be said to have been inspired by the Islamic ethos. The same, of course, is true of the conditions governing international trade and banking; it is true also of the educational system, especially at university level as it exists in almost every Muslim country. We have had no say in the making of the contemporary world — modern "civilization" — and we are obliged to fit into it as best we can, often as "square pegs in round holes"; an uncomfortable position, and one that might be said to emasculate us, robbing us of that self-confidence which I suggested, in my first talk, is of such profound importance.

The majority of Muslim nations — or shall we say of nations inhabited by the Muslims? — have, it seems, one principal ambition, and that is to become "modern." The Third World nations in general are usually referred to as the "developing countries," which simply means that they are assumed to be on the road to complete modernization in imitation of the Western model. Now whether this process is inevitable or not — whether it is possible or not — and making all allowances for what is commonly referred to as "defensive modernization," the fact remains that this is merely a euphemism for adopting the science, the technology, the weaponry, the political systems and, finally, the way of life practiced in Europe and the United States.

If this process is really inevitable, then we do well to remember a saying of Sayyidena Ali (RAA) which, if I remember correctly, suggests that a poison which you drink is the more dangerous if you take it without knowing that it

is a poison; so let us take it, if we must, in small sips and in full knowledge of what it is we are doing. There is a fact of life which is often ignored, but should never be ignored. Effects bring their causes trailing behind them. If you accept the effect blindly, then you also accept what gave rise to it. We cannot enjoy all the benefits of, say, modern technology without, to some extent, taking on board and principles, the suppositions and ideology which produced this technology. I must however add, if I am to avoid being misunderstood, that I am not suggesting that Muslims should entirely reject this technology. That would be totally impractical, and would leave us hopelessly weak and at the mercy of our enemies. What I am suggesting is that we must open our eyes and be fully aware of what we are doing and of what the implications are.

I was deeply impressed by something which Dr. Israr Ahmad wrote in his booklet entitled *Islamic Renaissance: The Real Task Ahead*. I want to quote that paragraph because I think it should be impressed on the minds of all young Muslims and of all who are active in public affairs. "The domince of Western culture and philosophical thought," he wrote, "is so pervasive and universal that even the point of view of such people as are struggling against it in some countries turns out, on closer examination, to be itself greatly influenced by the West. Indeed, they are themselves to a great extent Western in their approach and method, and even in their purported ideology. They too think in terms of Western philosophy and ideology, with the result that they lose their impact and their efficacy in opposing it."

Dr. Israr has said what I have been trying to say for many years and I must tell you that reading that paragraph gave me tremendous encouragement. I only wish this was a point of view more widely shared and more widely understood by people of influence within the *Ummah* and, in particular, by the young enthusiasts who believe that they are fighting for Islamic truth but who have, in fact, been dazzled by Western political theories. I might

add that it is probably easier for someone born into Western culture than for the oriental Muslim to see how true this is. Again and again in the writings or speeches of certain Muslim reformers and activists, we who were born into the Western culture are in a position to say: "Ah yes, I recognize those ideas, those principles. I know where they came from! This is all too familiar." The fact that these ideas are given an Islamic veneer does not deceive us.

If we are undeceived, then so — I hope — are the intelligent young people, the elite, born to Muslim immigrants in the West. As I hope to make clear later in this talk, it seems to me that the convert such as myself and the young born-Muslim in Europe or America have so much in common that it is unnecessary to distinguish between us. I sometimes say that I have two separate compartments in my mind and that I can switch between them, perhaps as one changes gear in a motor car. Given my upbringing and early conditioning, I have a Western mind or, to use an Americanism, "mindset." That is natural, and I am skeptical of those converts who claim to have eliminated that Western mindset totally from their personalities. Equally, after just over 40 years in Islam, I think I can claim to have a Muslim mind. I can therefore see any event or situation from two different perspectives, the Western and Islamic. These events and situations look very different according to which perspective I adopt. The same is true for these young Muslims of whom I spoke, although I must again emphasize that I am speaking of the most intelligent and the best educated among them, the elite who think deeply about their dual identity.

This, I hope, makes of us a bridge between two mutually incompatible structures of belief and ways of life. That, I think, can be a useful function. It is also a privilege. After I had talked to the Muslim doctors from North America, several of them came to me saying how disturbing and even how painful they found their position, situated between two different worlds, participating in two different cultures, the Islamic and the Western. I could only say to them that I, personally, rejoiced in this duality

because I found in it a certain richness. It appears to me that the more one can understand and the wider the area one surveys, the better placed one is to see both sides of any question objectively and to appreciate the variety to which a single human nature gives rise. But to rejoice in this situation does not permit any mental or moral laziness or self-indulgence; it requires mental and imaginative effort and it requires sound standards of discrimination.

We are, in any case, in the forefront of the confrontation to which I have referred more than once. As such, we have an obligation, not only to inform Western people about Islam, but also to attempt to interpret the West to our fellow Muslims who have less immediate contact with the centers of Western culture. I mean to speak later of the ignorance of Islam and the misunderstandings current in Europe and the United States, but I must add that the majority of my fellow Muslims have very little understanding of modern culture, which is why I took this as the theme of my first talk.

Let me now turn more specifically to the question of Muslims living in the West. It might be said that we have, in Britain and the United States, a microcosm of the *Ummah* as a whole. This is less true of continental European countries. In France the vast majority of Muslims come from Algeria, in Germany the vast majority from Turkey and, in Holland most are from Indonesia. But in Britain, as in the U.S., we do indeed have something of a cross-section of the Muslim peoples. What happens to this "microcosm" may offer some hints as to what is likely to happen to the *Ummah* as such if the process of "modernization" continues. So let me speak first of the Muslims in Britain. For convenience I propose to divide them into a number of different groups:

1. The older generation of poor and relatively uneducated immigrants.
2. The more educated, wealthier middle-class immigrants (a minority, but an important minority), who are frequently modernists in the full sense of the term.

3. The intelligent and more privileged young people of whom I spoke, who are trying to rediscover Islam for themselves.
4. The young Muslims, usually of a humbler background, who are commonly described as "fundamentalists" and who tend to be angry and frustrated, even disturbed.
5. The young who have, in effect, left the Faith of their parents and been absorbed into the host community.

Let me start with the first two groups. The uneducated immigrants, often doing humble jobs, are, I believe, in a painful situation. They really knew nothing before departing from their homes about the country to which they were going and were totally unprepared for such an alien and, in many ways, hostile environment. In many cases they speak very little English and the women have no English at all. This in itself is a terrible handicap and a source of weakness. It is always frightening to live in a country where one does not understand the language or speak it adequately. For the most part, they try to live a Muslim life as they lived it in their village in Pakistan or Bangladesh. To take only one example, the position of the women, sometimes driven to suicide by the loneliness and isolation of their situation: in their country of origin they would have belonged to a large extended family, with a wide circle of female relations amongst whom they could move freely. In London or elsewhere in British cities, they are likely to be shut up in a small apartment, day in and day out, deprived of normal human contacts, and tormented by the realization that their children have moved away from them into a different world. Imagine just for a moment the situation of a mother who speaks no English when she listens to her own children talking and joking together in this foreign tongue.

What then of the second group, the more fortunate among the immigrants? I asked a Pakistani friend recently whether I was right in suspecting that class differences in Pakistan are greater than in most countries. After some thought he agreed with me. I asked this question

because I had just been to a party given by a very wealthy family from Pakistan. I looked around at these successful men in their smart business suits and at these grand, bejeweled ladies in their beautiful dresses, all of them speaking perfect English, and they seemed to have nothing in common with the poor, working-class Pakistanis. I had the impression that they had very little interest and very little understanding of their poorer compatriots. One day a young man who had come to Britain to do a post-graduate course visited me at the Islamic Culture Centre, and we talked. He said to me, regarding the immigrants: "Where do these people come from? I never met such people at home!" I resisted the temptation to say to him: "Of course you have met them! You met them as your servants at home."

I hope that I have not offended anyone in making this point. I have made it, although I hesitated to do so, because it is relevant to our subject. It seems to me that, under ideal circumstances, the poor and uneducated immigrants would be in the care of their more fortunate brothers and sisters, who might offer them the leadership that is so desperately needed. As it is, the community in Britain has no real and effective leadership, although there are hundreds of self-appointed "leaders" who compete with each other and denounce each other. I might add that the situation in the United States is very much better on account of the large number of professional people among the first-generation Muslims.

The bulk of the community is divided by many different factors. The Pakistanis, of course, are divided politically between what might loosely be called the pro-Zia and pro-Bhutto factions. But this is less important than the differences in cultural habits. Among the Pakistanis, for example, the man who comes from a village in the North of this country and another man who comes from the South or even from a village a few hundred miles distant have different customs which they believe to be a part of the orthodox practice of Islam. What they know of their Faith is derived, in all probability,

from an ignorant village Imam. On this basis they readily condemn each other as *kafirs*. It is common, for example, for the followers of one *madhhab* to refuse to pray behind the follower of another.

One result of these divisions is that there is hardly a mosque in Britain that has not had to summon the police to deal with conflicts and quarrels, even with violence. I would hope that you find this as disgraceful and as shocking as I do, for it shames us all as Muslims, and it is little wonder if the authorities in Britain regard the Muslims as inveterate trouble-makers. The police certainly do not enjoy being dragged into quarrels which they do not remotely understand by people who seem to them like madmen.

I am speaking, however, of a generation which, in the nature of things, will soon die out. It is the young who matter; the second and the third generations. I have been told (I do not know whether this is true or not) that, in the United States, some forty percent of the young are leaving Islam altogether. That is disturbing, and one hopes that some will come back when they grow older, but there seems little that can be done at present about this situation. Let me speak first, then, of the third and the fourth groups I mentioned earlier. Those I described as "fundamentalists" find themselves, like their parents, in an alien environment which seems to them inherently hostile. They react with bitter anger, but they do not really know against whom to direct this fury.

I remember an occasion some time ago when there was violence in the London Central Mosque, due partly to the fact that the Chief Imam had accepted Salman Rushdie's supposed conversion (or "re-conversion"!) and partly on account of the Gulf War. There was a great deal of noise, shouting of slogans and threats. I walked around among these people, trying to understand their anger. I realized after a while that this was completely unfocused anger. They themselves did not really know what it was that made them so furious; all they knew was that they were possessed by very powerful emotions.

On this occasion or on a similar occasion, an incident occurred which seems to me significant. It was Friday, and the noise had started the moment the Jum'ah Prayer ended. An elderly man who wished to perform his *Sunnah* prayers came up to one of these young men and said very politely: "Please! Could you not keep quiet for just a little while and allow us to pray?" The young man turned on him and said: "Go and pray somewhere else if you want to!" What sort of Islam is this? It happened, after all, in the prayer hall of a mosque on a Friday. What does one make of it? I hope to return to this question, in the context of "political Islam," in my final talk. For the moment, I leave the question with you.

Now we come to what I have described as the "intelligent young," and this is where I place my hopes. I have seldom been more impressed than I have been by some of these young people, both the boys and the girls; but they too have their problems. I have lost count of the young people who have come to me saying something like this: "I want to be a real Muslim. That is my heritage, isn't it? But my parents' Islam makes no sense to me. It seems to be just a matter of custom, and they can't answer the questions I ask. All they can tell me is what I must not do. Surely there must be more to Islam than that!"

I try to tell them that there is indeed more to Islam than that, a great deal more: a storehouse of traditional wisdom, of mysticism and philosophy and the rich speculations of some of the greatest intellects the world has known. I try to encourage them to read and to study; in other words to rediscover Islam for themselves. That is what many of them are doing, and when I meet those who have been successful in this and are truly young people of faith, of *Iman*, with a good understanding of Islam, then I am indeed filled with hope for the future of Islam, at least in Britain and in the United States, where I have met boys and girls of the same calibre.

I noticed, when reading the booklets published by Dr. Israr, that he mentions the possibility that Allah may "bestow the favour of upholding the banner of His religion on an

entirely new people." When I read that I found myself wondering whether these good young Muslims growing up in the West and understanding both cultures might, conceivably, form the nucleus of such a people, *Insha Allah*.

But let me return briefly to the problem of the parents, the first generation. I mentioned earlier that some forty percent of the young are said to be leaving the Faith in the U.S. I am told that a considerable number in Britain are leaving, as they are in France, where the remark, "Islam? That's for the old people!" is heard only too often. The Muslim child going to school in the West is taught to ask questions, encouraged to be both sceptical and enquiring. These children or young people, when they go home, ask questions. If the parents are sensible, they will admit that they do not have simple or informed answers to these questions. They had always taken Islam for granted. Questions make them uncomfortable. If the children are less fortunate in their parents, the answer will be a slap across the face. There is then an inevitable alienation between parents and children.

It is therefore little wonder that many of the young are simply walking out of the door into the secular, profane world. At the same time, there is among most of these parents a failure to understand the temptations which their children face, temptations which they never encountered in their youth. The father of the family discovers that his teenage son has visited a "pub" with English friends. There is a tremendous scene, much anger and shouting. The son walks out of the house. Worse still, it is reported to the father that his daughter has been seen talking to an English boy with whom she had been at school. There is an even worse scene, and perhaps the girl walks out. Perhaps she becomes a prostitute or she comes into the hands of the police as a "delinquent teenager" or perhaps she marries her English boy and forgets all about the strange, narrow religion of her parents.

The attitude of such parents may be understandable. Most human behaviour is understandable if one has any powers of imagination. But I am not sure that it is

excusable. I remember an occasion some years ago when I gave a talk to a Students' Islamic Association at a University. They provided me with a bed for the night in the student house, and we talked until late in the night. In view of the problems they all seemed to have with their parents, I finally said to them (there were ten or twelve boys and girls present): "I would like you, each in turn, to answer me one questions. When your parents made this extraordinary decision to emigrate from their home to this strange country, how much thought did they give to the effect this would have on their children's religion?" One by one these young people said: "None! They gave no thought to the matter at all." I find that deeply depressing, and we are now seeing the results of this lamentable irresponsibility.

To whatever group Muslims in Britain may belong, we are all constantly irritated and often angered by the treatment of Islam in the media — press, radio and television. Sometimes these attacks are founded on some basic knowledge of our Faith; we may not like this, but I for my part would be even more worried if this did not happen. Faith is indeed the enemy of unbelief and Islam is inevitably opposed to a secular, irreligious way of life. One must expect the unbeliever to attack his enemy, particularly when that enemy is weak. If we always met with approval, this might indicate that we were being less than true to ourselves.

Most of the hostile comments are, however, based upon complete ignorance, and these comments are often profoundly insulting to the Muslims. This ignorance is almost total, but one has to remember that these people are almost equally ignorant about Christianity. Religious belief seems to them rather absurd. Some of us try to correct these errors by polite but, one hopes, informative intervention, but we do not have much success. There are also items relating to Islam which are characterised by appalling bad taste. I remember a case a few years ago when the British Queen had been on a visit to the Emirates. There was a cartoon drawing in the "Daily Express" which showed the Queen, surrounded on either side

by sinister, hook-nosed Arabs, and with a dish of food in front of her, rising from her chair several feet into the air with a look of horror on her face. One of the Arabs says to another: "But we thought she liked dogs!" In other words, since the Queen is well known to be fond of dogs, the implication was that the Arabs had tried to please her by cooking a dog for her enjoyment. I wrote to the Editor and, although he had the grace to reply, he did not understand what my objection was. "My colleagues and I thought the cartoon was very funny!," he said.

The caricatures of the Arabs in this cartoon reminded me of the cartoons of Jews in the German Nazi press before the war. It is no longer possible now in Western Europe for anyone to insult the Jews or to make such jokes at their expense. This readiness to mock and to denigrate has therefore been focused on the Arabs and, sometimes, the Pakistanis. The mockers can get away with that, whereas the Jews, though small in number, are powerful and will not allow them to get away even with the smallest insult.

This raises the question, much debated during the campaign against Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses," of the Blasphemy Law in England. The majority of British Muslims want to see this law extended to cover Islam. I am against this. The situation now is such that I do not believe that any charge brought for blasphemy against Christianity would succeed in the Courts. The whole notion of blasphemy has become meaningless in a secular society. It follows that, if the law encompassed Islam, a great many Muslims would rush to Court with their accusations, and all would fail. They would then, quite naturally, feel that they had been cheated, unaware that cases brought by Christians would have been equally unsuccessful.

Perhaps I should say something about the Rushdie affair which caused so much anger and pain among the Muslims. Speaking personally, I must say that I have been more angered by serious books, often written by distinguished academics, which attempt to undermine the very foundations of our Faith and to cast doubt upon everything in which we believe. But such books do not come to

the attention of the vast majority of Muslims. This book did. It is, indeed, an outrageous novel and a sick one, but the fact that a few pages concern a dream that one of the characters has concerning the Prophet (SAW) is only one aspect of this sickness.

You may not understand — there is no reason why you should understand — what form the modern novel takes in Europe and America. It is a literary form in which the writer pours out his own sickness, his neuroses, his anger, and his pain. I have sometimes likened this to vomiting in public. The idea of the novel as a story is no longer acceptable in intellectual circles; it is expected, instead, to delve into the darkest recesses of human corruption. As I mentioned in my last talk, art in the contemporary West aims not at beauty, but at ugliness, the implication being the human life, when seen truthfully, is ugly by nature. Perhaps it is, when completely lacking the religious dimension. I wonder sometimes if such novels are not a powerful indication of the human need for religious faith!

I will now turn to a question which is often asked. Now that they have Muslims in their midst, why is it that more British people do not accept Islam? Why are there so few "converts"? I could, of course, say rather unkindly that there is nothing surprising in this, considering the way many of our brothers behave. In the years since the Second World War Muslims have killed a great number of men, women, and children. Were these the enemies of Islam? By no means! The Muslims were too busy killing their fellow Muslims to pay attention to their real enemies. We can point out that, until recently, the Christians were no less dedicated to killing each other, but that is dismissed as ancient history. So far as Muslims in the West are concerned, the host communities see them constantly quarreling, backbiting, abusing each other. This can hardly be said to present Islam in a very attractive light, and references to the "brotherhood" of the Muslims can only provoke rude laughter. In addition to this, the media always report incidents which show us in the worst possible light. Recently a young woman alleged to have

committed adultery was murdered by her two brothers. This, of course, made headlines in the press, and it was presented as typical behavior on the part of these savage, "barbaric" Muslims.

We are not helped by the village Imams often imported by Pakistani or Bangladeshi communities in Britain. The "Islam" which they offer to anyone who shows interest is not — to say the least! — the Islamic Faith that I recognize or share. The Divine Mercy is conspicuous by its absence. Some while ago I gave a talk to the teachers in a large London school. When I had finished, the headmaster told me a story which in no way surprised me. "We have Muslim pupils here," he said, "and last year I decided we ought to learn something about the religion, so I invited the Imam of a local mosque to come and talk to us. When he had gone, we looked at each other in dismay, and one of my colleagues remarked: If that is Islam, then Christianity isn't so bad after all!" I knew exactly what he meant.

But there are other, more profound reasons for the distaste which Islam arouses. Perhaps I can best illustrate this by taking my own case as an example. Brought up as a complete agnostic, I became intensely interested in religion at an early age and this led, by the time I was in my early twenties, to a study of Hindu Vedanta, Chinese Taoism, and certain forms of Buddhism. As a result, I wrote a book which, through a chance contact with the poet T. S. Eliot, was published and met with some approval. Now the interesting thing is that, in writing this book, I never even considered Islam. My interest was in spirituality, and on the basis of the very little that I had heard of Islam, I assumed that this was a purely formal, legalistic, harsh and narrow-minded religion without any real spiritual quality. In making this assumption, I was thinking as a typical Westerner. I was not attracted by Christianity perhaps because of its Semitic origin. Islam seemed to represent all the most unattractive aspects that I found in Christianity, the "Old Testament" element in particular. The broad pastures of Hindu Vedanta

had far more appeal. In my own case, circumstances obliged me to change my mind when I discovered Sufism and understood how inadequate was my view of Islam.

At this point some explanation is required. So far as "intellectuals" are concerned, particularly in France, but also to some extent in Britain and Germany, Sufism is the gate through which they have entered Islam. This surprises many born-Muslims, it shocks others, and some it amuses. For the born Muslim, assuming that he does not dismiss and condemn it altogether, Sufism is, so to speak, the crown of piety. It is *Ihsan* which is inconceivable unless preceded by the perfecting of one's *Islam* and of one's *Iman*. What do these young people think they are doing, embarking on a Sufi path before they have learned to walk on the highroad of the *Shari'ah* and while they are still ignorant and immature?

There are, I think, two main reasons for this. In the first place, the Western agnostic or atheist, when he begins to doubt his own doubts and to feel the need for a religious explanation of his own existence, is less concerned with outward observance and a set of rules for his daily conduct, than with finding a spiritual path, a path towards illumination and towards personal awareness of the Divine presence here and now. What impresses him about the "mystics" is that they speak from personal experience. They do not say: "Believe this because I tell you to do so"; a command which carries no weight with the Western intellectual. They say: "We know this is true because the Truth has been shown to us in our own hearts in such a way that we cannot doubt it." That, rather than any orthodox preaching, is what persuades and convinces.

Secondly, the intellectual is by his very nature someone who asks questions and seeks answers that satisfy his needs. He finds answers to these questions in the writings of the great Sufi Masters, answers which satisfy him, banish his doubts, and justify faith. Whatever may be said about Ibn Arabi and however bitterly certain Muslims may condemn him, the fact remains that he provides reasonable answers to the very questions

that are commonly asked by modern man. It is almost as though he had been writing for us rather than for his contemporaries! If, in practice, he cures us of our doubts and brings us to Islam, then who dare condemn him? Those who are truly versed in his metaphysics may ask: "How much do these people understand of his writings?" Very little, perhaps; but enough. I must however tell you a little story which might amuse you. A dear friend of mine who is now dead, Titus Burckhart, lived in Fez in the early 1930s when he was a very young man. It was there that he accepted Islam. Having learned Arabic, he had a longing to read the *Futuhāt* and, to his great joy, he was able to purchase the first two volumes. He was returning home with these books under his arm, when he saw approaching him in the street an aged Sheikh whom he knew, so, in embarrassment, he tried to hide the books behind his back. The old Sheikh greeted him and then said: "Young man, show me what you have there in your hands!" Titus Burckhart — Sidi Ibrahim, as I always called him — showed what he had. The Sheikh smiled and told him: "When you can understand those books, you will no longer need them!"

But does this initial attraction to Sufism always lead to Islam, to true, total Islam? On the whole, I think the answer is in the affirmative. There are certainly false and aberrant *tariqas* in the West which allow their adherents to think of themselves as Sufis without demanding full adherence to Islam. But, in general, the man or woman who has entered through the gate of Sufism is compelled, as though by the force of gravity, to journey on into Islam as such, realizing that Sufism, unless well rooted in the Shar'iah, is without substance. What matters, surely, is where one finally arrives; not the route that is taken to arrive there.

Our position as Muslims in the West is not an easy one, but it is my belief that this position is easier in the United States and in Britain than it is in France or Germany. Particularly in France, the situation appears to be extremely dangerous. The British will on the whole tolerate strangers in their midst. They may

not like them and they certainly do not understand them, but they tolerate them. The French do not, unless these strangers integrate themselves completely into French society and French culture; in other words, unless they abandon Islam in everything but name.

Whatever our position and whatever our problems, it seems to me that the Muslims in the West deserve the sympathetic support of the *Ummah* as a whole. At the same time, we are in the forefront of the confrontation of which I have spoken, and, since we are obliged to find means of dealing with this, I hope that we may have something to teach those who live within the borders of the *Dar-ul-Islam*. We deserve your attentive concern.

But this concern must be accompanied by understanding. Some years ago the Chief Imam at the mosque where I work was summoned to a conference organized by *Rabita* in Belgium to discuss the problems of Muslims in Europe. I expressed my delight and said I hoped they were now going to give full attention to these grave and complex problems. "Oh no!" said my friend; "They are going to discuss the sighting of the moon for Ramadan." Now I do not imply that the sighting of the moon is an unimportant question, but its importance will be diminished if, eventually, there are no practicing Muslims left in Europe! There are — if I may indulge in typical British understatement — more urgent matters requiring attention.

But those who do feel concern for us must understand that they will only do harm if their motive is to force Western Muslims into any particular mold. I have already mentioned the village Imams imported from Pakistan and Bangladesh. I might mention also those of our Saudi brothers who would like us all to adopt a *Wahabi* — or should I say *Muwahid*? — understanding of Islam. No one, I believe, should involve himself in this matter unless he is able to adopt a very broad and tolerant view of the Faith and unless he is prepared to make allowances for the difficulty in following the *Shari'ah* fully in such an alien environment. What we most need is unity between the different

communities of Muslim immigrants and also their offspring. We do not need the creation of further divisions and further conflict.

The essential, so far as Muslims in the West are concerned, is an agreement to differ. It is pointless to expect the majority of Muslims in Europe and America to practice Islam exactly as they did or should have done in their country of origin, and to insist that they do so is a sure way to drive the young out into the wilderness.

So far as the future is concerned, I would not dare make any predictions. If history ran in a straight line, then one might at least attempt to guess. But it does not run in a straight line. The only certainty we have is that the unexpected will always happen, and the unexpected is, by definition, unforeseeable. Change comes from the direction in which we were not looking. Allah (SWT) constantly takes us by surprise. The disasters we most fear do not occur. Those which do occur are the ones to which we had given no thought.

What matters most as we move into that uncertain future is the faith, the *Iman*, with which we face it and with which we accept it. *Tawakkul* is not only a religious duty; it is a practical necessity. Do not ask me for solutions to the problems I have outlined. I have no solutions. For my part, I can only do what little I am able to do and put my trust in Allah (SWT), who will not leave His people without help provided they make some humble effort to deserve this help. *Insha Allah!*