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RELIGION AND VIOLENCE: APPRECIATING TRADITIONAL ETHICAL REASONING IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT˙

Abstract

The paper deals with four issues in the context of September 11 and its aftermath. Firstly, it addresses the issue of religion and violence. In this regard, the central question under consideration was whether religion in the form of religious convictions or religious practices causes social violence or cure it – or both? Secondly, it argues that the world civilizations with their own ethical and cultural systems have a history of two and a half millennia of interaction, though with increasing tension in the past century. Thirdly, it analyzes the works by a growing number of Western intellectuals who lay blame for the "clash" of these "world civilizations," especially between Islam and the West, on the doorsteps of the Muslim world. In an attempt to deconstruct such theories, the paper argues that such views are dangerously wrong, yet discouragingly widespread. Fourthly, the paper argues that it would be wrong to essentialize Islam or Christianity, or any religious tradition as holding any set of beliefs that can be characterized as good or bad from an ethical point of

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view.   It further asserts that religious traditions are social and doctrinal constructs that dispute issues on the basis of cherished texts and traditions.   Such issues as just wars, abortion, marriage and family life generate contested positions within religious traditions. To fail to see that is to fail to understand the nature of religion in human societies.

Deliberation on ethical society in the light of the tragic events of September 11 and their aftermath is a daunting task, for it involves quite complicated questions and problems. Different major civilizations in the world construe their notion of an ethical society, both in its specifics and in broad outline, in very different ways. Does the present trend toward globalization in economics and certain legal areas such as human rights carry with it the possibility of a common global understanding of social ethics and moral behavior? There is clear evidence that this is a troubled expectation.[1]   Another problem is how are we to read and interpret that text – the text of September 11, or "Black Tuesday" as it has been called?   Is there a common way for Muslims in Dhaka and non-Muslims in Atlanta, Georgia to understand the context of the events leading up to September 11 "on the road to September 11" as postcolonial history has been referred to recently.   It is especially daunting for me, a stranger among new friends in a land so much closer in many ways to the military response to September 11 than I have been these past few months. In this part of the world, perhaps October 7 – the date that a high-tech war was launched in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al-Qa`ida – is of equal or greater moral concern. At least, that was a point made to an American university audience by my colleague, Abdullahi an-Na`im – an audience that could not fully comprehend the human toll of the response, despite 24/7 television coverage by the cable news channels. In this difficult situation, I have a fear of

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1   I am thinking here of massive demonstrations at locales around the world against meetings of the World Trade Organization and corporate culture.

being able to say too little that is not trivial or uninsightful. Since September 11, I have begun to feel old but not wise. Although I am deeply concerned about the problem of global ethical societies, I am not in possession of simple answers or moral certainties, which, if we would just follow them, would produce a less hostile world for our children and students. You will not be surprised to hear me say, however, that I was convinced I had the answers when I was younger, marching in demonstrations against all sorts of things my parents were quite comfortable with.

There is also the danger of saying too much, of trying to respond to the enormity of the problem of social conflict and trying to have answers for all of it. We are familiar with those authors, commentators and politicians, who have not been timid or slow to serve their uncooked opinions and explain their drafty world views to the rest of us from the moment September 11 happened until now. I am reminded of a cartoon that was called to my attention a few years ago of a Native American Indian sending smoke signals to another Indian on a distant hill. The first drawing is of an Indian releasing three little puffs of smoke with his blanket over the fire—sending a signal. In the second frame, another Indian is looking at the smoke signal way off in the background. In the third frame, as the second Indian sets out to reply, he accidentally kicks over a pot of grease onto his little smoke-signal fire, and a great bellowing of smoke rises into the air and fills the sky. In the final drawing of the cartoon, the first Indian looks wide-eyed and amazed and exclaims: "Wow! What an answer!" In trying to send messages about the nature of an ethical society and the meaning of September 11, I am all too aware that it would be easy to pour the wrong stuff on the fire and send an overwhelmingly wrong message.

I am not the only one to be in danger of saying too much. One gets the impression listening to and reading the unending wisdom of media pundits, academic experts and national leaders the past few

months that trying to put "spin" on the events of September 11 and what has happened since then has been rather like feeding the flames of ignorance with a lot of messy and confused moral, religious, and social discourse.   And the character of misunderstanding and miscommunication that has come to light especially since September 11 has cast this misunderstanding — this contest of very different understandings — very often as a conflict between Islam and the West, between Islam and Judeo-Christendom, and perhaps most consistently between Islam and America. I hope that what I have to say today will contribute, at least in some small way, to a deconstruction of those misunderstandings that September 11 and October 7 revealed so dramatically.

Let me try to illustrate the problem we face from a recent experience. Last October, about a month after the destruction of the World Trade Center, several of us from Emory University and the University of North Carolina joined colleagues at Duke University in a televideo hookup over the internet with other colleagues in North America, Europe and the Middle East. We were searching for ways that we as scholars of Islamic history and societies – as Muslims and non-Muslims, as Americans, Europeans and Middle Easterners (several Arabs and Muslims were in the American studios) – could contribute to a greater mutual understanding between peoples separated by so much geography, culture, language, and religious background. At one poignant moment, a colleague in Cairo told the rest of us that several of his Egyptian Muslim students had come up to him at a subway train station, outside of class, and asked: "Why do Americans hate Muslims so much?" Immediately, several of us in the studio at Duke University looked at each other and smiled, for each of us had students in class on September 11 and in the days that followed who asked: "Why do they [meaning Muslims in the ME and Asia] hate us?" Indeed, "Why do they hate us?" has appeared as a headline or as the title of a special series of articles in many of the major media, such as the Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, and

the cable channel MSNBC. It has also been reported as a byline to articles about the Muslim world under the title "Muslims Ask: Why Do They Hate Us?"[2] I would submit that when non-Muslim Americans ask, "why do they hate us?" it is in response to September 11. When Muslims in Asia and the Middle East ask the same question, however, it is more likely in response to October 7.

In the next few minutes, I want to raise the following four topics for discussion. They represent issues and problems that I have been thinking about and concerned with for some time. I will try to connect them together, and I want to hear your own thoughts about them in the discussion that follows. Firstly, I will address the issue of religion and violence. Does religion in the form of religious convictions or religious practices cause social violence or cure it – or both? What does the historical record show? Perhaps in discussions we can come back to this issue and discuss the role many scholars now believe that religion can play in conflict resolution; I believe that such a role exists in interest-based negotiations between conflicting parties, but that religious convictions sometimes override the appeal to group interests in conflict resolution and management. Secondly, I want to present briefly a theory of world civilizations, each with their own ethical and cultural systems, which have a history of two and a half millennia of interaction, though with increasing tension in the past century. Thirdly, I want to comment on the growing number of Western intellectuals who lay blame for the "clash" of these world "civilizations," especially between Islam and the West, on the doorsteps of the Muslim world. Such views are dangerously wrong, yet discouragingly widespread. In deconstructing such arguments, however, I do not want to claim, as many of my colleagues do, that Islam – or any religion – is, if properly understood, innocent of

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2   See, among others, the following web site about Muslims who ask this question about Americans:
    http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/MiddleEast/TerrorInUSA/MuslimsAsk.asp).

violence against other human beings in the name of religion. Fourthly, I will close with a brief discussion of why, as a historian of religion, I think we make the wrong move if we try to essentialize Islam or Christianity, or any religious tradition as holding any set of beliefs that can be characterized as good, or bad from an ethical point of view. Religious traditions are social and doctrinal constructs that dispute issues on the basis of cherished texts and traditions. Such issues as just wars, abortion, marriage and family life generate contested positions within religious traditions. To fail to see that is to fail to understand the nature of religion in human societies.

1. RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

The association of religion with war and other forms of violence inflicted upon human beings is very old. Many examples come to mind. The Thirty Years War between Protestants and Roman Catholics, which devastated Europe between 1618 and 1648, is one that drove Western intellectuals and philosophers, like Voltaire to regard organized religion as a major cause of ignorance and intolerance in human affairs. In modern times Protestant/Catholic violence in Northern Ireland is a grim and tragic reminder that the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 – an attempt at a political solution to religiously motivated violence – was not a final solution to religious wars within European Christendom. Some six centuries prior to the Thirty Years War, Pope Urban II appealed to Christian faith and sensibilities in mounting an army to sweep across Europe to fight the "Saracen infidels" in Palestine, in 1095 in the first of several crusades.

A famous exchange of letters between Saladin (Salah al-Din), the Ayyubid Sultan, and Richard the Lion Hearted, King of the Franks has been preserved in Arabic by Imad al-Din al-Isfahani (d. 1201). From this work we see once again how rulers and commanders freely use the discourse and warrants of religion to

justify war and violence. Imad al-Din's history of the fall of Jerusalem records the following message sent by Richard to Salah al-Din in the year 1191:

> I am to salute you, and tell you that the Muslims and Franks are bleeding to death, the country is utterly ruined, and goods and lives have been sacrificed on both sides. The time has come to stop this. The points at issue are Jerusalem, the Cross, and the land. Jerusalem is for us an object of worship that we could not give up even if there were only one of us left. The land from here to beyond the Jordan must be given to us. The Cross, which for you is simply a piece of wood with no value, is for us of enormous importance. If the Sultan will be gracious enough to return it to us, we shall be able to make peace and to rest from this endless labour.

After reading this message, Salah al-Din consulted with his advisors, and then wrote this reply to Richard:

> Jerusalem is ours as much as yours; indeed, it is even more sacred to us than it is to you, for it is the place from which our prophet accomplished his nocturnal journey [into the seven Heavens] and the place where our community will gather [on the Day of Judgment]. Do not imagine that we can renounce it or vacillate on this point. The land was also originally ours, whereas you have only just arrived and have taken it over only because of the weakness of the Muslims living there are the time. God will not allow you to rebuild a single stone as long as war lasts. As for the Cross, its possession is a good card in our hand and it cannot be surrendered except in exchange for something of outstanding value to all Islam.[3]

There is in Richard's letter an appeal to interests on both sides in King Richard's letter – cessation of bloodshed and the wholesale

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3   Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. E. J. Costello (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984 [1957]), pp. 225-26.

destruction of material property – but the inviolable nature of the sacred, apparently could not be negotiated. For Richard and the Christians it is the Cross, a thing. For Salah al-Din and the Muslims it is the Dome of the Rock and Jerusalem, a place. Between Salah al-Din the Muslim and Richard the Christian their claims on each were dogmatically nonnegotiable. I want to ask: What possibility and indeed responsibility was there within Christendom and Islamdom to debate and resolve the negotiability of these absolute claims that, if continued, would lead to continued war and violence?

For now, I want to say a few words about world civilizations from a very broad and comparative perspective.

2. COMPARATIVE CIVILIZATIONS

I want to talk about the strikingly similar ways in which the major civilizations of the world established themselves and their religious and moral systems and worldviews. As a college student, majoring in philosophy, I was greatly impressed by theory of Swiss existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers, who held that an axial or pivotal age had occurred in much of the world around 600 BC. It was then that many of the great prophets in the Middle East, India and China lived and founded the religious civilizations of those parts of the world. Later, when a graduate student of Near Eastern Studies, I again encountered the theory of an "Axial Age" in the writings of the historian Marshall Hodgson.

The title of Hodgson's great work, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*,[4] indicates the important difference between his work and earlier historians, conscience, that is also one of the themes of this Conference. Hodgson was committed to comparative world history, not just

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4   3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Middle Eastern history. He believed that Islamic history was not adequate explained or understood if narrated primarily as an Arabian phenomenon. No civilization can be adequately understood if studied only on its own terms, as if each civilization existed in isolation from the rest of the world. He also believed that prophets, religious teachings and religious practices played an important role in the unfolding of the history of a civilization that many earlier histories had neglected. In his important opening chapter on "the World of Islam" after a long introduction on his method, Hodgson writes eloquently about the significance of the Axial Age, for world history, which he dates from 800 to 200 BC. It was during this time that Hebrew prophets who inspired all three of the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – lived and wrote their moral and theological criticisms of the divided kingdoms of Israel. It was also the time when Zoroaster in ancient Iran, the Buddha and Mahavira in India, and Confucius and Lao-ze in China were teaching and writing works that inspired the rise of great urban civilizations along the great rivers in the Middle East, India, and China, as urban civilization produce wealth and power in the hands of the few. Each prophet and each civilization was concerned with social justice and individual freedom. Great literary classics, both of a religious and of a legal nature, were produced at this time. These sacred religious writings produced classes of literati and scribes, as well as religious functionaries, whose major responsibility was to preserve and pass down the moral wisdom and teachings of the founding prophets from one generation to the next. Among the many values taught by the ancient prophets and shared among ancient world civilizations was the divine as a source of religious truth and ethical norms for society. In one way or another, each civilization came to teach the importance of blood relationships and honoring one's parents and family, and refraining from acts, such as murder, stealing and adultery, which fracture and harm the social fabric.

The point I wish to make is that the Axial Age provided a basis for major world civilizations to share, if much of the time in isolation from each other, common human social and moral values. I am not trying to make the vapid claim that all religions and all value systems are the same. The most forceful argument against that claim is that within each of the great civilizations there were opposing schools that construed social ethics and religious doctrine quite differently. What I do want to argue is that a basis exists in the legal and ethical systems of the modern descendents of the Axial Age civilizations that makes it possible to construct a concept of a common humanity, that despite our differences, there are certain things that as human beings we share and can appeal to. I would argue that it is possible to appeal to common human interests that we share across our societies, Asian and Euro-American, Islamic, Christian and secular, in coming to know each other better than we did on September 11. It is that belief and hope, conditioned as it is by the events of September 11 and October 7, which brings me now to our next consideration: the growing suspicion on the part of many interpreters that a postmodern clash of civilizations is not only possible, it is necessary!

3. ISLAM AND THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

I come, then, to the third of the points I announced earlier, namely, that a growing number of Western and some non-Western intellectuals see Islam as the major cause of social disorder and violence in the world. The effect of their writing has been to dismiss Islam as a source or model of an ethical society in the modern world. Who are these critics who write about Islam in such negative terms?

It is easy to dismiss the recent vituperative remarks about Islam by V. S. Naipaul on February 22, made at a literary conference in India, in which he managed to insult Hindus, Muslims, feminists, postcolonial theorists, and practically everyone. His Hindu colleagues called him rude and found him impossible to try to have a

conversation with during the conference. His longstanding criticism of Islam was published, *inter alia*, in two books: *Among the Believers* (1980) and *Beyond Belief* (1998). These have been widely read in the English speaking world and have drawn a great of critical acclaim as well as not a small amount of negative criticism. I had the distinction of traveling to three of the four countries Naipaul wrote about in *Among the Believers* a couple of years after he published his book and of meeting many of the same people he had interviewed in Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. I hope I do not need to belabor the point that my own impressions of the people he met and wrote about were very different from his. Writing in the 6-12 August, 1998 issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Edward Said concluded that

> [Naipaul's] obsession with Islam caused him somehow to stop thinking, to become instead a kind of mental suicide compelled to repeat the same formula over and over [namely, 'Muslims who are not Arabs are inauthentic converts, doomed to this wretched false destiny']. This is what I would call an intellectual catastrophe of the first order. . . . The great pity is that Naipaul's latest book on Islam will be considered a major interpretation of a great religion, and more Muslims will suffer and be insulted. And the gap between them and the West will increase and deepen.

Naipaul's earlier thesis that Islam, especially fundamentalist Islam, has been a constant source of religious and communal violence in the contemporary world has found some other notable supporters. Another troubling intellectual contribution to the critique of Islam came in 1989, this time from an academic, with the publication by Francis Fukuyama of an article titled "The End of History and the Last Man" published in *The National Interest*, later published as a book by the same title by the Free Press in New York in 1992. Fukuyama argued the Hegelian thesis that universal progress through history would soon leave liberal democracy as the highest order of human society. More recently he has become more

concerned about radical Islam in an essay titled "Today's New Fascists," where he highlighted what he termed today's new breed of "Islamo-Facscists." Sticking with his Hegelian dialectic, Fukuyama argued that radical, anti-liberal movements in Islam, given to violence and social disorder, would soon be overcome by liberal and modernist movements, toward which he believes history is necessary evolving.

Among those who wrote approvingly of Fukuyama's earlier work was the Harvard political scientist, Samuel P Huntington. In the summer of 1993, Huntington contributed a now infamous article to the Washington, D.C. journal *Foreign Affairs* titled "The Clash of Civilizations." According to the editors, that article caused a bigger stir than any other article published in the journal in over 45 years. Later that summer, I attended a conference of American and Arab Muslim scholars of religion in Salzburg, Austria, and there was much talk about and criticism of the article among those present. It had an immediate audience around the globe. Far from being dissuaded of the validity of his thesis by his many critics, Huntington answered them with a book-length study titled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

Huntington's thesis is well known and need not detain us much here. What is less well known is that Huntington took his title, "clash of civilizations" without acknowledging his source from an article that Princeton historian Bernard Lewis wrote over a decade ago. In "The Roots of Muslim Rage", *The Atlantic Monthly* September 1990:52-60, Lewis concluded that in the aftermath of reactions against Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses,* "we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a **clash of civilizations** –perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our. secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both." To his credit, Lewis

went on to say, "it is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but **equally irrational** reaction against that rival." However, that balancing cautionary note has been lost, in Lewis's subsequent reflections. It is evident in the most contemporary salvo fired by Prof. Lewis in his book just published, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

This phenomenon of finding Islamic civilization prone toward violence and therefore ethically deficient in such concepts as just war theory, is what my friend and colleague from Florida State, John Kelsay, calls putting Islam in the dock. A few years ago during the height of the war in Bosnia, Kelsay wrote an essay in which he chided Bernard Lewis and other critics who are taken seriously in Washington and in the national media. In Kelsay's words, in writing about Islam in order to influence American foreign policy, Lewis and others "are no longer dealing strictly in matters of policy; they are making normative judgments about Islamic tradition."[5]

Along with such American colleagues as John Esposito, Bruce Lawrence, and John Kelsay, I believe that Western intellectuals have something to learn from Islamic history and Muslim intellectuals about ethics and society. The tired old criticisms of Islamic civilization as violent and driven to dominate the rest of the world go back very far in history; Naipaul, Huntington and Lewis are just the most recent purveyors of this argument against Islam. My only criticism of Esposito, Lawrence and other defenders of Islam in the present debate about a clash of civilizations is that we much not try to defend a counter-thesis which claims that Islamic civilization is entirely innocent of violence against the other or of the misuse of power. The game of debate must not be allowed to blind us to the misuses of power and of actions taken, sometimes driven by religious

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5   John Kelsay, "Bosnia and the Muslim Critique of Modernity," in *Religion and Justice in the War over Bosnia*, ed. G. Scott Davis (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 119.

conviction, that have led to great social injustices. Islamic history, like Western and Eastern Christian history, and Asian Confucian history, is replete with examples, such as the Thirty Years War in Europe I mentioned earlier, that require moral condemnation and our every attempt to prevent such tragic events from happening again.

4.   RELIGION AND THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

About a week after September 11, I was interviewed in my office by a reporter for the American Broadcasting Company's (ABC) nightly news program, The Evening News with Peter Jennings. As these things often go, they taped me for over a half an hour in order to get a 5-second spot for the national broadcast. The one question the reporter kept asking over and over again was: "Does Islam teach that it is alright to kill non-Muslims?" I repeatedly refused to answer the question as it was put to me, with the provision that it was not that simple. The problem was, the reporter wanted a sound bite, and I wanted to give a lecture. Eventually, she won, and I appeared on national television saying something taken completely out of context.

In Islam, as in other traditions, there are legal, ethical and theological issues that are in dispute among religious scholars. The different schools or *madhhab*s disputed with each other from the same scriptural sources, but they often take diametrically opposed positions in their interpretations on any issue, such as just causes for war, the reasons for going to war, the treatment of noncombatants, the response to apostasy, heresy, marriage and family, etc. Religion, therefore, is not a neat set of doctrines and teachings on which all interpreters and members of that faith agree. Religion is more like a set of issues which are troubling to the jurists and theologians and intellectuals, and about which they disagree and argue in the search for truth.

In early Christianity it was the nature of Jesus Christ that became the subject of much theological inquiry and dispute. Was Christ human or divine, or both human and divine, or half and half, or fully divine but only appearing to be human? There never was and never has been an answer to the Christological problem that has satisfied all Christians. This does not mean that Christians who disputed this issue were bad Christians. As an historian of religion, as opposed to being a Christian theologian of this or that school, my task would not be to tell my students which doctrine of Christ is the true Christian belief. Rather, my task as a scholar is to explain the issues, how they arose, why they were important, and what were the consequences for those who held this or that belief, and for those who refused to hold this or that belief.

At about the same time as my adventure with ABC Nightly News, my friend Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl , who teaches Islamic Law at the University of California Law School, was asked whether Muslims advocate violence against Americans and other non-Muslims, and if so, whether they do so properly. (The venue in the first instance was NPR Radio, but the question came up later in other media contexts.) Khaled's answer, which became controversial, was that there are some voices within Islam that do advocate violence against those who are perceived by some Muslims as being the enemies of Islam. He pointed out to his media interlocutors that it is a problem for Muslims to deal with, an issue they must debate and resolve according to the warrants of their faith and ethics. What he was saying was that the use of lethal force for religious causes is not just an ethical issue as ethics is understood in liberal, democratic society; it is also a theological and legal issue with a history of argumentation as to whether and when to mount force against an enemy.

For example, in 1998, Usama bin Laden issued a *fatwa* which was cosigned by Rifa`a Taha and others and published in the

Newspaper *al-Quds al-'Arabi* on January 23, in which he advocated a *jihad* against Crusaders and Jews, symbols for the West. In the *fatwa* he argued for the necessity of such an offensive *jihad*, citing several Qur'an passages, and with the following statement: "for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors."[6] Although bin Laden was to make similar statements that were broadcast on the al-Jezira Cable Television Network after September 11, it is important to recognize that he and others had been making such arguments for some time, using the traditional modes of Islamic discourse and reasoning. Other Muslim jurists answered and refuted bin Ladin's arguments, and challenged his authority to issue *fatwas*. This is what I take Khaled Abou El Fadl to be referring to when he says that there are legal and moral issues that divide Muslim thinking and that liberal and progressive Muslims will have to address within the discourse of Islamic law and theology.

There are other examples, such as the document known as "The Neglected Duty" (*al-farida al-gha'iba*), which is said to have inspired the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt, and the *fatwa* written against the document by the Grand Mufti of Egypt at the time, al-Tantawi. Hans Jansen's monograph study of this document offers an important look into how the ethics of the just war and combat are debated within the Islamic system of legal reasoning and ethics.[7]

These examples also bear out my point that Islamic law and theology are dynamic systems of thought and argument for resolving issues in dispute. In response to September 11, Western non-Muslims of good will have by and large sought to find those Muslims who

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6   *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23 February 1998, p. 1ff.

7   Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

argue that suicide bombing and the killing of innocents is terribly wrong from a Muslim as well as an ethical point of view, and then to identify any Muslim who holds a different point of view as being a "bad Muslim." The point I have been trying to make is that this is the wrong road to take in cross-cultural and cross-tradition discussions about an ethical society. We 'who are not Muslims' have our own religious history, including not a little violence that we must come to terms with. In our larger conversations with each other, we must first listen to and learn about the legal and ethical issues in debate on the other side. And if we listen carefully, I suspect that non-Muslims from the West will find that the debate is not so remote after all. We have had our own "Culture Wars" in the 1980s and 1990s and they are still going on. Moreover, many of the most troubling issues in Islamic thought today have their historical roots in the age of colonial rule and postcolonial liberation. In that sense, some of the most difficult ethical issues for Muslim intellectuals are not just about the intricacies of Islamic law, but also about the West and its historical relationship with the Muslim world. But I think the world knew that as the dust began to settle from the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. And that is why it is good to talk with one another at forums such as this. Because our common humanity and our broadly defined moral heritage in the Abrahamic religions and from the Axial age, I submit that Muslims, Christians and Jews have a basis for understanding how we each think about and make judgments about the great moral issues of the day.