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Spiritual Revolution: The Challenge for the 21st Century

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Who is the 'Other' today?

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Spiritual Revolution: The Challenge for the 21st Century

Allah is the Light of the Heavens and of the Earth. The similitude of His Light is as it were a Niche wherein is a Lamp: the Lamp within a Glass: the Glass as it were a pearly Star. From a Tree right blessed is it lit, an Olive-tree neither of the East nor of the West, the Oil whereof were well-nigh luminous though Fire touched it not: Light upon Light! (Qur'an, 24:35)

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING THAT GOD ALMIGHTY HAS CREATED three kinds of beings: angels with reason but without passion; animals with passion but without reason; and men with reason and with passion. If passion prevails over reason, then animals are better than men, but if reason prevails over passion, then men are better than angels.

Nearly two centuries ago the German philosopher Immanuel Kant predicted that eventually the world order would come about either through intellectual or moral insights or through the experience of chaos. We are still in a position to make that choice.

WHY DO WE NEED A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION TODAY?

The word revolution designates "the action by a celestial body of going around in an orbit or elliptic course"; it is "a progressive motion of a body round an axis so that any line of the body parallel to the axis returns to its initial position while remaining parallel to the axis in transit and usually at a constant distance from it" (Webster's Dictionary).

Thus, "from antiquity through the early modern period, a 'revolution' invoked an idea of a periodically recurring cycle. In Copernicus's new astronomy of the mid-sixteenth century, for example, the planets completed their revolutions round the sun... thus invoking an idea of a revolution as a radical and irreversible reordering developed together with linear and unidirectional conceptions of time. In this newer conception, revolution was not a recurrence but its reverse, the

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bringing about of a new state of affairs that the world had never witnessed before and might never witness again".

Both of these two meanings of revolution can be applied to the idea of a spiritual revolution: first, of man's need to return to his origin, his initial position, and, second, of man's realisation that there is an alternative to his way of life. What are the divine revelations of the Tawrat (the Torah), the Injil (the Gospel), the Zabur (the Psalms), and the Qur'an but a progressive motion of a transcendental word round the axis of the Divine so that any meaning of the transcendental word parallel to the Divine, returns to its origin and its initial position. Hence, we need spiritual revolution to return to the initial position round the axis of Divine Spirit out of which we all have been made.

[For,] lo, thy Sustainer said unto the angels: -Behold, I am about to create a human being out of clay; and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of my spirit, fall down before him in

prostration! (Qur'an, 38:71-72).

While asking man to change his way of life from *Jahiliyyah* (of Ignorance or Negligence), the Qur'an is offering him the alternative of Islam which is nothing more than the return or submission to the orbit of the Divine Spirit, which man had ignored or neglected and thus had put himself in danger of falling out of a natural law, known as the *Sunnat Allah*. This natural law (as the *Sunnat Allah*) demands respect for freedom of religion as a fundamental principle, followed by respect of human life, human equality, human dignity, human community, human justice and human decency.

In fact, Islam means "revolution" in the sense of Muslim who is the *munib* (the returner), the one who comes back to the basics of human relationship with God and his fellow human being after it was broken due to man's ignorance or negligence. As a paradigm for a multiple spirituality, prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) is described as "*a compassionate, attentive and revolutionary (munib) in the sense of returning to the initial position of humanity toward God*" [Qur'an, 11:75]. But for him to have been elevated to that God given honor, Ibrahim, had to go through different temptations which had led him through a spiritual revolution, that brought about a radical and irreversible reordering of human faith in One God as an everlasting alternative to human way of life. He first saw a star as his Lord, but when it disappeared, he was attracted by the moon to be his guide, but when it set, he then saw the sun rising and said: "This is my Lord. This is the greatest of all". But when the sun disappeared as well, he said: "*O my people, I am free from your falsehood. I am returning my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth and never shall I be attached to falsehood*" (Qur'an, 6:76-79).

Still, Ibrahim, was revolutionary by asking provocative questions: "*My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead*" said Ibrahim. "*Don't you believe?*" God said: "*Yes! But to satisfy my own heart or my own understanding*"... (Qur'an, 2:260)

The case of Ibrahim as an inspiration for the need for spiritual revolution has its most appealing sign in the fact of

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him being put to the fire: "*Burn him and protect your gods, if you are to do anything at all!*" But God said, "*O Fire be cool and peace for Ibrahim!*" (Qur'an, 21:68-69).

I don't know whether Terry Jones had a slightest idea about the attempt of the burning of Abraham's body which obviously failed, but his attempt to burn the copies of the Qur'an sounds like that of Abraham, which obviously failed because it would be self-burning or spiritual suicide. So, in the attempt of the burning of the Qur'an I see, indeed, the great sign for the need of the spiritual revolution of the Abrahamic paradigm because it is revolutionising our approach to the basics of our human relationship towards God and towards our common human heritage.

Perhaps, it would be too simplistic to relate recent floods in the world to the biblical and Qur'anic stories of Noah's flood, but it would be, on the other hand, too arrogant not to see in them the sign of warning that we should start building Noah's Ark.

The problem of climate change is not anymore limited to the confines of the knowledge of an expert team. It is a reality of everyone's life and a fear of human collective mind. The nuclear threat is not a political game of the cold war anymore. It is life threatening for the whole of humanity. The poverty that is spreading around the world is not anymore far away

from us. It is a reality in our neighborhood.

There are so many things that make me proud of my faith, but when I see the state of the Muslim Society I do not find a big difference from the rest of the world. I see in my fellow Muslims the same paradox as elsewhere: the higher degrees in education, the less degree of ethics; the more knowledge, the less wisdom; the more experts, the less solutions; the more wealth, the less moral values; the more houses, the less families; the faster communication, the less decent human relation; the more books about pollution, the less care about natural environment; the more conferences about peace, the more wars around the world; the more call for reason, the less rational behavior.

The way out of this paradox of our global civilisation is the spiritual revolution that is different from the scientific, intellectual, political or industrial revolutions. It is the revolution of spirit that should embrace all of the positive results of the previous revolutions in the sense of the return to the God's light (nur) — a source of His light with which He enlightens human hearts and minds, which is light upon light, which expels darkness one over the other, which chases away darkness from human mind, which removes hatred from human heart, and which cleanses the human soul from Satan's evil.

We should listen to what the Prophet had to say: "Verily, God created the creatures in darkness, and then He poured them some of His light." It is this light, i.e. God's light, that has enlightened the human spirit and mind to lead humanity from slavery to freedom; from might to right; from mythology to science; from hatred to love; from terror to security; from fear to hope; from war to peace; from corruption to ethics; from poverty to wellbeing; from falsehood to truth; from selfishness to compassion; from arrogance to humility; from harshness to gentleness; from greed to modesty; from discrimination to equality; from pornography to chastity; from pedophilia to morality; from drug-addiction to self-esteem; from godlessness to Godliness; from suicide to the purpose of

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life, and from *jahiliyya* (ignorance) to spiritual enlightenment.

Thus, we need God's light that will enlighten once again, the human spirit and mind to lead humanity in a spiritual revolution which is to be of greater significance than the revolutions that changed the world. Although it took a long time, human beings eventually understood that they are born free and that freedom is like a virus for which there is no cure. Over time human beings have learned that their rights to life, faith, freedom, property and dignity are fundamental God given human rights and thus no human may be authorised to deprive any human being from these gifts of God.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of state and society is not to reign supreme over people, or to disturb them and violate their human rights, but to set each man and woman free from the fear of a witch-hunt to which they are subjected simply because of their appearance and the way of dress, and to defend their rights so that they may build mosques, churches and synagogues in peace, in order to live and work in full security and without harm to themselves and their neighbors.

On paper we have it all - freedom, right and science, but deep in our soul we sense that we are losing these values as some people would like to take us back to the dark age of slavery, might and mythology or *jahiliyyah* — *Is it a judgment of the time of jahiliyya that they are seeking? Who is better than Allah to judge people who are certain in their right beliefs* (Qur'an, 5: 50).

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Of course, science cannot replace the need of the soul to hear beyond what the ear can hear and to see beyond what the eye can see, through enlightened intellect. But also, human intellect which produces knowledge cannot renounce scientific achievements that have made man's life on earth easier.

The call for a return to faith must not mean a return to the world of mythology in which the light of intellect and the power of reason are dimmed. A spiritual revolution does not imply erasing human sagacity and rationality. It presupposes precisely what the last Messenger of God, Muhammad did, when he showed the way out of the dark age of *jahiliyyah* towards spiritual, moral and scientific enlightenment.

At the start of the 7th century of Milad, Prophet Muhammad surely led the most significant spiritual revolution in the history of mankind. With Divine inspiration (*wahy*), he carried out the most convincing and most efficient reformation of religious thought by abolishing the institution of mediation between God and man; by freeing man from the inherited sin; by establishing the principle of non-violence in religion; by repealing racial discrimination; by freeing women from slavery and fear; by taking into consideration human reason as an important yardstick in faith; by elevating human knowledge to the level of faith and morality; and by establishing equilibrium in relations between the individual and society.

Prophet Muhammad established an Islamic worldview

which defines the individual as a self-confident and autonomous human being which should be respected with all his human rights. He defined the community as a *jam'at*, i.e. as an integral *umma*, which integrates that which protects the rights of the individual with that which makes community stronger, that is to say, people and nation. In the Noble Qur'an we read:

"Thus We have appointed you as an integrative middle nation, that you may be witnesses for mankind, and that the Messenger may be a witness for you."

The idea of being integrative and inclusive was not strange to the great Muslim jurist al-Shafi'i when he was brought to the Caliph Harun al-Rashid to speak about the Book of God, but he replied to the Caliph: "About which of the Books of God you want me to speak, O the Commander of Believers, for God has revealed many books?" (Qur'an, 2: 143).

Furthermore, the Qur'an asks us to be tolerant in communication with people of all faiths, nationalities and worldviews:

"When you want the others to understand your faith, invite them with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord is Best Aware of him who strays from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright." (Qur'an, 16:125)

Therefore, spiritual revolution demands a return to wisdom, tolerance and dialogue, notions that have become lost in the flood of arrogance, egoism, extremism, holocaust, genocide, terrorism and violence in the streets and in homes. We have reached a point when the very mention of the word "wisdom" usually makes one think of elderly people who are wise because they have grown old and can no longer be ruthless.

Yes, ruthlessness has become what "wisdom" used to be for those who think that "wisdom" of life is to be found in narcotics; the "wisdom" of modern age in alcohol; the "wisdom" of freedom of choice in the lack of shame; the "wisdom" of wit in theft, and the "wisdom" of courage in violence. Of course, when one subjects his worldview to acquiring knowledge and

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information without morality and ethics; without wisdom and meaning; without decency and honour, without tolerance and the culture of dialogue, then we face violence, intolerance and discrimination in society.

Beside knowledge and information which are more accessible today than at any other time in history, especially to our youth, we need to learn wisdom as an ability to distinguish useful from harmful knowledge and useful from harmful information. Human soul, being Divinely inspired, possesses this capacity for wisdom as a spiritual power which increases with piety and shields man from ruthlessness towards his and the life of people around him.

The pollution of the human soul with lies and immorality is no less harmful than the pollution of nature with poisonous gases and garbage. Moreover, it is not possible to cleanse nature as long as human soul remains polluted with wickedness and irresponsibility towards life on earth.

Man must learn tolerance and a culture of dialogue because there is no other way that can contribute to his success in this world and his salvation in the Hereafter. It is because of the lack of human compassion for all forms of life on earth and because of the absence of true tolerance and a culture of dialogue among people and nations that the 20th century

will be remembered as the century of dark ideas of racism, fascism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia - the ideas that have induced people to commit the most heinous crimes in history of mankind.

Death camps, Gulags and the atomic bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed millions of people, more than in any other century. However, the 20th century is not only notorious for the numbers of those killed, but also because of the conviction that out of those killings a new, better world would be born. In the 20th century industries of killing organised by states against its own citizens, were launched with the conviction that those who survived would live in a better world than was ever existed. In the 20th century man tried to replace the Divine Spirit with a satanic evil spirit, daring to utter the words: "God is dead", becoming conceited in thinking that he can live as if there were no God. But, today those of us who have survived the "dark moments" of the 20th century can bear witness that God is al-Hayy, the Ever-Living.

We the survivors bear witness that we are aware of the Divine Spirit in us which beckons us to a spiritual revolution that should change the way of life in this century. We hope that the first signs of spiritual revolution will appear in al-Quds, in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land of Ibrahim's sons, for whom we pray here and now so that God Almighty may soften their hearts in order that they may remember that holy peace – not holy war – is in their hearts. The same we wish for the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other nations that suffer conflict and violence.

In Bosnia we are truly proud of the centuries of coexistence and tolerance, because, in spite of the experience of genocide, we have not forgotten to read the verses of the Holy Qur'an: *"The good and the evil are not the same. Repel the evil with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! But no one is granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint — none but persons of the greatest good fortune"*.

Hence, we need a spiritual revolution in the 21st century so

that we may learn how to exercise patience and self-restraint and thus to become human beings of the greatest good fortune.

Indeed, we need a Muslim initiative in the 21st century with the same vigour as it was in the 8th century in Bagdad, the Muslim initiative for an intellectual revolution and as it was in the 12th century in Cordoba, the Muslim initiative for a scientific revolution that brought about an epochal and irreversible change because it was applied in a systematic way to events in science and only later to political events. "In just this sense, the first revolutions may have been scientific, and the "American," "French," and "Russian Revolutins" are its progeny".

In just this sense, the first revolution in the 21st century should be spiritual through a moral insight so that humanity may be spared from an immanent chaos of the 20th century.

In the words of Musa Eric Waldbaum: "This century presents accelerating challenges for becoming. In order for us to become full human beings, we face the need to study, reconcile, understand and embrace consciousness, spirituality, ethics, values, culture, the sciences, arts, law, politics, economies, knowledge, actions, technologies and innovation. Individually, each of these areas only touches on the richness of meaning. The task is to see beyond reductionism and to make emergent the very meaning of our lives. To act responsibly in a world where man cannot know everything-indeed where uncertainty may be at the very core-faith is essential. But that faith cannot be doctrinaire. Rather it must be all embracing, seeking knowledge even to China as the Prophet (*peace be upon him*) said."

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