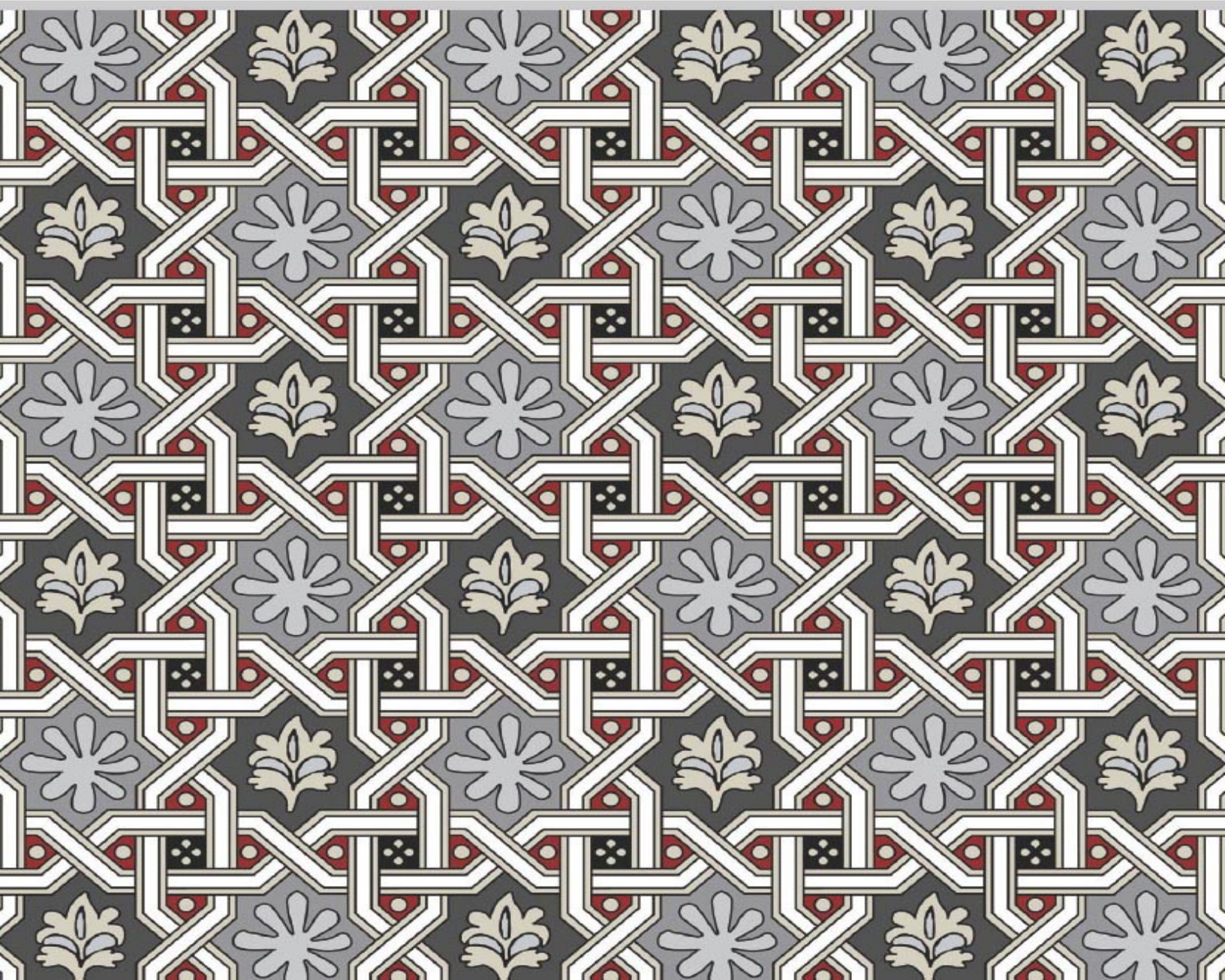


A Thinking Person's Guide to

OUR TIMES

H.R.H. PRINCE GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD

Foreword by SHAYKH HAMZA YUSUF HANSON



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PART I

THE PAST: WHAT HAPPENED?

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God Says:

. . . . But God came at them from where they least expected, and He cast terror into their hearts, destroying [as they did] their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers. So learn from this, O you with insight! (Al-Hashr, 59:2)

and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

When God wants a certain thing [a punishment] to occur, He takes away the intelligence of intelligent people until the thing occurs. Then after it occurs, He returns it to them.
(Bayhaqi, *Shu‘ab al-Iman*, *Musnad al-Daylami*)



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SUMMARY

THE CRISIS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD

(1795–1995 CE)



In the wake of the advent of modernity, real and imaginary worldly weaknesses have combined to reduce Islam to the hobbled Gulliver it is today; the hapless, hopeless, helpless victim of the civilisations surrounding it, despite the appearance to the contrary and despite its comprising nearly one quarter of the world's population. . . . (from below)

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic World is passing through what is perhaps its greatest crisis ever. Muslims, although numerically strong—making up over one fifth of the world's population—are politically, economically, militarily and technologically the weakest they have been for fourteen centuries, relative to the world's other major civilisations. Never have they been so divided, and never have they reached such a low ebb spiritually and culturally. The Islamic world has still not recovered from the ravages that the modernist mentality and modern technology have inflicted upon it, and has not been able to reconcile the contradictory demands made upon it by modernity and traditional religion. From every imaginable point of view there is a crisis in the Islamic world, the likes of which it has never seen before and which threatens, in the long term, the very substance of its existence.

The first step in the direction of a remedy is a proper diagnosis. So the following tract aims to sketch this crisis, in a necessarily simple and curtailed manner, from both the 'outer' (that is, 'outer'

relative to the religion of Islam as such, i.e., the ‘political’; ‘historical’; ‘sociological’, etc.) and the ‘inner’ (that is, ‘inner’ relative to the religion of Islam as such, i.e., the ‘psychological’, ‘religious’, ‘spiritual’, etc.) points of view. It discusses how the recent past has led to this crisis, what precisely the nature of the crisis is at the current time (1994–1995 CE), and what this may lead to in the future. On the eve of a new millennium, the following tract aims to sketch the Islamic world’s real situation and the challenges it inevitably has to face, from both a ‘worldly’ and ‘spiritual’ point of view. Islam is, after all, a religion, and thus primarily a spiritual affair and only secondarily a worldly entity (at least in principle, ‘*religio*’ meaning, in Latin, ‘retying the bond’ between man and God). Therefore, no matter how unusual it may at first seem to discuss both aspects side by side in the same essay, it is nevertheless necessary to do so in order to properly understand the crisis that Islam is undergoing, which, as will be seen, is as much ‘spiritual’ as ‘worldly’.



CHAPTER 1

The Outer Crisis



1. THE HISTORICAL CRISIS

First it must be said that the ‘worldly crisis’ of the recent past in the Islamic world started, historically speaking, when Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798 CE. This invasion showed decisively the overwhelming material superiority of a modern national army backed by modern industry over a traditional Islamic fighting force (like for example, the Mamluk army). What had been one of the largest, most powerful, longest-enduring and most glorious civilisations the world had ever known, suddenly became a second—if not third—rate worldly power. Admittedly, Islam had been in political decline for a while before 1798 CE and the star of Europe had long since been rising, but it is nevertheless worthwhile recalling that the Ottomans had been at the gates of Vienna as late as 1683 CE, and had even conquered the Ukraine ten years prior to that. Suddenly, however, with the dawning of the nineteenth century, the Islamic world found itself completely outstripped militarily, politically, technologically and scientifically (albeit clearly *not* morally, if crime rates and the strength of family structures are taken as indications of sound morality). In earlier times, when the Islamic world was in danger on the human plane by such threats as the Mongols and the Crusaders, the structure of Islamic society and culture, nevertheless remained, at root, intact. Accordingly, it was eventually able either to absorb its conquerors and turn them into Muslims, or to expel them. However, the new

danger in the nineteenth century was not merely one that affected the lives of a certain proportion of the population, but one that affected the very fabric of society, and indeed the continued existence of Islamic societies due to overwhelming enemy military force. Moreover, the very being of Islam became in danger from *within* in a way that was completely alien to its experience. For the nineteenth century brought with it not just European colonialism and imperialism, but an onslaught of brute machinery invented in the Industrial Revolution which devastated the traditional artisanal guilds, agricultural institutions and the nomadic strategic depth of the Islamic world, thereby dealing a death-blow to its traditional socio-economic structure.



2. THE DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS

Statistics show that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world: Muslims, already between one fifth and one quarter of the world's population, have the fastest relative rate of reproduction of any of the world's religions. Islam also has the highest rate of converts *to* it of any religion, and the lowest rate of converts *from* it. This massive statistical growth, however, masks a trend that is actually undermining both the stability and strength of Islam. For in actual fact, although Islam as such is nominally growing, conviction in 'Traditional Islam' (i.e., Islam of the four *Sunni* schools of jurisprudence or '*maddhabs*' [*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*]; of the two *Shi'i* schools of jurisprudence [*Zaydi* and *Ja'fari*] and of the *Ibadhi madhhab*) and in particular Traditional Islamic culture, art, spirituality and intellectual activity are on the decline. So whilst the numbers of Muslims may be growing, the quality of their Islam is being diluted. The contact between modern civilisation and Islam has either produced Muslim imitation of this civilisation ('Islamic Modernism', which basically adopts everything Western whilst keeping a sentimental and nominal attachment to Islam) or

‘rejection’ of this civilisation using modern means (‘Islamic Fundamentalism’). In both cases the focus is *off* Traditional Islam and *on* this world and, in particular, on modern civilisation and the appropriate reaction to it. In other words, both Modernist and Fundamentalist Islam are growing both in absolute terms and relatively, within Islam, (and, in fact, are feeding off each other by reaction), and Traditional Islam is declining, both in general and relatively, within the ‘Islamic fold’.

Muslim Fundamentalism, like the rest of Islam, comprises, largely speaking, of two branches: *Sunni* and *Shi‘i*. *Shi‘i* Fundamentalism was, for all intents and purposes, ideologically made possible by the doctrine of *Wilayat-i Faqih* of the late (d. 1989 CE) Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini, (which opened the door for the *Shi‘i* clergy to participate in the political sphere in the absence of the *Mahdi*). It is effectively only forty-five years old (dating back to lectures given by Khomeini in 1970 CE), and is now (in 1995) politically synonymous with the Iranian revolution (of 1979 CE) and the government set up in Iran following this. *Sunni* Fundamentalism has its *doctrinal* roots in the teachings of the Syrian jurist Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328 CE), and its *political* origin in the Bedouin movements inspired by the puritanical Nejdī preacher Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1787 CE). The followers of Ibn Taymiyyah are generally called ‘*Salafis*’. The term ‘*Salaf*’ means, literally, ‘what has gone before’ but in this case it means rejecting most of Islam’s intellectual heritage, development and historical experience, in the name of ‘going back’ to Arabia in the seventh century—as they see it at least. The followers of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab are called ‘*Wahhabis*’. As Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab himself was a follower of Ibn Taymiyyah, in theory all Wahhabis are necessarily Salafis, but not *vice versa*. In practice, the two streams have effectively dovetailed and become indistinguishable. Nevertheless, within this larger movement there is often more than one opinion on various issues.

The *Salafi-Wahhabi* movement is now, as a political-religious grouping, one of the two huge international *Sunni* Fundamentalist

blocs. They work on both political and religious-ideological tracks: on the political track they work through their own international organisations, through buying media institutes all over the world; printing books and distributing them for free and spreading propaganda. On the religious track they work through spending money on such things as building schools and universities and establishing presences in the existing ones; building mosques; establishing and recruiting ‘converts’ during the *Hajj* and the ‘*Umra*’ (after which Muslims traditionally gather to exchange ideas). On the ideological track they work by spreading their ideas on the rejection of traditional theology (‘*kalam*’ in Arabic), philosophy, mysticism (Sufism), sacred art and the jurisprudential principles of *qiyas* (logical analogy) and *ijma*’ (universal scholarly consensus); by their redacted and altered Canon of *hadith*; by their rejection of traditional notions of spirituality; by their iconoclasm and their destruction of sepulchral shrines; by their rejection of the role of the family of the Prophet ﷺ; by their anthropomorphism and by their focus on the rhetoric of *al-jihad al-asghar* (the ‘lesser struggle’—the war against unbelievers) rather than on *al-jihad al-akbar* (the ‘greater struggle’—the war against the ego).

The other *Sunni* Fundamentalist network—the Muslim Brotherhood bloc (founded in 1929 by the Egyptian Shaykh, Hasan al-Banna, d. 1949 CE)—was not originally doctrinally *Salafi* per se. Its ‘fundamentalism’—although the word is strictly speaking a misnomer, since all religions are about ‘fundamental things’—lies in its political militancy and reveals itself in two major ways: it continues to give precedence to political action over spiritual considerations, wants to change the world without real personal spiritual reformation, and it refuses to accept the legitimacy of local political authority over that of their own international institutional structure. Thus it regards all existing states as illegitimate and disbelieving and only itself as legitimate. It is often in political competition with the *Salafis*, but nevertheless contains a number of doctrinally *Salafi* individuals, and sometimes takes *fatwas* from the shaykhs of that movement. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood winds up

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