ISLAM AND THE RACE QUESTION

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THE RACE QUESTION AND MODERN THOUGHT

Islam and the race question

by 'Abd-al-'Azīz 'Abd-al-Qādir Kāmil

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Preface

Following the series of publications *The Race Question in Modern Science,* which was designed to give a succinct account of current views of anthropologists, geneticists and sociologists, Unesco decided to issue a series, *The Race Question and Modern Thought,* dealing with the attitude of major religious and philosophical systems to the question.

The problems of racial prejudice and racial discrimination do not only call for scientific examination. It would be optimistic to think that racial conflicts can be resolved, and the tragedies they cause ended, simply by bringing the findings of modern scientists to the knowledge of the public. Concepts and behaviour are and can be affected and moulded by other considerations, moral and intellectual; which is why the attitude of religions and philosophies towards the diversity of human types and the inequalities in treatment of human beings which this has served to excuse, is of importance.

This booklet on *Islam and the Race Question* follows those which have outlined the views of the Catholic Church, the Ecumenical Movement, Judaism and Buddhism. It has been written by Dr. 'Abd-al'Azīz 'Abd-al-Qādir Kāmil, Professor in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Cairo and Minister of Waqfs (religious and charitable foundations) and Azhar Affairs (administration of Al-Azhar Theological University) in the Government of the United Arab Republic. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Unesco.

Contents

Introduction

Some years ago, I was travelling back from Mecca to Al-Madīnah, having made my pilgrimage, an obligation discharged each year by over a million Moslems. They converge from the ends of the earth, speak all tongues, are of all colours, perform the same rites, and wear clothes devoid of ornament, so that none can tell the rich from the poor as they answer God's call to visit His venerable house.

As the car approached Al-Madīnah, the minarets and green cupola of the Prophet's mosque came into view; we entered the city and proceeded towards the mosque to pray. As my eyes wandered over its embellishments, I was struck by the names of the Companions engraved on the walls of the rear courtyard: Abu 'Ubaidah; 'Āmir ibn el-Jarrāh; Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās; 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd; 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar . . . ; these being from Arab tribes. I read on: Bilāl ibn-Rabāḥ, an Ethiopian; Salmān, a Persian; Suhaib ibn Sinān, a Byzantine (or perhaps he had lived in Byzantium); and next to each of these names was the traditional Islamic invocation: May he be acceptable to God!

This human garland is culled from the great nations living around the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Prophecy, men who were attracted to Islam by its beliefs and laws. They fraternized despite differences in colour, and though centuries have elapsed, these names continue to be honoured by Moslems and by all who love mankind.

This brotherhood that continues down the ages, the living reality that we encounter at the season of the Pilgrimage, is frequently in evidence throughout the Islamic world. The visitor to Al-Azhar, in Cairo, sees students arriving from all over the earth. Each province and nationality has its own

college, where its students live and work, and throughout the ages these colleges have continued to symbolize the fellowship of human beings gathering together for the noblest aim of all, the pursuit of knowledge. What the visitor sees at Al-Azhar, the oldest of Islamic universities, he will also find in the other universities, from the farthest point west in the Maghreb to the Pacific, and in the beacons of knowledge that have arisen like minarets in the heart of Africa. The same was true, too, of the Islamic universities in Europe.

What we thus find in the world of learning, we also witness in daily life, the mosque and the university being regarded as models of what human life should be. It is an attitude that finds its aptest expression in the Prophet's words on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage: 'O men: You have one Lord, and one Father. You are all issued from Adam, and he from dust. The noblest among you in the sight of God is he who is the most God-fearing.'

Let us therefore attempt to set out the principles which, in Islam, affirm the dignity of man and universal human brotherhood, a brotherhood that transcends partisan feelings of race, colour and class.

1 Islam and learning

One of the great questions in the history of learning is learning's relationship with religion, a relationship which, in various countries and at various times has been negative and at times antagonistic. Because of this, attempts to deal with racial discrimination have tended to be different in approach according as learning or religion dominated, both in the arguments and in their subsequent practical applications. There is no doubt that, here, co-operation between religion and learning on a wide scale would be of the greatest value. Hence the importance of the attitude of Islam, as a religion, towards learning. We shall see how positive that attitude is.

The verse in the Koran that God first revealed to His Prophet is the one that says: 'Proclaim [or 'read', the Arabic word *iqra'* has both meanings] in the name of thy Lord Who created, Created man from a clot of blood. Convey! And thy Lord is Most Generous, Who taught [man] by the pen, Taught man what he knew not' [96: 1-5].[1]

Thus, he who reads must do so in the name of God the Creator, who brought man forth out of a clot of blood so small as to be scarely visible, and who then brought him up and raised him to heights of knowledge hitherto unknown. And this long road has been travelled by mankind as a whole, with no distinction between one person and another.

And so, learning is to be pursued in the name of God, and not in the name of passions, resentments, or partisan feelings based on colour or race. . . . For Islam, knowledge possesses

1. The references in brackets are to the Koran. The quotations are based on several of the standard English translations; no one version has been followed throughout.

a certain sanctity, and no man should use it for his own aggrandizement in pursuance of any purpose incompatible with justice, since justice is one of the attributes of God.

We have seen many examples—some recounted in Unesco publications—of how, at certain times and in certain countries, knowledge has been used to promote racialism,[1] whereas its real function should be to light the way for the elimination of the obstacles to human brotherhood.

Just as the God of Islam has honoured knowledge, so has He honoured its instruments. The first object that God swore by in the Koran, thereby honouring that object, was the pen, in the words: 'By the pen and [by] that which they write' [68: 1]; the second thing sworn by, as we see from the words '[by] that which they write' was writing itself. Chronologically, this oath occurs even earlier in the Koran than the oath by the great celestial bodies that illuminate the universe, like the sun, the moon and the stars, thus giving precedence to the light of knowledge over the light of the heavenly spheres.

The Koran mentions the term 'knowledge' and its derivatives about eight hundred and fifty times in connexion with God, His messengers and mankind. God instructs the Prophet to invoke Him, and says: 'Say, "O Lord, increase me in knowledge" ', and the Imam al-Qurtubī comments on this: 'Were there anything more exalted for God than knowledge, then had He commanded His Prophet to ask Him for it when He directed him to call upon Him.'[2]

For this reason, the Prophet puts the ink of learned men on the same plane as the blood of martyrs, and calls upon men to meditate upon the universe and to fathom its secrets: 'In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there are indeed Signs for men of understanding; . . . Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and [lying] on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain; [nay] Holy art Thou; save us, then, from the punishment of the Fire . . ." ' [3: 190-1].

1. See: Juan Comas, *Racial Myths*, 6th impr., Paris, Unesco, 1965, 49 p. (*The Race Question in Modern Science.*)
2. Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān* [A Compendium of Koranic Verdicts], 4: 41.

It is not enough to remain in meditation in the place where one lives; we are also called upon to be active, to pursue our studies in other lands, and to delve into the history of mankind: 'Say, travel in the earth, and see how He originated the creation. So will God produce a later creation. Surely, God has power over all things' [29: 20]. We are also told: 'Surely, there have been [many] dispensations before you; so travel through the earth and see how [evil] was the end of those who treated [the Prophets] as liars. This is a clear demonstration to men, and a guidance and an admonition to the God-fearing' [3: 137].

Indeed the entire universe—the heavens, the earth and all its natural and human phenomena—provides matter for thought and belief simultaneously. 'Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of night and day, and in the ships which sail in the sea with that which profits men, and in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and quickens therewith the earth after its death and scatters therein all kinds of beasts, and in the change of the winds, and the clouds pressed into service between the heaven and the earth—are indeed Signs for the people who understand' [2: 164].

'And He it is Who has made the stars for you that you may follow the right direction with their help amid the deep darkness of the land and the sea. We have explained the Signs in detail for a people who possess knowledge. And He it is Who produced you from a single person and there is [for you] a home and a lodging. We have explained the Signs in detail for a people who understand. And it is He Who sends down water from the cloud; and We bring forth therewith every kind of growth; then We bring forth therewith that green foliage wherefrom We produce clustered grain. And from the date-palm, out of its sheaths, [come forth] bunches hanging low. And [We produce therewith] gardens of grapes, and the olive and the pomegranate —similar and dissimilar. Look at the fruit thereof, when it bears fruit, and the ripening thereof. Surely, in this are Signs for a people who believe' [6: 97-9].

In the midst of this great multitude of natural and human phenomena, which he considers matter for thought and belief, and a proof of God's power, he goes on to say: 'And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the

diversity of your tongues and colours. In that surely are Signs for those who possess knowledge' [30: 22].

Both dogmatically and scientifically, Islam regards differences in colour—as it regards differences in language and all the other natural and human phenomena of this great universe—as simply a manifestation of the Divine Power: 'Holy is He Who created all things in pairs, of what the earth grows, and of themselves and of what they know not' [36: 36].

Islam and the scientific method

This attitude of Islam to learning and the objective study of natural phenomena, including differences of colour, has its parallel in the scientific foundation and development found in all Islamic thought worthy of the name.

It has been established that the method usually attributed to Francis Bacon (1561-1626) had already been applied several centuries earlier by Ibn al-Haitham and other Moslem scholars, whose rigorous and systematic approach to the collection and investigation of data proved their determination to ensure logical and empirically sound conclusions.

The seventh epistle of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (fourth century A.H./tenth century A.D.), gives precise rules for scientific investigation, consisting of nine criteria or questions:[1]

1. Is it? Does the object of the inquiry exist or not?
2. What is it [its real essence]?
3. How great is it [its dimensions]?
4. How is it [its characteristics]?
5. Of what kind is it?
6. Where is it?
7. When is it?
8. Why is it?
9. Who is it?

Islamic scholars held that ratiocination divorced from experimental investigation could not lead to the truth, and accordingly

1. 'Abd-al-Ḥalīm Muntaṣir, *Tarīkh al-'ilm wa daur al-'ulama' al-'arab fī taqaddumihi* [History of Knowledge and the Role of Arab Scholars in its Development], p. 94-5, Cairo, 1967.

combined the theoretical with the empirical. Hence their interest in inventing scientific instruments and experimentally verifying the results of earlier investigations. In this they were obeying God's word, when He calls for verification: 'Follow not that of which thou hast not knowledge. Verily the ear and the eye and the heart—all these shall be called to account' [17: 36].

Jābir ibn-Ḥayyān (A.H. 120-210) strongly advised his pupils to experiment, and not rely on anything else; he stressed the necessity of accurate observation and caution and warned them against jumping to conclusions: 'Your first duty is to carry out tests; he who does not shall not reach even the lowest rungs of perfection; and so, my son, you must experiment in order to attain knowledge.... Scholars do not take pride in a great number of drugs but in the excellence of their composition, so you must be indulgent, patient and painstaking; follow in the steps of nature, for the quality which you seek in every object is inherent in its nature.'[1]

Islam calls for method and objectivity in research; it respects the results of such research, regarding them as a principal source of knowledge, and goes so far as to consider them part of the Divine revelation; it is said: 'We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in themselves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth' [41: 53].

Islam accordingly accepts what objective and methodical study has established about the problem of race.

1. Muntaṣir, op. cit., p. 149.

2 Islam and responsibility

The gravity of the racial question is that it imposes upon man a responsibility for something not of his own choosing: Why am I of this colour or of that?

Islam does not approach the problem of human equality from the point of view of a person's skin but—as a religion—in terms of the creation and of existence itself. God has said: 'Who receiveth guidance, receiveth it for his own benefit; Who goeth astray, doth so to his own loss; No [soul] can bear the burden of another; nor would we punish until we had sent forth a messenger [to give warning]' [17: 15].

Islam believes in one God. From this profession of the divine uniqueness derives the necessary and inescapable unity of all human beings, a unity in which I bear no responsibility save for my own actions, and am the equal of every other man throughout history, anywhere in the world. It is from this angle that Islam contemplates the creation of man, with its concomitant responsibilities and obligations.

The story of the creation, and the responsibility of man

There are two clear tests in the story of the creation as told by Islam.

The first is the story of a being—Adam—whom God created out of the matter of our earth and into whom He breathed of His spirit so that he became a fully-fashioned, erect human being. 'For I am about to create living man from clay, and when I have fashioned him and have breathed into him of My Spirit, fall ye down in submission to him' [38: 71, 72]. God taught the names of all things to our original father and gave him know-

ledge which he had withheld from His angels, and when God examined Adam on that which He had taught him, he replied before the angels and they submitted to him, at God's command. In the words of God: 'And He taught Adam all the names, then He put the [objects] of these [names] before the angels and said: "Tell me the names of these, if you are right." They said: "Holy art Thou! No knowledge have we except what Thou hast taught us; surely, Thou art the All-Knowing, the Wise." He said: "O Adam, tell them their names", and when he had told them their names, He said: "Did I not say to you, I know the secrets of the heavens and of the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?" ' [2: 31-2]. And elsewhere we read: 'So the angels submitted, all of them together, except Iblis; he refused to be among those who submit' [15: 30-1].

This then was a successful test: instruction, comprehension and practical proof of that comprehension. Adam's first test, as described in the holy Koran, was successful, and was followed by the sojourn in paradise, adhering to God's commandments and avoiding those things which He had prohibited.

Then came a second test, when Adam ate of the forbidden tree. It is worth pausing to examine how this story is told in the Koran, and that for several reasons.

The divine command was not directed to Adam alone but to both him and his wife, and the devil did not persuade Eve (Hawa) alone, who then in her turn persuaded Adam to eat of the tree, but both Adam and Eve together. They are therefore both responsible for their act. This is what we read about Adam and his wife in God's word: ' "And O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat therefrom wherever you will, but approach not this tree lest you be among the wrongdoers." But Satan whispered [evil suggestions] to them so that he might make known to them what was hidden from them of their shame, and said: "Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree, lest you should become angels or such [beings] as live for ever." And he swore to them [saying]: "Surely, I am a sincere counsellor unto you!" So, by delusion, he caused them to fall [into disobedience]' [7: 19-22].

It was ambition that impelled them to eat, ambition which leads men to transgress the divine commandment: they aspired to become angels, or to be as the immortals.

In their spirit there arose a conflict between an unmistakable command and the ambition that heeded not that command; God had dealt generously with them, both spiritually, by giving them knowledge, and materially, by placing them in paradise, yet they aspired to something that is not in human nature.

This continues to be a problem fraught with profound consequences for our world: the observance of bounds or their transgression in an attempt by man to transcend human nature, with the rejection, which that implies, of humanity as it already exists.

Is not this the heart of the race question—that man rejects the essence of humanity—in himself or in others—and attempts to become other than what he is; and, when he fails, tries to degrade others to a position of inferiority as compared with himself? And in his search here on earth for means of proving that the distinction he is attempting to draw is valid, he can find nothing more obvious to appeal to than the colour of a person's skin.

Hence, the Koran's use of the pregnant expression, 'he caused them to fall by delusion'. For that human self-delusion as a result of which Adam and Eve attempted to rise to greater heights was the path that led to their downfall.

Our relationship to the story

The Koran goes on to describe the repentance of our first parents: 'They said, Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves; and if Thou forgive us not and have not mercy upon us, we shall surely be of the lost' [7: 23].

This was mankind's first lesson, a lesson containing two tests; one resulted in success, the other in failure. God held out his compassionate hand to raise Adam and Eve from the depths of their misery, and we read God's word: '. . . And Adam observed not the commandment of his Lord, and so he erred. Then his Lord chose him [for His grace], and turned to him with mercy and guided [him] . . .' [20: 121, 122].

And so the first tale is over: a story of success, transgression, repentance, and repentance accepted; and of God's choice of our first father and his wife, after they had undergone the

two tests, to set in train a long series of events, in which Adam is 'God's viceroy on earth' [for God '. . . said to the angels: I will appoint a viceroy on earth'], viceroy in spite of the transgression that had been committed and those that would follow the trials of mankind throughout its long history and its deviations from God's law, which is based on truth, justice and mercy.

In the view of Islam, man's life on earth is not a penance or a punishment. I do not, as a man, bear any responsibility for the consequences of Adam's transgression, any more than did Adam for the errors of his wife. Each of us starts, so far as God and society are concerned, with a clean sheet, and, according to Islam, without transgression and with no need of redemption.

There is only one respect in which the story of Adam and Eve is not entirely independent of our own, and that is the lesson we can learn from the two trials they underwent. For they symbolize the continuous struggle going on in the human soul between duty and transgression, between right and wrong: 'They said, Our Lord, we have done wrong to our souls.'

More than once the Koran mentions God's acceptance of Adam's repentance: 'Then Adam learnt from his Lord certain words [of prayer]. So He turned towards him with mercy. Surely, He is Oft-Returning [with compassion, and is] Merciful' [2: 37]. 'And Adam observed not the commandment of his Lord, and so he erred. Then his Lord chose him [for His grace], and turned to him with mercy and guided [him]' [20: 121, 122].

Personal responsibility

Many verses confirm the notion of personal responsibility, placing all men, whether contemporaries or not, on an equal footing of responsibility before God and society. We may read, in this connexion, God's word, calling upon men to be charitable.

'Dost thou see him who turns away, And gives a little, and does it grudgingly? Has he the knowledge of the unseen so that he can see? Has he not been informed of what is in the Scriptures of Moses and of Abraham who fulfilled [the commandments]? That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of

another, and that man will have nothing but what he strives for; And that his striving shall soon be seen; Then will he be rewarded for it with the fullest reward; And that to thy Lord do [all things] ultimately go' [53: 33-42].

'Every man's fate We have fastened on his own neck: On the Day of Judgement We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will find spread open. [It will be said to him:] "Read thine [own] record: Sufficient is thy soul this day to make out an account against thee" ' [17: 13, 14].

'And We shall set up [accurate] scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul will be wronged in aught. And even if it were the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We would bring it forth. And sufficient are We as reckoners' [21: 47].

'O my dear son! Even though it be the grain of a mustard seed, and even though it be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, Allah will surely bring it out; verily Allah is the Knower of all subtleties, All-Aware' [31: 16].

3 Man in his natural environment

Man's existence on earth, as described in the Koran, is not a penance, but a noble mission, described by God in the words: 'And when thy Lord said to the angels: "I will appoint a viceroy on earth . . ." ' [2: 30].

It is an existence torn between two contending forces: obedience to God's commandment, and the ambition that impels man to attempt to rise above himself—which in fact means nothing more or less than the rejection of his own humanity, either in himself or in others.

It is in the nature of this mission—that of 'God's viceroy'—that the relationship between man and the surroundings in which he works should be one of love and goodness.

The Koran states that God has created this world for us:

'He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth' [2: 29].

'And He has set the earth for [His] creatures' [55: 10].

'Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and caused water to come down from the clouds, and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; and He has subjected to you the ships that they may sail through the Sea by His command, and the rivers [too] has He subjected to you, And He has [also] subjected to you the sun and the moon, both performing their work constantly. And He has subjected to you the night as well as the day. And He gave you of all that you asked Him, and if you try to count the favours of Allah, you will not be able to number them' [14: 32, 33].

The whole of this vast creation surrounding man is subservient to him, and the earth is spread out before him: 'It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you; so traverse ye through its tracts, and eat of His provision: But unto Him is the Resurrection' [67: 15].

The Koran, indeed, considers man to be part of the stuff of the earth: 'And God has caused you to grow out of the earth' [71: 17]. Man is not a stranger on earth, neither is he banished to it. He lives on its surface, and then is buried within its bowels: 'From it have We created you, and into it shall We cause you to return, and from it shall We bring you forth once more' [20: 55].

The Prophet adds to this his comment: 'Draw nearer to the earth, for it is your mother and charitable unto you.' Consequently, the relationship between man and the world around him is not, in Islam, based on enmity, ruinous exploitation and devastation, but on the enjoyment of its bounties in a spirit of co-operation, harmony and friendship.

This spirit of co-operation is extended to embrace the actual earth itself; thus in the Prophet's precepts it is written: 'Do not cut down a tree except it were for food.' This injunction referred to wartime conditions; in peacetime it has even greater force.

He also forbids cruelty to animals, saying: 'A woman was cast into the Fire because of a cat which she shut up and did not feed nor allow to eat of the vermin of the earth.' The point of this is that the cat is unable to defend itself when it is shut up. A man's behaviour towards those weaker than himself gives the clearest indication of his character. He may fear his superiors and behave courteously towards his equals, but his true disposition becomes apparent in his behaviour towards the weak.

Prophetic tradition provides us with another example: that of a man who descended into a well to slake his great thirst. As he climbed out, he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out and panting with thirst: So he thought to himself: 'The same misfortune has befallen this dog as befell me' and, '. . . not finding any vessel close by, he went down once more into the well, filled his own shoe with water, and, climbing out, let the dog drink until its thirst was quenched.' After the Prophet had told this tale to the Companions, they asked him: 'Is there then a reward for us in respect of the animals, O Messenger of God?' He replied: 'There is a reward for you in respect of all such living creatures.'

The Prophet even says of that which the birds eat in the fields: 'If a Moslem plants anything, and men or beasts or birds eat of it, it shall be accounted to him as a charitable act.'

The ruler of an Islamic country considered himself responsible for its livestock so far as care and upkeep of roads and the prevention of ill-treatment were concerned. The second of the orthodox caliphs, 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, said: 'If a she-mule were to stumble in Iraq, I would be found responsible in the eyes of God for having omitted to pave the road for it.'

The Caliph 'Umar ibn-'Abd-al-'Azīz, while himself in Syria, fixed the maximum weight to be carried by camels on the banks of the Nile: 'It has been reported to me that there are in Egypt transport camels which carry loads weighing one thousand pounds; should this letter reach you, know that I will not permit the load borne by a single camel to exceed six hundred pounds.'[1]

This compassion towards animals was reflected throughout the territory of Islam. Waqfs (charitable foundations) were established to feed and care for stray beasts and to purchase grain for bird-seed. This tradition has survived to the present day in the Holy Mosque (*Ḥaram*) at Mecca, where visitors purchase wheat kernels and scatter them on the floor of the mosque to be gleaned by the innumerable pigeons that live there, undisturbed and at peace with their human neighbours.

Thus the confinement and ill-treatment of beasts—to say nothing of blood sports and animal combats—are prohibited by Islam; while I need hardly mention the great affection which the Arabs have always felt for their camels and horses, giving them tender names and singing their praises in poems which extol the friendship and fidelity that exist between man and beast.

This is the picture of the relation between man and the world of nature round about him: all created matter—stones, air, the vegetable and animal kingdoms—spring from a single principle, which is that God is the creator of man and of all being; man in his splendour and the visible world were equally fashioned by the hand of God, and everything in creation is a manifestation of His omnipotence. Man's activity on earth, in compliance with God's will, is no different—in so far as it manifests the power of God—from the movement of the rest of creation, whose existence is a perpetual act of worship,

1. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sīrat 'Umar ibn-'Abd-al-'Azīz* [The chronicle of 'Umar ibn-'Abd-al-'Azīz], p. 166, Cairo, Al-Raḥmānīya, 1927.

described by the Koran in the following terms: 'Hast thou not seen that it is God Whose praises all who are in the heavens and the earth celebrate, and [so do] the birds with their wings outspread? Each one knows his own [mode] of prayer and praise. And God knows well what they do' [24: 41].

God invites man to meditate on this creation, and to infer from it God's existence and power, for everything around him affords matter for faith.

'Behold! In the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding—men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth: "O Lord, thou hast not created this in vain. Praise be to thee! Spare us the tortures of fire" ' [3: 190, 191].

Man is also directed to contemplate the world of vegetation: 'Verily, it is Allah Who causes the grain and the date-stones to sprout.... And it is He Who sends down water from the cloud; and We bring forth therewith every kind of growth; then We bring forth therewith that green foliage wherefrom We produce clustered grain. And from the date-palm, out of its sheaths, [come forth] bunches hanging low. And [We produce therewith] gardens of grapes, and the olive and the pomegranate—similar and dissimilar. Look at the fruit thereof when it bears fruit, and the ripening thereof. Surely, in this are Signs for a people who believe' [6: 95-9].

After that, he is bidden to meditate on the world of insects: 'And thy Lord has inspired the bee [saying], "Make thou houses in the hills and in the trees and in the trellises which they build. Then eat of every [kind] of fruit, and follow the ways of thy Lord [that have been] made easy [for thee]." There comes forth from their bellies a drink of varying hues. Therein is cure for men. Surely, in that is a Sign for a people who reflect' [16: 68, 69].

Then, he is invited to reflect on the world of animals: 'Do they not then look at the camel, how it is created?' [88: 17]. 'And the cattle too He has created; you find in them warmth and [other] uses; and of them you eat. And in them there is beauty for you when you bring [them] home in the evening, and when you drive [them] forth to pasture in the morning. And they carry your loads to a land which you could not reach

except with great hardship to yourselves. Surely, your Lord is Compassionate, Merciful. And [He has created] horses and mules and asses that you may ride them, and as [a source] of beauty. And He creates what you know not' [16: 5-8]. 'And surely in the cattle [too] there is a lesson for you. We give you to drink of what is in their bellies, from betwixt the faeces and the blood, milk pure [and] pleasant for those who drink [it]' [16: 66].

What the Koran has to say about the world of nature is indeed a sign for those 'who reflect', for those who hear and think and remember . . . 'haply ye may give thanks, and receive guidance . . .'—thanks to God, and guidance to enable us to do what is right in this world.

As for the differences in size, colour and function that exist among all God's creatures, these only serve, in the view of Islam, to indicate His omnipotence; and the attitude of Islam towards man is no different, in this respect, from its attitude towards all the rest of creation.

4 Mankind as one family

A single soul

In the Koran we may read the proclamations addressed by God to man as a human being, indicating the path he must follow in the major problems that confront him, the most important of which is that of his attitude to all his human brethren.

It follows from the fundamental doctrine of oneness in Islam that there must be unity among men. That is what Islam has proclaimed; scientific studies have reached the same conclusion, and Unesco has based its declaration on the race question on this same principle.

Let us listen to God's word: 'O ye people! Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain scattered abroad many men and women; and fear Allah, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and [fear Him particularly respecting] the wombs. Verily, Allah watches over you' [4: 1].

The creator is one, and the human soul is one; from this soul, God created its mate, and from the original family have descended all people: multitudes of men and women. God then commands us to fear two things: God and 'the wombs' (*al-arḥām*). 'The wombs' refers here to the human bond that links all men, however remote they may be from each other in space or time, and however unlike they may be in language and colour, and however much they may differ in economic or social position. We are charged to fear God's commands, and this applies first and foremost to the observation of human brotherhood on the widest scale, with respect to which God adds: 'Verily, God watches over you.'

We—the vast human community of today—were not present at the beginning of creation; our eyes have never beheld the single human soul. Instead, we see people speaking a variety of tongues and with skins of many differing hues. What then is Islam's position with respect to all this diversity?

As already stated, Islam's view of this matter is precisely the same as its attitude to differentiation in all its aspects and wherever it may occur. Our previous remarks concerning the world of nature were designed to introduce our discussion of man: God's viceroy on earth, to whom God therefore subjected the creatures of the air and of the earth and allowed him to rule over them.

Differences in language and colour are mentioned among a host of other natural and human phenomena, and are all considered as proofs of God's existence. The fact that they are referred to in this manner, without being singled out for special study, is a further indication that they are merely one of many phenomena, to be meditated upon as others are, and providing, like them, matter for that contemplation which implants deeper faith in the soul and inspires it to action based on charity and mercy.

For God has said: 'So glorify God when you enter the evening and when you enter the morning—And to Him belongs all praise in the heavens and the earth—and [glorify Him] in the afternoon and when you enter upon the time of the decline of the sun. He brings forth the living from the dead, and He brings forth the dead from the living; and He gives life to the earth after its death. And in like manner shall you be brought forth. And [one] of His Signs [is this] that He created you from dust; then behold, you are men who move about [on the face of the earth]. And [one] of His Signs [is this], that He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them, and He has put love and tenderness between you. In that surely are Signs for a people who reflect. And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours. In that surely are Signs for those who possess knowledge. And among His Signs is your sleep by night and day, and your seeking of His bounty. In that surely are Signs for a people who hear. And [one] of His Signs

[is this], that He shows you the lightning as [a source of] fear and hope, and He sends down water from the sky, and quickens therewith the earth after its death. In that surely are Signs for a people who understand' [30: 17-24].

The Koran's account of the diversity of tongues and colours among men is similar to its account of the variety of features to be found in nature: they are all manifestations of God's omnipotence. Human beings in his sight are sacred and worthy of respect, and our duty, wherever we can find a way, is to act according to his commands.

Here, God says: 'Dost thou not see that God sends down water from the sky, and We bring forth therewith fruits of different colours; and among the mountains are streaks white and red, of diverse hues and others raven black; And of men and beasts and cattle in like manner there are various colours? Only those of His servants who possess knowledge fear God. Verily God is Might, Most Forgiving' [35: 27, 28].

Now it is noteworthy that, of the two verses dealing respectively with the diversity of colours among people and among mineral formations in rocks, the first ends with the phrase: 'In that surely are Signs for those who possess knowledge', and the second with: 'Only those of His servants who possess knowledge fear God.'

There is a connexion between these phenomena which should be scientifically investigated. The Koran reassures us that whatever is revealed by objective scientific inquiry here will never conflict with the principle on which life is based: that all men are brothers, descended from one father, and that they should so conduct themselves that differences in colour, whether in men or in nature, are not permitted to hinder their working together towards a better world.

Geographical distinctions

Proceeding from this basic principle of human unity, the Koran goes on to consider differences in geographical location: for men live as nations and tribes, each with its own home, and it is incumbent upon them all to learn to know one another and to work together in the fear of the Lord.

Thus, God says: 'O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of God, is he who is the most righteous among you. Surely, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware' [49: 13].

Islam sees mankind as a large garden, in which there are flowers of many colours, but no one colour is superior to any other. That is the meaning of the following remark ascribed by tradition to the Prophet: 'I am the forerunner of the Arabs, Suhaib of the Greeks, Salmān of the Persians, and Bilāl of the Ethiopians.' For these men were the first among their own peoples to embrace Islam, and so the Prophet gathered them, together with himself, into a faithful garland.

But it was not easy for the human mind, corrupted as it was by the habit of regional, colour and class prejudice which had gradually, over the centuries, become part of the intellectual fabric of society, to accept this great Islamic message of universal brotherhood. It was Islam's task to introduce sounder notions —first of all intellectually—in the hope that they would eventually permeate men's lives and help to establish a new social structure, broadly based on faith, human brotherhood and righteous works.

5 Among the prophets, too, there is brotherhood

Prophets are one people

As a confirmation of the significance of human brotherhood through the ages, the Koran directs Moslems to believe in all the earlier prophets without distinction. Thus, God says: 'This Messenger [of Ours] believes in that which has been revealed to him from his Lord, and [so do] the believers: all [of them] believe in God, and His angels, and His Books, and His Messengers [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers"; and they say, "We hear and we obey. [We implore] Thy forgiveness, O our Lord, and to Thee is the returning." '

The Prophet and all believers are directed by God to believe in the books sent down by God and in the messengers He has sent, without distinction between any of His messengers.

The Koran does not state that all the messengers have been named by God in the Koran itself, but it says of the prophets: '. . . of them are some whose story We have related to thee, and some whose story We have not related to thee . . .' [40: 78].

Man looks to religion for a statement of the moral principles on which human life is based; he does not regard the names of the prophets, to say nothing of the details of their lives, as forming an essential part of it. When he witnesses righteous works, it is his duty to appreciate and respect them, even though proceeding from a faith not specifically mentioned in the scripture revealed to him by God.

God commands that we shall always speak thus, and confirms this idea in more than one verse of the Koran: 'Say ye: "We believe in God and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob and [his] children, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and

what was given to [all other] Prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between any of them; and to Him we submit ourselves" ' [2: 136].

Many *sūrāt* contain laudatory references to earlier prophets, mentioning their virtues and their struggle in search of truth. Indeed, about three-quarters of the Koran is devoted to an exposition of the stories of the prophets as seen from various angles, of which the three most significant ones are: the confirmation of believers in the path of truth; an account of the fierce opposition which the prophets encountered at the hands of their own people; and the punishment meted out to the iniquitous—in other words, the moulding of the believer, the social conflict, and the consequences of that conflict.

The Koran calls upon us to follow the example of these models for humanity regardless of the distance separating them in time and space, and considers them all as one people: 'Verily, this is your people—one people; and I am your Lord, so worship Me' [21: 92].

It goes on to indicate the nature of the struggle and to confirm the obligation of science to establish standards of truth and justice in human life: 'But they have become divided among themselves in their affair; and all will return to Us. So whoever does good works and is a believer, his effort will not be disregarded and We shall surely record it' [21: 93, 94].

In spite of religious conflicts throughout history, the sanctity of all the prophets has continued to be proclaimed in the land of Islam: men read what God has written concerning them and devote themselves to His service, and the shining rays that unite all mankind continue to illuminate men's hearts, summoning them constantly to that human brotherhood for which prophets and righteous men have fought.

An end, not a beginning

The Prophet illustrates the united efforts of all prophets towards a single goal in a vivid parable: 'My case and that of the prophets who preceded me may be likened to that of a man who built a house, embellished it and decorated it, except for a space for one brick in a corner. Men used to walk round it and wonder

at it, and say: "How beautiful it all is! Had you only placed this brick!" For I am the brick and the last of those that are sent.'

His accounts of the prophets always contain that spirit of brotherhood and comradeship which he called for in life.

He said of Joseph: 'Know ye who is al-Karīm [i.e. the noble one] ibn al-Karīm ibn al-Karīm ibn al-Karīm? He is Joseph son of Jacob son of Isaac son of Abraham.'

Of Jonah he said: 'Never has a believer repeated in his affliction the prayer of my brother, the man of the whale—"There is no God but Thee, all praise to Thee: verily I was one of the transgressors"—but that God has delivered him from his affliction.'

Of Moses he said: 'May God have mercy on Moses: He suffered graver wrong than this and was patient.'

Of Jesus he said: 'All the prophets are descended from one origin [meaning, are related] except for Jesus son of Mary: No prophet has come between him and me.'

He sensed that kinship with all prophets in his daily life. On his journey to Al-Ṭā'if, he called on the tribe of Thaqīf to be converted to Islam; they replied ungraciously, encouraging insolent men and youths to throw stones at his feet and hurl insults at him, until he found refuge in a garden tended by a Christian labourer, who had pity upon him and brought him water and fruit. The Prophet asked him: 'From what country are you?' The man replied: 'From Nineveh.' He said: 'That is the town of the prophet Jonah.' When the labourer wondered and asked him whether he knew him, he replied: 'Certainly, for he is a prophet and so am I.'

One goal but many colours

In the course of the famous Midnight Journey, God took the Prophet by night from the Mosque in Mecca to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, then brought him up by a ladder to heaven, where he witnessed many of God's wonders, and finally returned him to his abode.

The Divine Messenger has left us an account of his meeting with the prophets during this journey and provided us with

a description of their principal features. Some were dark in colour, 'adamites'—for in Arabic, Adam means black—others were brown, while still others were white as snow. He mentions all these colours without distinction or preference, and says that one prayer united them all during that blessed night.

Thus the prophets whom Muḥammad encountered on the Night of the Ladder, were of many different colours. He did not distinguish between them on that basis, any more than he was later to do when speaking of his Companions.

6 From race to brotherhood

Islam refers to pre-Islamic society as the age of 'ignorance' (*al-Jāhilīyah*): ignorance as opposed, not to knowledge but, basically, to justice. Fundamentally, ignorance here means injustice, with all that that implies of the subordination of learning and truth to the appetites and passions. The word is already used in this sense by the pre-Islamic Arab poet 'Amr ibn-Kulthūm: 'O Hind! do not behave ignorantly towards us; or we in turn shall behave ignorantly beyond the ignorance of the ignorant.'

That is to say, do not oppress us beyond a certain limit, or we shall feel obliged to return the oppression with interest!

Islam thus came to apply the word *Jāhilīyah* (or injustice) to racial discrimination in all its manifestations—including excessive deference to lineage, tribal convention and economic situation.

Thus the Prophet admonishes men, saying: 'O, you people, God hath caused to depart from you the vainglory and presumption of the ignorant, and their pride in their forefathers. Men are of two sorts: the righteous, God-fearing man, honourable in the sight of God, and the licentious, dastardly man, of whom God takes little account.

'You are all from Adam, and Adam was created from dust; let men cease to boast of their forefathers, or else they shall be more despicable than dung beetles in the sight of God.

'Your lineage is of no account . . . you are all the children of Adam . . . the pride you take in your forefathers transgresses the teaching of your Lord . . . no man is superior to another save in faith and fear of God.'

Counselling his Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī the Prophet said: 'See, you are not worthier than any other man, nor superior to him, except you be more God-fearing than he.'

One of his prayers, when he communed with God towards the close of night, was: 'I am a witness that [God's] servants are all brothers.'

But this was not easy for people accustomed to regard their tribal conventions as little less than sacred and to hold to their kinship generation after generation in a manner for which it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a parallel in other nations.

How was Islam to bring them, and mankind with them, on to the straight path of faith and equality?

By invitation

There was inequality among men on a tribal basis, or one could say, on a racial basis; whatever the reason, inequality existed, and Islam's role was to put an end to it.

Equality begins with a universal creed, open to all, and containing no private mysteries: for religion is for all men. Thus God speaks to his Prophet, who says: 'O mankind! Truly I am a Messenger to you all from God . . .' [7: 158].

Thus he is not a regional or racial prophet; indeed he says: 'I have been sent to men both fair and black.'

Without fanaticism

It is in the nature of this universal invitation that it knows nothing of fanaticism, one of the major causes of discord between men.

The people of Quraish attacked the message of Islam on the grounds that it had been revealed to a poor man. This is recorded in the Koran: 'And they say, "Why has not this Koran been sent to some great man of the two towns?" Is it they who would distribute the mercy of thy Lord? It is We who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank], so that some of them may make others subservient [to themselves]. And the mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass' [43: 31, 32].

We shall later return to this text, but the aspect of it which concerns us here is that poverty, or economic situation was

one of the reasons given for the attacks to which Islam was subjected in Mecca.

At that time, the majority of the Arabs could not imagine that the Prophet's invitation was disinterested. They therefore offered him all manner of supposed distinctions or advantages —the basis of their own lives—if he would abandon Islam: 'If it is simply wealth that you are seeking with this matter that you have brought, we shall collect for you wealth that will render you wealthier than us, and if you desire honour, we shall make you lord over us and decide nothing without you, and if you desire sovereignty, we shall make you our king.'

But he shunned wealth, social position and authority; in other words, he refused any distinction with a financial, social or political basis and would accept from them only faith and human brotherhood.

Thus the Prophet rejected at the outset those factors that lead to discrimination. Let us see how this is reflected in the religious observances of Islam.

Worship

Prayer is the most prominent feature of Islamic religious observance. In addition to the five daily prayers, the people gather for communal prayers on Fridays and the two feast-days, while the most important gathering takes place at the season of the Pilgrimage. In the mosque, the worshippers stand in rows, men of different tongues and colours mingling indiscriminately, and those who arrive earliest are entitled to occupy the front rows. The Imam is the one most qualified to read the word of God, while he who calls them to prayer must be chosen from among men of irreproachable character.

The first muezzin[1] for the Messenger of God was an Ethiopian slave, Bilāl, who had been seriously ill-treated by the idolaters of Quraish. They used to make him lie on the scorching ground with a hot stone weight on his belly, until one day he was ransomed and released by Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's Companions. That is why 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, the second

1. Summoner to prayer.

Caliph used to say: 'Abu Bakr, our lord, released our lord.' Bilāl had a beautiful voice, and was one of those who accompanied the Prophet when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina. He used to utter the summons to prayer for the Prophet during the latter's journeyings and sojournings. Later, when the Prophet conquered Mecca in the eighth year of the Hegira, he ordered Bilāl to utter the call to prayer from the top of the Ka'ba; and his voice was thus the first to be heard summoning the faithful to prayer from that spot. After the death of the Prophet, he called no more, save on one solitary occasion when he did so at the request of the Moslems in the Aqṣa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Thus, the first voice to be raised in the muezzin's call to prayer from all three of the mosques most sacred to Moslems was that of Bilāl, the Ethiopian from Africa.

Similarly in regard to learning. In the Umayyad period and after the death of the great Arab masters of jurisprudence known as 'the Abdullahs' (ibn-'Umar, ibn-al-'Abbās, ibn-al-Zubair and ibn-al-'As), intellectual primacy in most Islamic lands passed into the hands of non-Arabs. Thus 'Aṭā' ibn-Abī-Rabāḥ who was Imam of the Mosque and Faqīh (jurisprudent and theologian) of Mecca, was, according to Islamic historians, as black as a raven, lame and flat-nosed. The Imam al-Awzā'i, Faqīh of Damascus, says of him: "Aṭā' was the most agreeable of men."[1]

When 'Abdullāh ibn-'Umar came to Mecca and they questioned him, he said: 'Why do you bring your problems to me, since you have, among you here, Ibn Abī-Rabāḥ?'

The Imam of Yemen was Tāwūs, while Yahyā ibn-Kathīr was Faqīh of the Yamāma, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was Faqīh of Basra, Makḥūl was Faqīh of the people of Damascus, and 'Aṭā' el-Khorasāni was Faqīh of the people of Khorasān. As to Medīna, it had as its Faqīh a man of the Quraish, Sa'īd ibn-al-Musīb, who refused to give his daughter in marriage to the son of the Umayyad caliph, and married her instead to one of his disciples, because of his confidence in the latter's piety, morals and responsiveness to learning.

1. Al-Nuwawi, *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wal-Ṣifāt* [Refinement of Names and Attributes], 1: 333.

At the time of the Jāhilīyah, the people of Quraish were exceptionally stubborn in their attitude to the Pilgrimage. The main ritual was the halt at Mount 'Arafāt, but the Quraish would not go there, wishing merely to halt at al-Muzdalifah, which lies within the boundary of the Holy Places, whereas 'Arafāt is outside it. As an affirmation of full equality between all men in the discharge of their religious duties, the Prophet gave orders that the Quraish should in future perform the halt on 'Arafāt in exactly the same way as other Moslems, as can be seen from the following passage in the Koran: 'Then pour forth from where the people pour forth . . .' [2: 199].

On the Muzdalifah, during the Jāhilīyah, they used to recite the names of their glorious ancestors and boast of their close-knit tribal solidarity. But the Prophet forbade them to take so much pride in their ancestors, and commanded them to glorify God, their Creator. God's word here is: 'And when you have performed the acts of worship prescribed for you, celebrate the praises of God as you celebrated the praises of your fathers, or even more than that' [2: 200].

7 In the community they are as brothers

The family

Islam does not consider that colour or social position can constitute an impediment to the establishment of a family. All that it calls for is mutual agreement, the ability to set up house, and the regular fulfilment of domestic obligations. That is the essence of *kafā'ah* (competence) as defined by Islam.

The Prophet said: 'Where a man satisfies you in his religion and morals, accept him in marriage; otherwise, discord and great corruption will result in the earth'; and also: 'if his religion and morality satisfy you, that is a proof of competence where religion and morality are concerned.'[1]

The Imam Mālik said: 'Competence resides in religion alone.'[2] That is the principle adopted by most Islamic scholars among the Sunnites and Shī'ites. Abū Ḥanifah said: 'If the woman of Quraish accepts the Mawla (a non-Arab who embraces Islam), and he can pay her an adequate bridal dower, it is up to her legal guardian to give her to him in marriage; if he refuses, she shall be given in marriage by the judge. And Mālik, al-Shāf'i and Abū Suleimān have said the same.' God's word [49: 10] confirms this: 'The believers are but a single brotherhood.'[3]

This is seen in practice in the following. The sister of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn-'Awf, a Quraishi, was married to Bilāl ibn-Rabāḥ, the Prophet's muezzin, who was, as we have already mentioned, an Ethiopian; Abū Ḥadhīfah (one of the Companions)

1. Al-Shūkānī, *Nīl al-Awṭār* [The Fulfilment of Purposes], 6: 127.
2. Ibn Quudāmah, *Al-Mughannī* [The Singer], 6: 482.
3. Ibn-Ḥazm al-Andalusi, *Al-Maḥallī*, 10: 24.

gave in marriage his brother's daughter to one of his Mawla clients; al-Ḥusain ibn-'Alī ibn-Abī Ṭālib freed one of his girl-slaves, and then married her, and when Mu'āwniyah criticized him for this action, he wrote to him in reply: 'Through Islam, God has raised up that which was low, and has caused natural defects to be of little account; a Moslem cannot be blamed except in respect of an established fault; it is rather paganism that is to be blamed.'[1] This is because it is not easy in practice for every person to attain the heights to which Islam calls him, and it is only the cream of humanity that is completely uninfluenced by social, colour or racial considerations. Practice and perseverance were therefore essential to enable these moral attitudes to take root in human society.

In matters of authority

Islamic scholars have discussed the qualities required in a caliph who would govern the affairs of the Moslems. They were: learning, justice, competence, and sound senses and organs —since these affect both a man's judgement and his actions; opinions differed, however, regarding the fifth condition, which was that he had to be related to the tribe of Quraish.

This last condition rested on a unanimous agreement reached by the Companions at a meeting which took place on the day following the Prophet's death. The people of Quraish had overruled the Helpers (the Medinan followers of the Prophet, with whom he had taken refuge), who were proposing to install Sa'd ibn-'Ubādah, one of their number, as caliph of the Moslems, on the grounds that the Prophet himself had said: 'The Imams [must be] from Quraish.' At this stage, 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb said to the Helpers: 'By God, the Arabs will not accept that you should become rulers or eminent over them', and Abū Bakr said: 'The Arabs will not submit save to this tribe of Quraish', and the upshot of it all was that Abū Bakr was installed as the Prophet's successor.

Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Al-Muqaddimah*, comments on this incident as follows. 'When we come to consider the true reason

1. Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Al 'Iqd al-Farīd* [The Peerless Necklace], 3: 229.

for the stipulation regarding descent from the Quraish, we find that it was in fact based on respect for the feeling of tribal solidarity, whose existence guarantees the rule of law and enables the Imam to govern without opposition and dissension, accepted and supported by the entire Moslem community. Now the Quraish were foremost in solidarity, nobility and vigour, and this was recognized by all the other Arabs. If a member of some other tribe had been elected caliph, the opposition and non-compliance of the Quraish would probably have split the entire community from top to bottom. . . . But once it is established that the stipulation regarding Quraishi descent was merely designed to obviate dissension by relying on that tribe's superior solidarity and vigour, and when we consider that the lawgiver does not legislate specifically for a particular generation, era or people, it is clear that what we are really dealing with is a question of competence (*kifāyah*). . . . In other words, he who would conduct the affairs of the Moslems must belong to a people excelling its contemporaries in the strength of its feeling of solidarity, and hence capable of enforcing their obedience and securing that unity which is the best guarantee of security.'[1]

In jurisprudence

In Islam all men are equal before the courts. As for the judge himself, his race and colour are immaterial; he is merely required to be learned, competent, and of high morality. He judges all men impartially.

During the Prophet's lifetime, a woman of the Banū Makhzūm (a noble Arab clan) stole and was due to be punished. Some of the men of Quraish thought it intolerable that judgement should be executed upon the person of a woman of Makhzūm and considered who would be able to speak to the Prophet and convey the people's intercession to him. Their choice fell on Usāmah ibn-Zaid, who was near to the Prophet's heart and well loved by him, because of his own and his father's rank and standing. But the Prophet rejected Usāmah's mediation, and

1. Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah* [Prolegomena], Al-Sharqīyah, p. 214-17.

rebuked him, saying: 'Would you intercede against a punishment ordained by God?' He then stood up and addressed the people: 'Verily those that came before you were destroyed. It was their wont, if a noble man stole, to let him go free and if a weak man stole, to execute judgement upon him. By God! Were even Fāṭimah the daughter of Muḥammad a thief, she should have her hand severed.'

A Jew once brought a lawsuit against 'Alī ibn-Abī Ṭālib before 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb during the latter's caliphate. When they both appeared before him, 'Umar addressed the Jew by his name; but 'Alī he addressed by his agnomen, Abū al-Ḥasan, as was his custom when conversing with him. Then, as wrath showed in 'Alī's features, 'Umar said: 'Are you displeased that your opponent is a Jew and that you have appeared with him before the court?' 'Alī replied: 'No, but I take it amiss that you have not treated us equally but have displayed partiality in my favour, inasmuch as you addressed him by his name and me by my agnomen' (for the use of the agnomen was a mark of esteem).[1]

Work and security

Islam grants to all individuals the right to carry on any lawful occupation that may appeal to them and for which they are suited.

God calls all men to work and to disperse over the earth and earn their living: 'He it is Who made the earth even and smooth for you; so traverse through its sides, and eat of His provision. And unto Him will be the resurrection' [67: 15].

He gives precise directions as to visiting the mosque for prayer and leaving it as soon as the prayer has ended in order to return to work: 'O ye who believe! When the call is made for Prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave off [all] business. That is better for you, if you only knew. And when the Prayer is finished, then disperse in the land and seek of God's grace, and remember God much, that you may prosper' [62: 9, 10].

1. Wāfi, *Huqūq al-Insān fil-Islām* [Human Rights in Islam], 1967, p. 9.

The call to prayer is described as a call 'to the remembrance of God', and the call to return to work as a call 'to seek of God's grace'. Thus, in entering and leaving the mosque, the believer fulfils God's commandment, obeying Him with respect both to the act of worship and to the earning of his living.

Islam encourages men to earn their living even during the Pilgrimage; thus: 'It is no sin for you to seek the bounty of your Lord. But when you pour forth from 'Arafāt, celebrate the praises of God at the Sacred Monument' [2: 198].

It was related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that some people approached the Prophet, and told him that a certain man fasted by day, and stayed awake at night, and abounded in remembrance of the Lord. The Prophet asked: 'Which of you sees to it that he has enough food?' They answered: 'All of us [i.e. we all co-operate in ministering to his wants] so that he may be free to worship.' Then the Prophet said: 'You are all better than he.'

The first Caliph, Abū Bakr, did not abandon his trading activities until the Moslems granted him from the public treasury an allowance for his own needs and for those of his dependants, in order that he might be free to devote all his time to the affairs of the caliphate.

The right to work, as established by Islam, is guaranteed to every man, regardless of race, religion or class.

The State, according to Islam, is responsible for providing care and good treatment necessary to guarantee the free development of all individual potentialities and of the community as a whole.

The Prophet said: 'He who harms a zimmi [a non-Moslem living under the protection or in the society of Moslems] harms me.'

He also declared: 'He who is unjust towards a Mu'āhid [one who has a pact (*'ahd*) with Moslems], or encroaches upon his rights, or makes excessive demands on him, or takes anything from him against his will, I shall be his enemy on the Day of the Resurrection.'

After the Moslem conquest of Jerusalem, 'Umar ibn-Khaṭṭāb stated in the pact which he made with its inhabitants: 'This is what 'Umar, Commander of the Faithful, has promised to the people of Aelia [Capitolina] for their security: They shall have

protection for their persons, their property, temples and crosses, for the sick and the healthy, and for all members of their community; the temples shall not be occupied, nor destroyed; and nothing shall be removed from them or from their riches, nor anything taken from their persons or property.'

This security is the broad foundation on the basis of which individual potentialities can flourish and develop, working fruitfully and without encroaching the rights of other individuals and of society.

Protection of life and earnings

The duty of the community is to protect each man and to safeguard the fruits of his labour, whether he be a Moslem or not. As an illustration of this, let us take the case of murder. Islamic law does not provide for any difference in the penalty according to whether the victim is a man or a woman, an adult or a minor, sane or insane, educated or ignorant, rich or poor, Moslem or zimmi, white or black . . . in accordance with the general rule: 'And therein we prescribed for them: a life for a life' [5: 48]; and God said: 'And there is life for you in [the law of] retaliation, O men of understanding, that you may enjoy security' [2: 179].

Islam does not distinguish between murder committed by one person or by a group of persons, whatever the number. Indeed, Islamic lawgivers stated: 'The most appropriate penalty is the execution of all the participants in a murder; for it is usual for a murder to be committed with the aid of others; if the punishment were not fixed in this way, there would be no limit, for whoever desired another's death would engage accomplices in order to remove the punishment from his own person. This would frustrate the objective of retaliation, which is to preserve life.' 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb (may God be gracious to him) executed a number of people for the murder of one man, and uttered his famous saying: 'Even if the entire population of Ṣnā' had conspired together to do this deed, I would have killed them all.'

Some Islamic lawgivers (the foremost being the Imam Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān) have considered that the murder of a zimmi by a Moslem is a graver crime than that of a Moslem by

a Moslem on the grounds that, as religious hatred leads to murder, the need for forcible prevention here is even greater. Therefore, it was even more important to assert the principle that life must be preserved when enacting the punishment of a Moslem who murdered a zimmi than in the case of the murder of a fellow-Moslem.[1]

Islam thus unequivocally respects human life and the right of men to live, and has instituted penalties for the protection of men's lives, without distinction as to the murderer's race, social and economic position, colour or religion.

On the same principle of respect for human life and work, each worker is entitled, in Islam, to his earnings. Here, the Prophet says: 'Give to the labourer his hire before the sweat dries upon his brow', and further: 'God [who is strong and great] has said: "there are three kinds of men whom I shall not endure the Day of the Resurrection . . ." and of these, he mentions "he who hires a labourer, profits from him, and does not pay him".'

These principles can be applied to all kinds of lawful toil, whether it be manual labour, intellectual work, or the performance of administrative duties.

1. Wāfi, op. cit., p. 256-7.

8 Exemplary men

In the bosom of Islam

The first example cited by Moslems in illustration of Islam's view of humanity as transcending racial distinctions is that of Bilāl ibn-Rabāḥ, the Ethiopian who was the Prophet's muezzin. In the mosque of Al-Madīnah, the Prophet was the Imam (leader in prayer) of the Moslems while Bilāl called them to prayer; and these two functions, of Imam and muezzin, are the two most important offices of the mosque.

'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Caliph, said: 'Abu Bakr is our master, and he liberated our master [meaning Bilāl] who is the third of Islam [i.e. the third person to embrace Islam].'

Among the Sūdān (this was the name given by Arabs to all who were black-skinned) it is Al-Miqdād ibn-al-Aswad, a Companion of the Prophet, who is cited. He was one of the most distinguished members of the Companionship, and, with the Prophet, had witnessed the great battle at Badr as well as all the other great events. Al-Miqdād says: 'When we came down to Al-Madīnah, the Messenger of God divided us into groups of ten and quartered each group in a different house, and I was among those who were with the Prophet, and we had naught but an ewe, from whose milk we could satisfy ourselves.'[1]

Then there was Julaibīb; of whom it is related that the Prophet, while on a raid, asked his Companions if they had missed any of their men. They replied: 'Yes, we have lost some', and named them. Later, he [twice] repeated to them the same question, and the third time, they replied: 'No one.' He said: 'But I do not find Julaibīb; look for him.' And when they had

1. Ibn-'Abd-al-Birr, *Al-Istī'āb* [Comprehension], 4: 1482.

searched, they found him dead among seven whom he had killed. The Prophet then said: 'He has slain seven, and now he has been slain. He is of me, and I am of him.' He then carried him in his arms until they had dug [a grave] for him; he had no bed save the arms of the Messenger of God.[1]

In the accounts of the chroniclers and geographers of Islam

Islamic scholars in their writings on history, geography and civilization have never adopted a hostile attitude towards any race merely on account of its colour.

For instance, Al-Mas'ūdi, in his accounts of various races, describes the land of the Sūdān—by which he means the inhabitants of Africa south of the Sahara—in a spirit of objectivity, and remarks on the eloquence of the negroes and the forcefulness of their native preachers.[2]

In his accounts of the Chinese monarchs, he speaks of their sense of justice, and the steps they take to safeguard the rights of foreign traders travelling through their lands.[3]

The same approach can be found in *Al-Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn, in the passage where he describes the races of man.

He does not attach too much importance to the influence of the natural environment and the bodily characteristics for which it is responsible, but concentrates on social factors, and attempts to show the influence of people's occupations and ways of life, to which he attributes the principal role in the development of their different temperaments and dispositions.

His theory is clearly summarized in a comparison which he draws between eastern and western Islam when discussing the art of teaching in the sixth chapter of *Al-Muqaddimah*:[4] 'The people of the East are, on the whole, better teachers and more cultivated than those of the West, to such an extent that many Westerners who have studied in the East believe that the Easterners are more intelligent than themselves and possess

1. Risālat faḍl al-Sūdān [Epistle on the Merits of the Sūdān], *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* [Epistles of Al-Jāḥiẓ], p. 55-6.
2. Al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-Dhahab* [Gold Meadows], 1: 244.
3. Al-Mas'ūdi, op. cit., 1: 85.
4. Ibn Khaldūn, op. cit., p. 430-3.

some sort of natural intellectual superiority. However, this is not the case; the superiority of the Easterners is simply a matter of greater intellectual alertness due to the influence of their settled civilization. The common belief that there is some sort of basic, constitutional difference between the inhabitants of East and West has no foundation.'

This approach, which regards the distinguishing qualities and characteristics of different peoples as a function of the social circumstances in which they live and as something quite independent of their physical conformation, is corroborated by modern research; and it is precisely this attitude that is consistently advocated by Unesco.

The Koran and its attitude to colour

This principle in Islam is based on the attitude of the Koran to colour. We may dwell on two words or notions in the Koran: black (*al-sawād*) and white (*al-bayāḍ*).

The root denoting blackness occurs ten times in the Koran. Three times it has the meaning of lordship (*al-siyādah*). The first is in the account of our lord Yaḥyā (John the Baptist): 'And the angels called to him [this refers to our lord Zachariah] as he stood praying in the chamber: "God gives thee glad tidings of Yaḥyā, who shall testify to the truth of a word from God —noble [*sayyid*] and chaste and a prophet, from among the righteous" ' [3: 39]. The second is about the 'Azīz (high-ranking courtier of Egypt in the story of Joseph (Yūsuf), where God's word is as follows: 'And they both raced to the door [referring to Joseph and wife of the 'Azīz] and she tore his shirt from behind, and they found her lord at the door . . .' [12: 25]. The third is in the following verse: 'And they will say, "Our Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our great ones and they led us astray from the way" ' [33: 67].

In these examples, we find 'lordship' (*al-siyādah*) in a context of praise, then in one of censure, and the third time in an expository passage, without praise or blame.

Blackness (*al-sawād*) occurs five times as a description of a condition—rather than an inherent characteristic—of the countenance. Thus, it appears twice in a verse describing the

darkening of the unbelievers' faces on the day of the Resurrection [3: 106]. The reference here is to their punishment and not to their original colour. The same phenomenon is referred to in the thirty-ninth *sūra*, verse 60. Twice we read of people whose faces darken on hearing of the birth of a female child: in the sixteenth *sūra*: 'And when to one of them is conveyed the tidings of [the birth] of a female, his face darkens, while he suppresses [his inward] grief' [16: 58]—a type of discrimination between the two sexes for which the Koran rebukes pagan society—and in the forty-third *sūra*: 'Yet when tidings are given to one of them of that the like of which he ascribes to the Gracious [God] [i.e. a female—when the very same people used to describe the angels as daughters of God] his face becomes darkened and he is choked with grief' [43: 17].

There remain two uses of the word, one of them a description of mountains in: 'And among the mountains are streaks white and red, of diverse hues, and others raven black.' This description is intended to show the power of God Almighty, and blackness is here coupled with a reference to the white and red parts of the landscape. The tenth and last occurrence is in a description of night: 'And eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn' [2: 187].

In short, it may be said that the root S-W-D, from which all the words we have been considering are derived, appears in the Koran in connexion with lordship (*siyādah*), in both a laudatory and a pejorative context; with natural phenomena, such as the succession of night and day, and the diversity of the colours of rocks; and as a description of certain spectacles to be witnessed at the Resurrection or of a passing condition that suffuses the face as a result of some inward agitation. It is not limited to, or even connected with, any particular notion of good or bad. So it can be affirmed that, in the Koran, the colour black has no special status distinguishing it from the remaining colours.

It is the same when we turn to the colour white (*abyaḍ*), of which the root B-Y-D occurs in the Koran eleven times and in a total of seven different forms.

Whiteness appears in the *sūra* of Joseph, where our Lord tells us of the extreme grief suffered by Jacob (may peace be upon him): 'And his eyes became white because of grief' [12: 84].

It is used twice to describe the believers' faces on the Day of Resurrection: 'On the day when some faces shall be white, and some faces shall be black. As for those whose faces will be black [it will be said to them]: "Did you disbelieve after believing? Taste, then, the punishment because you disbelieved." And as for those whose faces will be white, they will be in the mercy of God: Therein will they abide' [3: 106, 107]. The blackening here means the suffusion of their faces with sorrow, and the whitening their irradiation with joy. Then we find an expression characterizing the houris in paradise: 'as if they were eggs closely guarded' [37: 49], where the word *bayḍ* (eggs) means ostriches' eggs, quoted by the Arabs as an example of purity. Dawn is described in the words: 'And eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn' [2: 187], in a passage dealing with the beginning of the great fast. Next, a description of mountains: '. . . among the mountains are streaks white and red' [35: 27]. It is also used four times in describing the miracle of the hand of our lord Moses; the verses in question, which link whiteness (*al-bayāḍ*) with immunity from evil (i.e. disease), are: 7: 108, 20: 22, 27: 12 and 28: 32. Finally, the word appears in an account of the beverage served to the dwellers in paradise: 'They will be served round with a cup from a flowing fountain, [sparkling] white, delicious to the drinkers' [37: 45, 46].

Thus, the use of the colour white in the Koran may also point to deep sorrow or to rich rewards; it may refer to some manifestation of God's omnipotence in nature, whether animate or inanimate; or it may refer to women or the hands of men, with the absence of evil expressly stipulated—for extreme whiteness, as is well known, can be a symptom of disease.

In short, it may be said that the Koran does not attach the colour white to any special notion of good or bad, nor does it connect it with any specific position in the world. The main principle of the Koran, as may be observed in its precepts, is that of equality among all men, while progress may only be achieved by following God's ordinances: 'Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of God, is he who is the most righteous among you' [49: 13].

However, the Koran does consider the question of degrees of rank among people; how, then, does it treat this problem?

9 Degrees of rank in the Koran

Equality and preference

We read in the Koran about equality among men, but we can also read such verses as the following: 'It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank] . . .' [43: 32].

Some may find that this and similar texts, if narrowly interpreted, conflict with the statements concerning equality.

The matter must therefore be studied more closely. Let us see, first, the full text of the passage in question: 'And they say, "Why has not this Koran been sent to some great man of the two towns?" Is it they who would distribute the mercy of thy Lord? It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank], so that some of them may make others subservient [to themselves]. And the mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass' [43: 31, 32].

The text is connected with the question of prophecy. The idolaters among the Quraish disputed the revelation of the Koran to the blessed Muḥammad. Their contention was that he was not one of their leaders, nor a man of high position or great wealth. They thought that revelation could descend only upon men of noble rank, who possessed wealth and standing, for they imagined that prophecy was of necessity connected with riches and authority. As long as the gift of prophecy was a sign of honour and elevation, then, according to their lights, it could only be granted to the wealthy and the eminent.

The Koran has an answer to this corrupt principle, which insists on linking prophecy with wealth, and which states that

divine inspiration can be transmitted only to the rich, and not to the poor or righteous.

It refutes it in these words: '. . . Is it they who would distribute the mercy of thy Lord?' The Imam Ibn-Kathīr writes [4: 127]: 'It is not up to them but up to God: for God knows best who is to receive his message, and does not reveal it except to those who are purest and most honourable and who are best fitted for it in heart and soul.' He meant here the prophets, may peace and blessing be on them.

Muḥammad was poor; God's word here is: 'Did He not find thee an orphan and give thee shelter? And He found thee wandering and guided thee. And He found thee in want and enriched thee.' Upon this basis he proceeds to erect social duties: 'So the orphan, oppress not, And him who seeks [thy help], chide not, And the bounty of thy Lord, proclaim' [93: 6-11]. So it is by no means an inescapable rule that prophets must be drawn from the ranks of the rich or the eminent; the fundamental principle is that they should be worthy of the mission entrusted to them from God, and it is clear that the 'mercy of thy Lord' mentioned in the text which we are examining is prophecy.

Next comes the part which has caused most comment: 'It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank], so that some of them may make others subservient [to themselves] . . .' and this is followed by: '. . . And the mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass.'

Some have understood this verse in its obvious and literal sense, as a reference to the uneven distribution of worldly goods and to the disparity among men as a result of which some of them are able to exercise dominion over their fellows. The downtrodden, whether socially, economically or politically, are exhorted not to lament, but to be content with the mercy promised to them by God on the Day of Resurrection. Others have gone further and said that this text is an invitation to negativism, encouraging men to reject the idea of work and content themselves with whatever God has given them; and they have attempted to support this interpretation by citing verses and traditions in which men are urged to renounce worldly things and be content with little, including the verses immediately

following: 'And were it not that mankind would have [all] become one [type of people], We would have given to those who disbelieve in the Gracious [God], roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways by which they could go up; And doors [of silver] to their houses, and couches [of silver], on which they could recline, And [other articles] of embellishment. But all that is nothing but a [temporary] provision of the present life. And the Hereafter with thy Lord is for the righteous' [43: 33-5].

From all this, some writers have constructed a theory, which they put forward as belonging to the fabric of Islam, that inequality and privilege form part of the very basis of religion. Once this principle is granted, it is open to anyone to justify exploitation on grounds of colour or of economic or social status by saying that it is the will of God.

But it is not the will of God.

Let us consider the text from two angles. First, from the point of view of the cause—that is to say, the cause of revelation—and secondly, from the point of view of the general intention and the eternal, ever-fresh lesson to be drawn from the text.

Social struggle

As to the cause, we see that the passage is a defence of the Prophet. God denies the necessity of any connexion between material wealth and the rank of prophet. Prophecy here is called mercy (*raḥmah*) and it is God who distributes it. Let us consider what is meant by 'exaltation' into the ranks of the prophets, and by these 'degrees' to which God has elevated them.

The men in question bore their responsibility with conviction, sacrifice and courage; they bore the burden of exhorting their fellow-men to justice, righteousness and brotherly love, of which the Prophet said: 'I am a witness that Thou art one God, none other with Thee, and that all that fall down before Thee are brothers . . .' Then—in our text—come the words: '. . . so that some of them may make others subservient [to themselves]', i.e. the result was that some humiliated others, and the wealthy waxed insolent towards those righteous men who had

followed the prophets, mocking them. Let us now go back to the verses preceding our text in the same *sūra* and read God's word: 'And thus [has it always been] that We never sent any Warner before thee to any township but the evil leaders thereof said: "We found our fathers following a [certain] course, and we are following in their footsteps." [Their Warner] said: "What! Even though I bring you a better guidance than that which you found your fathers following?" They said: "Certainly we disbelieve in that which you are sent with." So we punished them. Behold then what was the end of those who rejected [the prophets!]' [43: 23-5].

The meaning is clear. It is an assertion of the conflict that exists between the centres of luxury and exploitation within a community and the abiding strongholds of the law of God, a conflict between luxury, exulting in its wealth and influence, and human dignity as exemplified in those true and excellent values which constitute the very spirit of religion and which look only to the essence of each individual, regardless of the colour of his skin, or of his social, economic or political standing. From this profound belief in God and in the dignity of man, we draw our strength for work, dedicating our lives to the service of God through the service of man—of all men without exception.

God's word follows, in confirmation and corroboration of the work of His Messenger and those who believe: '. . . And the mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass . . .'. The meaning here is that the prophet's task is to exhort men to listen to God and to conduct their lives in a manner consonant with the dignity of man—of all men. Patience in the face of such evil as may come his way is better than the material wealth which others have amassed while in a position of power, and which they have used as a weapon for the subjugation of their fellow creatures.

Unity in diversity

When we now turn to the general argument, we find that the starting-point is the same: the people of the time linked, or attempted to link, wealth to God's message, and marvelled that the Koran was revealed to a man who was for them sincere,

faithful and of excellent character, but who was not a man of substance and who did not represent any material interest in the community. How, they thought, could they listen to one who was not a leader among them, even though he was of great moral stature?

Then comes God's word: 'It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood.' Let us examine the text as a whole, not at the level of a single homogeneous community, organized as homogeneously as is humanly possible, but at the level of mankind in its entirety, with all its natural and human resources. We shall find ourselves contemplating a flagrant inequality in the distribution of natural wealth on continents and among nations; and if we turn to a map showing the distribution of any of the world's natural sources of wealth or power, such as gold, silver, copper, oil or uranium, we find everywhere an irregular distribution. The same is true of mountains, rainfall, soil fertility, vegetation and population—all of which vary not only from continent to continent but from country to country. And it is undeniable that life offers wider opportunities to the inhabitants of the wealthier regions than to those of remote regions, cut off from the currents of civilization.

But there is nothing in the Koran which says that men must inevitably bow down before this state of affairs; on the contrary, it is a question of distribution, which they are expected to approach in a spirit of co-operation and justice.

When human relations are based on justice and human brotherhood, all the differences between them can melt away; but if they remain founded on privilege and discrimination of whatever sort, class distinctions spring up and acts of injustice abound. The Imam al-Zamakhsharī said in his Koranic commentary: 'God has allotted livelihoods and benefits. It is men who fall into sin by their faulty receiving of them—in other words, by their rejection of that which God has ordained in favour of that which He has not ordained.'[1]

It is clearly not logical to expect the distribution of natural resources as between nations or as between groups within a given country to conform to arithmetical considerations, for the simple reason that political boundaries are created by man,

1. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* [The Discoverer], 4: 249.

who proceeds to consecrate and venerate them. But if we look at the world as a single unit, what abundance of wealth do we not find to satisfy those who dwell on it?

That is the divine logic which we can read in God's word: 'He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth' [2: 29].

The problem, then, is not one of natural distribution, nor of the distribution of races but of our attitude, right or wrong, towards those resources and towards our human brethren.

If we are content to bow down before fate and destiny, then it means that we are frustrating God's judgement, for how shall He call us to account if we have no will?

We must carry on the struggle between good and evil in order to establish these human values. The first field of struggle is in human thought itself—the prime source from which is derived our tendency towards good or towards evil, towards justice and brotherhood or towards oppression and discrimination.

Social relations

In the text phrase, the word *sukhrīyan* has been variously interpreted to mean either 'subservient' or 'an object of ridicule'; so far as the syntax of the sentence is concerned, the clause is thought to express a result rather than an intention—i.e. some men actually did make others subservient (or objects of ridicule).

That is the test imposed on us by God, that He may see in what manner social groups conduct their struggle for the establishment of justice; and whether they condone the growth of injustice and oppression or whether, in answer to the call for truth and equality, they will decline to be intimidated by concentration of wealth in the hands of those who hold positions of power and who use them to perpetuate inequality between man and man.

When we remember that this text was revealed to the Prophet while he was still at Mecca and had not yet instituted a new social order at Al-Madīnah, we realize that it was revealed in the early days of Islam, at a time when the Moslems in Mecca were suffering grievous oppression. They had few possessions, while their enemies had great riches. The few wealthy men

among the believers, such as Abu Bakr and 'Uthmān, began to use their money to free those slaves who were believers, combining the liberation of men from domination by their fellows with the liberation of their own souls from the domination of wealth, greed and power. They believed that the call to faith would be made complete through freedom and by offering food to the hungry and compassion to the poor, as is shown in God's word: 'But he did not embark boldly on the ascent. And what should make thee know what the ascent is? [It is] the freeing of a slave. Or feeding in a day of hunger an orphan near of kin, Or a poor man [lying] in the dust. Again, he should have been of those who believe and exhort one another to perseverance and exhort one another to mercy. These are the people of the right hand' [90: 11-18].

Here the Koran asserts the value of faith in the struggle for the high ideals without which human life cannot be set to rights; and it calls on those who believe in God and in the dignity of man not to be intimidated by the concentration of material power in the hands of those who deprive men of their rights. Thus: 'And were it not that mankind would have [all] become one [type of] people, We would have given to those who disbelieve in the Gracious [God], roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways by which they could go up . . .' meaning that these things should not be magnified in one's sight, but that rather one should beware of them and shun them, for the sake of faith in God and the dignity of man.

The next verses proclaim that those who live in luxury and who profit from the divisions between people are evil and men of Satan. This is immediately followed by: 'And he who turns away from the remembrance of the Gracious [God], We appoint for him a Satan, who becomes his companion. And surely they hinder them from the way [of God], but they think that they are rightly guided . . .' There come later even sterner words: 'Canst thou, then, make the deaf hear, or guide the blind and him who is in manifest error?' Their subsequent fate, whether in the presence of the Prophet or after his emigration from Mecca to Al-Madīnah, is then announced: 'And if We take thee away, We shall surely exact retribution from them, Or We shall show thee that which We have promised them; for surely We have complete power over them.' God then calls on him

to hold fast to the truth: 'So hold thou fast to that which has been revealed to thee; for thou art on the right path' [43: 36, 37, 40-43].

This is a Koranic illustration of the drama of conflict that goes on between the strongholds of power and between faith and human brotherhood, even though it may be that those who call for the latter are lacking in wealth and their voices are lost in the clamour of oppression or carried away by the gales of discord.

Two kinds in inequalities

But there is still another aspect. Even within an equitable community, supposing such a community to exist, inequalities are inevitable, owing to differences of intellectual level or natural characteristics, including hereditary factors beyond human control.

Islam distinguishes clearly, on the one hand, between the inferiority which an individual brings upon himself by reducing, voluntarily, his own effective and positive qualities and by failing to acquire learning and experience, and on the other hand, the inferiority forced by a society on individuals by standing in their way and depriving them of their natural right to exploit their potential abilities to the full.

In a just community, it is possible to accept differences based on equality of opportunity. In an unjust community, however, inequality is imposed on individuals and groups as a result of the discrimination applied to them before any opportunities have even been offered to them.

For where social justice prevails, and each individual is given the opportunity to work without any hindrance based on colour or social and economic position, to acquire as much knowledge as he is capable of and to play his part in the community to the full extent of his capacities—in such a case, if a man has not succeeded in attaining within his community as much as he might have attained had he exerted greater effort, it can be said that the resultant inequality is a reasonable and acceptable disadvantage which this reason has brought upon himself in spite of the opportunities and encouragement to work that were available to him.

But if the obstacles are constituted by the social structure itself; if individuals are fettered hand and foot, regardless of their ability, for no reason save the colour of their skin, then the differences arising out of their deprivation are entirely unacceptable to any religious faith and incompatible with the conscience of society. This is the social corruption which inevitably produces conflicts that may result in conflagration and bloodshed.

Thus, when discussing such texts as that quoted above ('. . . It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank] . . .') we must bear in mind what kinds of inequality we are concerned with.

The dignity of man as seen by the Islamic lawgivers

On the basis of what has been said above, the manner in which the Islamic religion upholds the dignity of man becomes apparent. The wrongs inflicted on each other by different racial and coloured groups have no basis in religion. God ordains that there must be justice, and allows men ample scope to institute just laws in their lands and to combat injustice, beginning with one of its principal strongholds: human thought and the various class, community and racial interests with which it is entwined.

Here I would like to quote a text by the venerable Imam Ibn-Ḥazm al-Andalusi, which comes at the end of his study *Al-Zakāt*. Its significance is that it gives us an image of social perfection and the rights of the individual in relation to the State and to society as a whole. This is what he says: 'It is reported of Abu-'Ubaidah ibn-al-Jarrāḥ, and three hundred of the Companions (may God be gracious to them), that their supplies had been destroyed, so Abu-'Ubaidah, who was their leader, ordered them to collect their provisions in two sacks and proceeded to deal *out the food equally among them.*'[1]

Ibn-Ḥazm lived in the middle of the fifth century of the Hegira (the eleventh of the Christian era), and was involved

1. Ibn-Ḥazm al-Andalusi, *Al-Zakāt* [Alms], Al-Maḥalli, 6: 156-9.

in many disputes with his contemporaries. He was renowned for the pertinent proposals he put forward for the treatment of the underprivileged sections of the community and the regulation of their relations with the Administration. He wrote: 'It is the duty of the well-to-do in every town to look after the poor, and they are obliged to do so by the authorities in cases where there are not sufficient funds available from the *Zakāt* (alms-tax) or among the remainder of the property of the Moslems.'

Ibn-Ḥazm then established what he considered to be the minimum living conditions which ordinary citizens could claim as a right: 'Provision should be made for them of that which is indispensable in the way of food, of winter and summer clothing, of dwellings that afford shelter from rain, from the heat of summer and of the sun and that screen them from the eyes of passers-by.' He derives this view from a dialogue that comes in the Koran about those who go to Hell: ' "What has brought you into the Fire of Hell?" They will say, "We were not of those who offered prayers, Nor did we feed the poor" ' [74: 42-44]. God has compared the feeding of the poor with the obligation to pray. He then quotes from the Ḥadīth (traditions) of the Prophet: 'He who has food enough for two [men], let him seek out a third man [to feed], and he who has food for four, let him feed five or six', and again: 'He who has a back [meaning a beast that can carry him] too many, let him put it at the disposal of one who has none, and let him who has superfluity of provision make it available to him who has no provision.' Ibn-Ḥazm observes: 'These remarks of the Prophet about the various types of wealth are intended to make us realize that none of us is entitled to superfluity—i.e. that which exceeds his requirements.'

But Ibn-Ḥazm attains an even loftier summit in his defence of justice and prohibition of exploitation, for he declares that the poor have the right to do battle in defence of their life against hunger and nakedness, a ruling which he bases on the statements of previous law-givers. 'The thirsty fear death; they are therefore bound to take water where it may be discovered and to fight for it.' Ibn-Ḥazm goes on to ask what difference there is between fighting which is permitted, when a man strive to save himself from dying of thirst, and that which is prohibited,

when he tries to save himself from dying of hunger and misfortune. That is contrary to the Koran, established precedent, the general consent and the principle of analogy.

For Ibn-Ḥazm, justice and human brotherhood are a vital necessity, and discrimination is one of the elements of injustice that can lead to sudden wars and the boiling over of resentment. And who shall profit from this? It is every man's sacred duty to fight for his rights, but is it possible to suppress a volcano once it has erupted?

The struggle against discrimination is a humanitarian obligation

That is why the attempts of mankind to raise itself to the level of brotherhood and the struggle against all forms of racial discrimination are a necessary task, in which the interests of religion, science and humanity in its widest sense coincide.

For man cannot attain true dignity until he has been offered the opportunity to work and exert himself freely within a community which allows him to do so. At the same time, if any person is unable to work, or is injured in the course of his work, or if he finds he is not able to carry out his obligations, then it is his right, too, that the community should assist him to lead an honourable existence.

Such inequality as still remains, even after every effort has been made to provide equality of opportunity and social security, is something that it is beyond human power to eliminate completely. It is not to be expected that the individuals of a society should all be transformed into precisely identical creatures. Those differences that remain after society has assumed its responsibilities are the 'degrees of rank' mentioned in the Koran, and there is no unfairness in them. They are instances of a preferment consonant with the Divine word: 'It is We Who distribute among them their livelihood in the present life, and We exalt some of them above others in degrees [of rank].'

The real meaning of this is that faith in God coupled with equality of opportunity causes most feelings of resentment and envy to vanish; it prevents the less gifted from harbouring sentiments of rancour against their more talented fellows, and restrains those in positions of responsibility from behaving

arrogantly towards their workmates. Beyond the mere physical exertion, there is the faith that fills our hearts with satisfaction, brotherhood and love. Satisfaction comes after, not before, expenditure of effort—provided that the community does not permit a group of its members who find themselves in positions of leadership, control, or intellectual pre-eminence, to become a 'class', shored up by economic or social position or racial prejudice, which then endeavours to appropriate the community's riches for itself rather than allowing them to be distributed among all its members.

In other words, we should not attempt to transmit from generation to generation wealth acquired as a result of the deprivation of others, for by doing so we will split society not only horizontally but vertically—by which I mean that the resentments following in the wake of such wealth will also become hereditary. A child is not born colour-conscious, it is society which instils the poison into it; and society does this on account of the social, political and economic privileges which it can thereby secure at the expense of others. Here, brotherhood has a horizontal connotation at the level of a particular generation, and it has a vertical connotation at the level of successive generations. It has extension in space and prolongation in time.

10 Conclusions

Having completed this study of Islam and the race question, we may summarize our conclusions under the following points:

First of all, Islam calls on men to pursue knowledge and to employ scientific methods based on observation and experiment, and respects the results obtained by scientific research. Hence its respect for all that science has done to promote the unity of mankind and combat racial discrimination.

Islam regards each individual as responsible for his acts, but rejects the notion that any person should be held responsible for something beyond his control, such as colour. Each person, according to Islam, starts his life, and his account with his Maker, with a blank page, free from all responsibility.

Islam bases the relationship between man and his natural environment on mercy and proper enjoyment. It treats him as part of the stuff of this earth, and intimately linked to it. He must not ill-treat any animals; he is not permitted to cut down trees, save for some useful purpose, or to destroy the earth's resources, for this world is his dwelling-place, and as such he must take proper care of it. The diversity of colours among things created in the universe is a manifestation of God's omnipotence and is not a reason for favouring one being at another's expense.

Mankind, according to Islam, is one large family, created by God from a single soul; from that soul He created a mate for it and then, from both of them, he scattered a multitude of men and women over the face of the earth. The diversity of tongues and colours is simply a manifestation of divine power, and does not imply any notion of preference or privilege. On the contrary, in Islamic thought, privilege is opposed to God's commands of love and brotherhood.

Islam considers all prophets, whatever their colour or nation, as brothers, and invites us all to accept this brotherhood. It depicts the struggle waged by the prophets and their followers as a continual and righteous effort towards a noble end, that of belief in God and the dignity of mankind.

Islam does not indulge in theoretical speculation about origins, but puts its principles into practice: when worshipping before God, all men are equals, and an Arab has no precedence over a non-Arab, piety being the sole criterion; within the community, all men are treated as equals, and marriages are contracted without any consideration of colour. They are also equal in respect of social rights and obligations, equal before the law, equal where working opportunities are concerned, and equal when it comes to the security of their persons.

Islam is not content merely to enumerate all these aspects of human brotherhood or to combat racial discrimination in its various forms. It also gives us vivid examples from the history of the Prophet and of his Companions and of those who continued their good works. We find this in daily life just as we find it in the works of certain scholars of Islam, such as Al-Mas'ūdi and Ibn-Khaldūn, who addressed themselves to the problems of race.

In our analytical and statistical study of the mention of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' in the Koran, we saw that it does not display any antagonism towards, or preference for, any particular colour, but that all colours are treated on the same footing, as manifestations of God's omnipotence.

What the Koran has to say about disparity between individuals is based on the necessity of giving everyone a fair opportunity in the first place. The disparity in question arises after equal opportunities have been offered, and not before. Thus, it is a natural, just difference and not an unjust one.

In no circumstances can Islam accept the idea of the talents of individuals, or their social positions, being converted into strongholds of power in which such individuals can build themselves into closely-knit groups on a basis of racialism, colour discrimination or any other manifestation of privilege, oppressing the rest of the community and bequeathing this state of affairs to future generations in the form of resentments and divisions.

I conclude this message with God's word, describing the mission of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) to mankind: 'He enjoins on them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful for them the good things and forbids them the bad, and removes from them their burden and the shackles that were upon them' [7: 157].

There are no shackles heavier than discrimination between men on account of their colour, and I pray to God that what I have written here about faith and learning may help point the way towards the broad uplands of human brotherhood where there shall be neither racialism nor any disparity other than in respect of righteous endeavour for the good of man . . . the good of all mankind.

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