

### Chapter 3 – Man in Society

There is no doubt that a central aim of the Qur'ān is to establish a viable social order on earth that will be just and ethically based. Whether ultimately it is the individual that is significant and society merely the necessary instrument for his creation or *vice versa* is academic, for individual and society appear to be correlates. There is no such thing as a societiless individual. Certainly, the concepts of human action we have discussed, particularly that of *taqwā*, are meaningful only within a social context. Even the idea of "being unjust to oneself [*ẓulm al-naḥs*]," so that individuals and particularly societies are eventually destroyed, really means destruction of the right to exist in a social and historical context. When the Qur'ān talks about the death of individuals like Pharaoh or Korah, it is basically talking about the self-destructiveness of a way of life, of a society, of a type of civilization.

Whenever there is more than one human being. God enters directly into the relationship between them and constitutes a third dimension which can be ignored by the two humans only at their own risk:

Do you not see that God knows everything in the heavens and the earth? There is no secret cliquing of three but that God is their fourth, nor of five but that He is their sixth, nor of less than these or more but that He is with them wherever they be. (58.al-Mujādilah:7)

This verse is one of the Qur'ān's recurrent criticisms of the small but frequent conspiratorial meetings of the opponents of Islam (whether Meccan pagans or Madinan hypocrites), and while the immediate meaning is that no matter how secretly they talk, God knows what they say, the more general idea obviously is that God is present wherever two or more persons are present. God's presence is not merely cognitive, for His condition entails other consequences—most importantly, judgment upon cumulative human activity. This is the meaning of the frequent Qur'ānic reminders that God is ever wakeful, watching, witnessing, and, so far as societies are concerned, "He is sitting in a watch tower" (89.al-Fajr:14), and "no atom in the heavens or the earth ever escapes His notice" (10.Yūnus:61; 34.Saba':3).

The Qur'ān's goal of an ethical, egalitarian social order is announced with a severe denunciation of the economic disequilibrium and social inequalities prevalent in contemporary commercial Meccan society. The Qur'ān began by criticizing two closely related aspects of that society: the polytheism or multiplicity of gods which was symptomatic of the segmentation of society, and the gross socioeconomic disparities that equally rested on and perpetuated a pernicious divisiveness of mankind. The two are obverse and converse of the same coin: only God can ensure the essential unity of the human race as His creation, His subjects, and those responsible finally to Him alone. The economic disparities were most persistently criticized, because they were the most difficult to remedy and were at the heart of social discord—although tribal rivalries, with their multiple entanglements of alliance, enmity, and vengeance, were no less serious, and the welding of these tribes into a political unity was an imperative need. Certain abuses of girls, orphans, and women, and the institution of slavery demanded desperate reform.

Looking first at the economic sphere: Mecca was a prosperous commercial town, but it had a subterranean world of exploitation of the weak (the tribeless, slaves, and hirelings), and a variety of fraudulent commercial and monetary practices. The Qur'ān

bears eloquent testimony to a situation characterized by selfish and callous un-charitableness and boastful conspicuous consumption on the one hand and grinding poverty and helplessness on the other:

Competition in accumulating wealth keeps you preoccupied until you visit your graves. Nay, you shall find out soon; nay, nay, you shall find out soon. (102.at-Takāthur:1-4)

Woe betide every fault-finder, back-slider, who collects wealth and counts it. He thinks his wealth will bestow eternal life upon him! Nay, he shall certainly be thrown in *huṭama* and do you know what *huṭama* is? It is God's fire that He lights and that descends upon the hearts [of callous miserly people]. (104.al-Humazah:1-6)

The Qur'ān is certainly not against earning wealth. On the contrary, it sets a high value on wealth, which it terms "the bounty of God [*fadl Allāh*]" (62.al-Jumu'ah:10; 73.al-Muzzammil:20; 5.al-Mā'idah:2; cf. 24.an-Nūr:22; 27.an-Naml:16; 30.ar-Rūm:23) and "good [*khair*]" (2.al-Baqarah:105, 215, 272-273; 11.Hūd:84; 22.al-Ḥajj:11; 38.Ṣād:32; 50.Qāf:25; 68.al-Qalam:12; 70.al-Ma'ārij:21). It counts peace and prosperity among the highest blessings of God:

How accustomed have the Quraysh [the mercantile tribe of Mecca] become to their winter journey [to Byzantium] and their summer journey [to the Indian Ocean] [so that they take them for granted]. Let them, then, serve the Lord of this House [the Ka'ba] Who has given them plenty instead of hunger, and peace instead of war. (106.Quraysh:1-4)

But the abuse of wealth prevents man from pursuing higher values and renders it "a pittance of this world" and a "delusion of this world" (3.Āli 'Imrān:14, 185, 197; 4.an-Nisā':77; 9.al-Tawbah:38; 10.Yūnus:23, 70; 13.ar-Ra'd:26; 16.an-Nahl:117; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:60; 40.Ghāfir:39; 42.ash-Shūrā:36; 43.az-Zukhruf:35; 57.al-Hadeed:20). The Meccans' single-minded pursuit of wealth is said to be "the height of their knowledge" (53.an-Najm:30), since they knew only the "exterior of life, being heedless of its higher ends" (30.ar-Rūm:7).

In the absence of concern for the welfare of the poor, even prayers became hypocritical:

Did you see the one who gives the lie to the Faith? It is he who maltreats orphans and works little for the feeding of the poor. Woe betide, then, those who pray, yet are neglectful of their prayers—those who pray for show and even deny the use of their utensils [to the poor]. (107.al-Mā'ūn:1-7)

This lack of consideration for the economically needy is the ultimate expression of pettiness and narrowness of mind—the basic weakness of man.

The Meccans contended that they had earned their wealth, which they, therefore, rightfully owned and which they could spend or dispose of as they wished. The Qur'ān insisted, first, that not all wealth earned was rightfully the earner's; the needy had also a "right" in it: "In their wealth there is a definite right of the indigent and the deprived" (70.al-Ma'ārij:25; also 51.adh-Dhāriyāt:19). Secondly, the Qur'ān told the Meccans that even the wealth they rightfully owned they could not spend just as they wished, for they could not become islands of plenty in a sea of poverty: "Does man think that none can put reins on his wealth when he says, 'I have thrown away stacks

of money [on such-and such]' ?" (90.al-Balad:5-6). The people of the prophet Shu'aib tell him, "Shu'aib! do your prayers order you that we should give up those [idols] which our fathers worshipped or that we should desist from doing with our wealth whatever we please?" (11.Hūd:87; cf. also 2.al-Baqarah:272; 30.ar-Rūm:38, 39; 76.al-Insān:9).

The Qur'ān exhorted Muslims "to spend in the cause of Allāh" and thus "establish credit with God, so that God may repay you manifold," rather than invest money in usury in order to suck the blood of poor people (30.ar-Rūm:39; 2.al-Baqarah:245; 5.al-Mā'idah:12; 57.al-Hadeed:11, 18; 64.at-Taghābun:17; 73.al-Muzzammil:20). In a lengthy Madinan passage (2.al-Baqarah:261-274), the Qur'ān states that expenditure on the needy is like a single grain that grows seven ears of corn, each ear containing a hundred or more grains, that those who spend in order to show off or who want recognition from their beneficiaries are like rocks upon which there is a thin layer of earth which is easily washed away by a torrential rain, leaving the bare rock that grows nothing, while those who spend "seeking God's pleasure" are like the highlands which, if watered by rains, bring forth plenty but which even in the absence of rains get enough dew because of their height to grow a crop. It then states: "Satan inspires you with [fear of] poverty [for investing in society] and commands you obscenities; God, on the other hand, promises you forgiveness and prosperity [for such investment] (2.al-Baqarah:268)." Indeed, the Qur'ān holds that one major cause of the decay of societies is the neglect into which they are cast by their prosperous members:

When God tests man and raises his position and gives him plenty, he says, My Lord has favored me; but when God tests him and puts strict reins on his means of sustenance, he says, My Lord has forsaken me! Nay [it is not so], but you do not do good to orphans nor work for the weal of the poor; you [wrongfully] devour inheritances wholesale and are excessively attached to wealth. (89.al-Fajr:15-20)

Two important measures taken were the banning of usury and the imposition of the *zakāt* tax. The ground for the banning of usury was prepared in the Qur'ān:

The wealth you invest in usury so that it should grow at the expense of other people's wealth, does not grow in the sight of God, but whatever wealth you spend on welfare [*zakāt*— supporting sincerely the cause of God—it is multiplied several-fold. (30.ar-Rūm:39)

It should be noted that the repeated phrase concerning social expenditure that it "grows several-fold" has the practice of usury in view, since usurious deals increased the invested sums "many many-fold [*ad'āfan mudā'fa*]" (3.Āli 'Imrān:130). It was then banned (2.al-Baqarah:275-280) with a stern warning that God and His Messenger would wage war against violators; the alleged equation between usury and "lawful commerce" was rejected; and the antithesis between usury and welfare spending was once again underlined. Creditors were asked to recover only their capital sums, but "if you forego even that it would be better for you—if you only knew."

The prohibition of usury was essential for the public welfare; the medieval lawyers of Islam, however, drew the conclusion from this that all forms of interest are banned, a stand to which even today the vast majority of Muslims still cling, despite the fundamental change in the role of modern banking in the context of a "development economy." It is some measure of the current confusion in thought that

numerous educated Muslims use Keynesian or Marxist arguments to support their position.

With regard to distributive justice, the Qur'ān laid down the principle that "wealth should not circulate only among the rich" (59.al-Ḥaṣhr:7). Although these words were spoken in the context of the distribution of booty among the poor Meccan immigrants to Madina to the exclusion of more well-to-do Madinese, who consequently raised complaints, they point to a central theme in the general economic policy of the Qur'ān. Thus, after the Qur'ān denounced the Meccans for hoarding wealth and exploiting the poor classes, in Madina the *zakāt* tax was imposed. Its purposes are detailed in 9:60:

The *zakāt* is [not for the rich but] only for the indigent and the poor, those who collect the tax, those whose hearts are to be won over [for Islam], for [ransoming] war-captives, for the relief of those who are in chronic debt, for the "cause of God" [*jihād* and social welfare purposes like education and health] and for the wayfarer [facilitating travel].

These categories of expenditure, including social welfare in a wide sense and comprising relief from chronic indebtedness, wages for the administrative service (tax-collectors), diplomatic expenditure ("for the winning of hearts"), defense, education, health, and communications, are so broad that they comprise all the activities of a state. Yet, the Muslims came to understand these functions characteristically narrowly under a hidebound tradition, and *zakāt* became, in the course of time, necessarily defunct.

At the sociopolitical level, the Qur'ān aims to strengthen the basic family unit comprising parents and children with aged grandparents, on the one hand, and the larger Muslim community, on the other, at the expense of the tribe. Filial loyalty is emphasized (2.al-Baqarah:83; 4.an-Nisā':36; 6.al-An'ām:151; 17.al-Isrā':23; 29.al-'Ankabūt:8; 31.Luqmān:14; 46.al-Aḥqāf:15). The bond of the community is strewn over all the pages of the Qur'ān, especially in the Madinan *suras*. All Muslims are declared to be "brothers" (49.al-Ḥujurāt:10). They are together as impregnable "as a building reinforced with lead" (61.aṣ-Ṣaff:4). They give priority to needy Muslims over themselves even if they themselves are in need, and "whosoever is saved from the pettiness of his own self, they are the successful ones" (59.al-Ḥaṣhr:9).

There may, of course, arise serious tensions between natural blood ties (including filial piety), on the one hand, and loyalty to truth, righteousness, or the community on the other, in which case unflinching concern for the latter is uncompromisingly demanded. The story of Abraham and his idolatrous father is told several times, of how the former forsook the latter despite his tender feelings for him, for the sake of God. Although Abraham is said (6.al-An'ām:74; 19.Maryam:42; 60.al-Mumtaḥinah:4, etc.) to pray on behalf of his father, it is also stated (9.al-Tawbah:114) that Abraham only prayed for his father "because he had promised him," hinting that if one's parents are entrenched in unrighteousness, even prayers on their behalf may not be a good thing. A stark announcement is made in 29.al-'Ankabūt:8: "We have certainly admonished man to be good to parents, but should they exert pressure upon you to associate others with Me [in worship] of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them." Again, the oft-repeated story of Noah and his idolatrous son who perished in the Flood has the same import.

Similarly, on the question of doing justice and giving truthful evidence, the command is clear:

O You who believe! establish justice, being witnesses for God—even if the evidence goes against yourselves or against your parents or kinsmen; and irrespective of whether the witness is rich or poor under all circumstances God has priority for you [over your relatives]. (4.an-Nisā':135)

Nor can one take an unfair attitude even towards enemies: "Let the enmity of a people [towards you] not determine you upon an unjust course; be fair, it is closer to *taqwā*" (5.al-Mā'idah:8; cf. also 5.al-Mā'idah:2). Finally, in *jihād* for Islam, any consideration of blood relationship is sternly warned against:

Say [O Muhammad! to Believers]: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your spouses, your clans, the wealth which you have acquired, the trade whose decline you fear and your houses with which you are so pleased—if all these things are dearer to you than God, His Messenger, and struggling in His Cause, then wait till God brings down His judgment; God guides not an unrighteous people. (9.al-Tawbah:24)

The Muslim community is, then, constituted by its ideology, Islam, whose aim is to "command good and forbid evil" (3.Āli 'Imrān:104, 110; 9.al-Tawbah:71)—which includes all specific commands and prohibitions and in fact represents the social dimensions of *taqwā*. To carry on their collective business (government), the Qur'ān asks them to institute *shūrā* (a consultative council or assembly), where the will of the people can be expressed by representation. *Shūrā* was a pre-Islamic democratic Arab institution which the Qur'ān (42.ash-Shūrā:38) confirmed. The Qur'ān commanded the Prophet himself (3.Āli 'Imrān:159) to decide matters only after consulting the leaders of the people. But in the absence of the Prophet, the Qur'ān (42.ash-Shūrā:38) seems to require some kind of collective leadership and responsibility. The Qur'ān will tolerate strongman rule only as a temporary arrangement if a people is immature, for how can a society whose people remain immature produce mature leaders? The efforts of several Muslims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to justify propagate the idea of a strongman rule, therefore, run in the very teeth of the Qur'ān.

At the same time, the Qur'ān sternly prohibits dissension and cliquing, whether it is the work of groups or of political parties (this not mean that political parties are prohibited; only cliquing), saying firmly:

Do you not see those to whom cliquing [*najwā*] had been prohibited but they [constantly] return to what was forbidden to them, and they clique with sinful and aggressive thoughts and in order to defy the Messenger. . . . O you who believe! if you hold secret meetings, do not hold them for sin, transgression, and defiance of the Messenger. . . . Secret meetings [cliquing] are inspired by Satan so that the generality of the Believers might come to grief. (58.al-Mujādilah:8-10; see also 58.al-Mujādilah:7; 4.an-Nisā':114)

Political parties, which in themselves can be salutary, must not degenerate into forces divisive of the community, but must consult with each other as well. The perils of democratic demagoguery must be avoided.

That is why, with all its concern for a liberal pluralism of institutions and basic individual freedom, the Qur'ān, under certain conditions, admits that the state, when representing society, is paramount. Rebellion is punishable by the severest penalties:

The punishment of those who take up arms against God and His Messenger and devote themselves to [corruption], creating discord on the earth, is that they should be killed or hung on the cross or their hands and feet should be severed from the opposite sides or they should be exiled—such should be their disgrace in this life, and in the hereafter there is greater chastisement for them, except those who repent before you lay your hands upon them. (5.al-Mā'idah:33-34)

When there is dissension and in-fighting between Muslim groups, the Qur'ān mandates arbitration; if one party rejects arbitration, it must be reduced by force of arms (49.al-Ḥujurāt:9; see also 49.al-Ḥujurāt:10). Again, a certain management or censorship of news in the public interest is called for where open propagation of news will demoralize the public:

And when news about peace or war reaches them [the "hypocrites" of Madina], they broadcast it [in order to demoralize the people]; but if they had left it to the Messenger and to those who are in authority from among themselves, they would know how to dispose of the matter. (4.an-Nisā':83)

As a general rule, Muslims are asked to "obey God, the Messenger, and those who are in authority from among yourselves [duly elected or appointed authority]" (4.an-Nisā':59).

But it must not be imagined that protest or rebellion is never allowed. Indeed, according to the Qur'ān, all Messengers after Noah were rebels against the established order. The real criterion for the Qur'ān is what it constantly calls "corruption on the earth" (*fasād fil-arḍ*), which can mean any state of affairs that leads to general lawlessness—political, moral, or social—when national or international affairs are out of control. The Qur'ān comments on the situation contemporary to the Prophet, probably referring to the international situation caused by the Perso-Byzantine wars (the *sura* opens with a reference to a battle in which the Byzantines were defeated):

Chaos [corruption] has become rampant on land and sea, thanks to what the hands of men have earned, so that [God] might make them taste something of what they have done; perchance they may return [to the right path]. Say, Travel over the earth and see for yourselves the end of those before you, most of whom assigned partners to God. (30.ar-Rūm:41-42; among other references to "corruption" or "corruption on the earth" and "reform" or "reforming the earth" are 2.al-Baqarah:11, 27, 205; 8.al-Anfāl:73; 7.al-A'rāf:56, 85; 11.Hūd:116; 12.Yūsuf:73; 13.ar-Ra'd:25; 16.an-Naḥl:88; 17.al-Isrā':4; 26.ash-Shu'arā':152; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:77)

The essence of all human rights is the equality of the entire human race, which the Qur'ān assumed, affirmed, and confirmed. It obliterated all distinctions among men except goodness and virtue (*taqwā*):

O you who believe! let not one group of men among you deride another, for they may be better than them; nor one group of women deride another, for they may be better than them, nor slander each other, nor call each other names—how bad it is to call [each other] by bad names after all of you became Believers. Whoever does not desist [from this], they are the unjust ones. O you who believe! avoid most suspicion, for some suspicion is sinful, and do not pry into others' affairs and do not backbite each other; would any one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?—how distasteful would it be to you! So fear God—indeed, God is forgiving and merciful. O people!

We have created [all of] you out of male and female, and we have made you into different nations and tribes [only] for mutual identification; [otherwise] the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one most possessed of *taqwā* [not one belonging to this or that race or nation]; God knows well and is best informed. (49.al-Ḥujurāt:11-13)

The reason the Qur'ān emphasizes essential human equality is that the kind of vicious superiority which certain members of this species assert over others is unique among all animals. This is where human reason appears in its most perverted forms. It is also true that the distance between human potentialities and their actual realization displays a range exemplified by probably no other species of living being: barring natural defects, there is hardly any difference, for example, between one specimen of earwig and another. But as we ascend the scale of evolution, the distances between potentialities and their actualities proportionately increases: among higher animals, like certain types of dogs, the gap is surprising.

But it is in man that the gap is most yawning and this is why the Qur'ān talks of God's Messengers, their conscience and sensitivity, the acuteness of their intelligence, and their godliness on the one hand, and on the other the bulk of mankind, who "are like animals, indeed, even more incapable of guidance, since they are so heedless!" (7.al-A'rāf:179). Further, man can exploit inherited or reflected power and glory in which no part whatever may be played by personal achievement—indeed, which may even lead to personal decadence, something quite irrational and yet man alone is capable and culpable of it.

To offset all these artificial but powerful sources of discrimination between man and man, it is necessary that man constantly remind himself that we "are all children of Adam and Adam was of dust" (as the Farewell Pilgrimage address of the Prophet has it), that in the darkness of the earth there are no distinctions and that while in the light of the heaven there are distinctions, *their* basis is that intrinsic worth which is called *taqwā*.

With perfect justification have the lawyers of Islam emphasized four fundamental freedoms or rights—life, religion, earning and owning property, and personal human honor and dignity (*'ird*), all of which it is the duty of the state to protect (for life, 5.al-Mā'idah:32; for religion and belief, 2.al-Baqarah:256; for property, all verses pertaining to the earning of wealth quoted earlier on the issue of economic justice and those on *zakāt*; for personal honor, all verses referring to man's nobility and dignity, and the story of the creation of Adam itself in 2.al-Baqarah:30 ff.). Any large-scale violation of these, including, of course, demeaning man through sheer poverty, would constitute "corruption on the earth." However, for the Qur'ān, there is equally "discord and corruption on the earth" when the opposite happens, i.e., when people do not carry out their obligations, upon which the Qur'ān lays even greater stress, "Obligations" and "rights" are the obverse and converse of the same coin; the one obviously cannot subsist for any length of time without the other. Indeed, the Qur'ān is a document that primarily exhorts to virtue and a strong sense of moral responsibility, suggesting that a comprehensive sense of responsibility can very well take care of all human rights; but the converse is not so true—indeed, a society that begins to understand "rights" in terms of permissiveness and lawlessness spells its own inevitable doom.

Through its more specific social reforms, the Qur'ān aimed at strengthening the weaker segments of the community: the poor, the orphans, women, slaves, those chronically in debt. In understanding the Qur'ān's social reforms, however, we will go

fundamentally wrong unless we distinguish between legal enactments and moral injunctions. Only by so distinguishing can we not only understand the true orientation of the Qur'ānic teaching but also solve certain knotty problems with regard, for example, to women's reform. This is where the Muslim legal tradition, which essentially regarded the Qur'ān as a lawbook and not *the religious source* of the law, went so palpably wrong.

To take the example of polygamy: the Qur'ān says, "If you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, then marry from among [orphaned] women such as you like, two, three, or four. But if you fear you will not be fair [to your wives], then [marry] only one; that is the safest course" (4.an-Nisā':3). In 4.an-Nisā':2 the Qur'ān accuses many guardians of orphan boys and girls (the abundance of orphans was a necessary consequence of frequent wars) of being dishonest with the orphans' properties—a theme which the Qur'ān had already begun to address in Mecca (6.al-An'ām:152; 17.al-Isrā':34) and emphasized even more in Madina (2.al-Baqarah:220; 4.an-Nisā':2, 6, 10, 127; for the general welfare of orphans, see 2.al-Baqarah:83, 177, 215; 4.an-Nisā':8, 36; 89.al-Fajr:17; 93.adh-Dhuḥā:9; 107.al-Mā'un:2; for their share in booty and that of the poor in general, see 8.al-Anfāl:41; 59.al-Ḥashr:7). It then says that since guardians do not deal honestly with orphaned women's properties, then they may marry them, up to four, *provided they can do justice among them*. That this is the correct interpretation of this text is clearly borne out by another passage of the same *sura* which appears to be earlier than 4.an-Nisā':3: "They ask you [O Muḥammad!] concerning women. Say: God gives you His decision concerning them, and what is being recited to you in the Book concerning orphan women to whom you do not give their due, but you would rather marry them, and [also concerning younger] and weaker children" (4.an-Nisā':127). This shows that this question arose within the special context of orphan girls; but the Qur'ān also states, "You shall never be able to do justice among women, no matter how much you desire to do so" (4.an-Nisā':129).

There is apparently a contradiction between permission for polygamy up to four; the requirement of justice among co-wives; and the unequivocal declaration that such justice is, in the nature of things, impossible. The traditionalist interpretation was that the permission clause has legal force while the demand for justice, though important, is left to the conscience of the husband (although traditional Islamic law gave women the right to seek remedy or divorce in case of gross injustice or cruelty). The weakness of this position from the viewpoint of normative religion is that something should be left to the good conscience of the husband, even though in the nature of things it is certain to be violated. Muslim modernists, on the other hand, tend to give primacy to the demand for justice plus the declaration of the impossibility of justice, and say that permission for polygamy was meant to be only temporary and for a restricted purpose.

The truth seems to be that permission for polygamy was at a legal plane while the sanctions put on it were in the nature of a *moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move*, since it was not possible to remove polygamy legally at one stroke. We encounter a similar phenomenon with regard to slavery: the Qur'ān legally accepted the institution of slavery, since it was impossible to legislate it away at one stroke, but strongly recommended and encouraged emancipation of slaves (90.al-Balad:13; 5.al-Mā'idah:89; 58.al-Mujādilah:3), and, in fact, asked Muslims to allow slaves to purchase their freedom by paying an agreed sum in installments (24.an-Nūr:33); the classical Muslim lawyers, however, interpreted this as a "recommendation," not a command.

That appears to have been the usual procedure in Qur'ānic legislation. Generally speaking, each legal or quasi-legal pronouncement is accompanied by a *ratio legis* explaining why a law is being enunciated. To understand a *ratio legis* fully, an understanding of the sociohistorical background (what the Qur'ānic commentators call "occasions of revelation") is necessary. The *ratio legis* is the essence of the matter, the actual legislation being its embodiment so long as it faithfully and correctly realizes the *ratio*; if it does not, the law has to be changed. When the situation so changes that the law fails to reflect the *ratio*, the law must change. Traditional lawyers, however, while recognizing the *ratio legis*, generally stuck to the letter of the law and enunciated the principle that "Although a law is occasioned by a specific situation, its application nevertheless becomes universal." For example, it is said (2.al-Baqarah:282) that in a credit transaction, the credit, large or small, should be written down and there should be two witnesses to the deed; the witnesses can be two reliable adult males or, if two are not available, then one male and two women "so that if one of the two women should be forgetful, the other would remind her." The reason for having two female witnesses instead of one male is that women would be more "forgetful" than men, since women in those days were normally not used to dealing with credit. According to the traditionalist understanding, the law that two female witnesses equal one male is eternal and a social change that enabled a woman to get used to financial transactions would be "un-Islamic." The modernist, on the other hand, would say that since the testimony of a woman being considered of less value than that of a man was dependent upon her weaker power of memory concerning financial matters, when women became conversant with such matters—with which there is not only nothing wrong but which is for the betterment of society—their evidence can equal that of men.

A similar problem is that of the general equality of men and women. The Qur'ān says, "And for women there are rights [over against men] commensurate with the duties [they owe men]—but men are one degree higher" (2.al-Baqarah:228). It is certain that, in general, the Qur'ān envisages division of labor and a difference in functions (although there is nothing in the Qur'ān against women earning wealth and being economically self-sufficient; indeed, the Prophet's first wife owned a business and the Qur'ān recognizes the full and independent economic personality of a wife or a daughter). The question is whether the verse quoted is a statement of inherent inequality. We are told that "Men are in charge of women because God has given some humans excellence over others and because men have the liability of expenditure [on women]." (4.an-Nisā':34). This shows that men have a functional, not inherent, superiority over women, for they are charged with earning money and spending it on women. We have said in the previous chapter that the Qur'ān speaks often of the superiority of some men in wealth, power, etc. and also of the superiority of some Messengers over others, but that this superiority is not inherent but purely functional. If a woman becomes economically sufficient, say by inheritance or earning wealth, and contributes to the household expenditure, the male's superiority would to that extent be reduced, since *as a human*, he has no superiority over his wife.

Religiously speaking, men and women have absolute parity: "Whosoever does good deeds, whether male or female, while being believers, they shall enter Paradise" (4.an-Nisā':124; 40.Ghāfir:40; also 16.an-Nahl:97). Often when people of virtue and *taqwā* are mentioned, the Qur'ān mentions males and females separately:

Those who have surrendered to God of males and females, those who believe of males and females, those who are sincere of males and females, those who are

truthful of males and females, those who are patient of males and females, those who fear God of males and females, those who give in charity of males and females, those who fast of males and females, those who preserve their private parts [from indecency] of males and females, those who remember God often of males and females—God has prepared for them forgiveness and great reward. (33.al-Aḥzāb:35)

Infanticide of girls, to which some Arabs resorted for reasons of poverty or honor, was abolished: "And when the girl buried alive shall be asked for what sin she was slain?" (81.at-Takwīr:8); again:

When one of them is given good news of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens as he tries to suppress his chagrin. He hides from people because of the evil the good news meant to him [and he wonders] whether he shall keep her in disgrace or shove her into the earth—beware! evil is what they judge. (16.an-Nāḥl:58-59; also 43.az-Zukhruf:17; 17.al-Isrā':31; 6.al-An'ām:140, 151; 60.al-Mumtaḥinah:12)

It is strongly suggested (6.al-An'ām:137) that Arab pagans used to justify the killing of their children on the authority of their gods.

The Qur'ān also prohibited the marriage of widows with their stepsons (4.an-Nisā':23; cf. also 4.an-Nisā':19). Essentially, the Qur'ān views the marital relationship as sustained by natural feelings of "love and mercy" (30.ar-Rūm:21) and it is stated: "They [our wives] are garments unto you and you are garments unto them" (2.al-Baqarah:187). Kind and generous treatment of women is laid down:

O You who believe! it is not permissible for you that you inherit from your womenfolk against their will; nor must you pressure them in order to make away with part of the wealth you have gifted them, except when they commit a clear obscenity [i.e., adultery]. And live with them in goodness; even when you dislike them [for certain things]; it is quite possible that you may dislike a thing, but God Has put a great deal of goodness in it. But when you do want to divorce a woman in favor of another [whom you want to marry], and you have already given your [existing] wife a large amount of wealth, do not take anything away from it—will you take it back as a pure falsehood and a clear sin? How will you take it back when you have fondly met each other in intimacy, and they have gotten solemn promises from you? (4.an-Nisā':19-21)

The question of the feeding of the infant after a divorce is discussed in 2.al-Baqarah:233 but in 2.al-Baqarah:229-32 the question of divorce itself is discussed. This passage clearly reveals how anxious the Qur'ān is to preserve a family by allowing remarriage, no doubt for the sake of children—something which contrasts oddly with the historic practice of the Muslim community:

Divorce is lawful twice; after that either you keep your wife in goodness or set her free in kindness. And it is not permissible for you to take back anything from her that you have gifted to her, except if the couple fears that they will not be able to observe the limits of God [i.e., that they will continue to quarrel and harm each other after divorce]; if you fear this, then there is nothing wrong if she gives up a part [of those gifts] willingly. These are the limits of God, do not transgress them; and whosoever transgresses God's limits, they are the unjust ones. If the husband does divorce her [i.e., for the fourth time], she shall not be lawful to him afterwards until she marries another husband; if this latter should divorce her [or he dies], then there is no harm if

the original couple return to each other, provided they think they can observe God's limits. These are God's limits which He makes clear to people who are capable of knowledge. When you divorce women and they have completed their term [the waiting period of three months after divorce], then either keep them in goodness or set them free in goodness, but do not keep them in order to harm them and to transgress against them—whosoever does that, *he has committed injustice against his own self* [for this phrase, see pp. 12-13 in Chapter II]. Do not take God's commands frivolously. . . . When you divorce women and they have completed their term, do not pressure them against remarrying their [former] husbands, if they have come to a mutual understanding in goodness. This is what those among you are being admonished who [really] believe in God and the Last Day—it is cleaner for you and purer, and God knows but you do not. (2.al-Baqarah:229-232)

In its laws of inheritance (see 4.an-Nisā':7-12, 176), the Qur'ān prescribed shares for daughters and other females, but laid down the share of a daughter at half of the share of a son. Modernist Muslim opinion is divided as to whether, under the changed conditions of today, the daughter should get an equal share with her brother, the opponents of change contending that since the daughter when she marries, also gets a dowry from her husband (without which a marriage cannot be valid) the apparent inequality in inheritance shares means a real equality. The question must obviously be studied further in the light of today's realities.

To resume our account of the general social philosophy of the Qur'ān, human history basically consists of a constant process of the making and unmaking of societies and civilizations according to certain norms which are essentially moral; their source is transcendental but their application is entirely within collective human existence. These norms are called "God's Sunna" (practice or law for mankind which is unalterable):

[Look at] the example of those [Messengers] we sent before you [O Muhammad!], and you will find no change in Our law. (17.al-Isrā':77) This has been God's practice with regard to bygone peoples, and God's Command [law] is irrevocably determined. (33.al-Aḥzāb:38)

This has been God's practice with the peoples of yore, and you shall certainly not find any change in God's practice. (33.al-Aḥzāb:62)

Are these people [Muhammad's opponents], then, awaiting only the fate of earlier communities? For they shall surely find no deviation, no change whatever in God's law [or practice]. (35.Fāṭir:43; see also 8.al-Anfāl:38; 15.al-Ḥijr:13; 18.al-Kahf:55; 40.Ghāfir:85; 48.al-Fath:23)

This is the Qur'ān's concept of "judgment in history," which descends upon peoples and nations rather than individuals (who will primarily be judged on the Last Day). When the Qur'ān speaks of judgments upon peoples on the basis of their collective performance, it talks in much more cut-and-dried terms than when it talks about the last judgment upon individuals. In the latter case, God is forgiving and merciful, even if an individual has made many mistakes. But although God gives nations respite to see if they will mend their ways and improve their performance (13.ar-Ra'd:32; 7.al-A'rāf:183; 22.al-Ḥajj:44, 48; 3.Āli 'Imrān:178; 68.al-Qalam:45), when their "term is come, they can neither hasten it, nor postpone it." Certain past nations have been so obliterated that "neither the heavens nor the earth wept for them, nor were they given respite" (44.ad-Dukhān:29). The whole earth is not destroyed for

the sins of certain nations, so some are "reaped off while others keep standing" (11.Hūd:100; cf. 10.Yūnus:24). But when a nation perishes or is swallowed up by a morally clean and virile civilization, its good members are visited by the same doom as its bad ones if the former have not tried to halt the rot:

Why, then, did those possessed of excellence and virtue [*baqīya*] among the peoples who preceded you [Muslims] not prevent [their co-nationals] from corrupting the earth—except very few whom We saved—but those who sank into decadent ways had to pay for them for they were criminals. (11.Hūd:116)

This, then, is the essence of the Qur'ān's goal: to prevent people from "corrupting the earth" by "falling into decadent ways." Thus it is said of the Jews, with an implicit threat of punishment, "Why did their rabbis and learned men not dissuade them from uttering sinful sayings and consuming wealth earned through foul means? Evil is what they used to do" (5.al-Mā'idah:63). Sins of omission of this order are as bad as grave sins of commission. This is why Muḥammad (PBUH) came to warn his people, and through them others, for although a Messenger immediately addresses his people, once delivered, his Message becomes universal. This is why the Qur'ān insists on the "indivisibility of prophethood" (as we shall see in Chapter V and in Appendix I). This task of preventing the rot, or curing it once it has set in, was the function of each community instituted by every Messenger; through Muḥammad (PBUH) it devolved upon the Muslim community, which is charged with "being witnesses upon mankind" and "calling to goodness and prohibiting evil" (2.al-Baqarah:143; 3.Āli 'Imrān:104, 110)—a task for which, as we shall see, the necessary instrument of *jihād* was provided.

The weakening of moral fiber is often represented by the Qur'ān as a natural process: "Too long an age has passed over them, so their hearts have become hardened [i.e., their conscience has become dull]" (57.al-Ḥadeed:16); "We have created many generations [of them], and their age has become prolonged" (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:45; also 25.al-Furqān:18). It is in this context that the Qur'ān says to Jews and Christians, "O People of the Book! Our Messenger has come to you clarifying [matters of right and wrong] to you during an extensive gap of Messengership among you—lest you should say, No [new] giver of good tidings and warner has come to us" (5.al-Mā'idah:19).

This renewal of conscience is absolutely essential if a community is to continue its task. In this connection, the Qur'ān makes particular targets of Jews and Christians (although it definitely prefers the latter to the former [5.al-Mā'idah:82]) for their exclusivist claims: "They say: None shall enter the Garden except Jews (as the Jews say) and Christians (as the Christians say)" (2.al-Baqarah:111); "They say. Become Jews or Christians, if you want guidance; say, Guidance is God's guidance [not of Jews or Christians]" (2.al-Baqarah:135; also 2.al-Baqarah:120; 5.al-Mā'idah:18). And the measure of their self-righteousness is that "Christians say Jews have nothing to stand on and Jews say Christians have nothing to stand on—and yet both of them recite the Book" (2.al-Baqarah:113). The Qur'ān also told Muslims repeatedly that they are not indispensable for God unless they exert themselves to further His purposes: "If you turn back, God will substitute another people for you, and they will not be like you" (47.Muḥammad:38; also 9.al-Tawbah:39).

The specific forms of vice that can kill a society can be many, as we have said: economic oppression and exploitation of the poor; or political and social oppression

of the poor and subject classes, in which case eventually "the inheritance of the earth" comes to the weak and the oppressed, as was the case with the Jews versus Pharaoh (7.al-A'rāf:137; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:5) Or there may be vices of idolatry and permissiveness, as with the people of Noah and Lot. When the rot sets in, there is either a successful reaction against it from within or a power is imposed from without, the former being more common. However, even in this case, a fresh start has to be made and the new generation has usually to build the edifice of a clean civilization once again.

The Qur'ān sometimes talks as though there is an essential discontinuity between a decrepit and decayed civilization and its successor: often no ready-made and quick succession can be assured to a decaying civilization. God would rather clean the slate and make a new beginning than tolerate a symbiosis of decadent and the virile. The Qur'ān definitely seems optimistic about the future, while rather grim about the past: "When a new community enters [Hell], it curses its sister(s) [fore-runners]" for leaving bad precedents for future generations (7.al-A'rāf:38); the phrase "Then we created and altogether new generation" occurs repeatedly (6.al-An'ām:6; 23.al-Mu'minūn:31, 42; 38.Ṣād:3) as well as "We gave the inheritance of the earth" to new and more deserving people (21.al-Anbiyā':105; 33.al-Aḥzāb:27; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:5; 7.al-A'rāf:128, 137; 39.az-Zumar:74; 44.ad-Dukhān:28).

The real "inheritor" (owner) of the earth is, of course, God, but He puts deserving nations in charge of running its affairs until they lose the capacity to do so (15.al-Ḥijr:23; 19.Maryam:40; 3.Āli 'Imrān:180; 57.al-Hadeed:10). It is absolutely imperative for successor civilizations and their bearer communities to study well and learn from the fate of earlier ones that have perished; or they will assuredly meet with the same fate, for "God's law does not change" for any people. This is perhaps one of the most insistent ideas in the Qur'ān, which constantly exhorts people to "travel on the earth and see the end of those before them [or you]" (3.Āli 'Imrān:137; 6.al-An'ām:11; 7.al-A'rāf:84, 86, 103, 128; 10.Yūnus:39, 73; 12.Yūsuf:109; 16.an-Nahl:36; 27.an-Naml:14, 51, 69; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:40, 83; 30.ar-Rūm:9, 42; 35.Fāṭir:44; 37.aṣ-Ṣāffāt:73; 40.Ghāfir:21; 43.az-Zukhruf:25; 47.Muḥammad:10). Those who are people of excellence and *virtue and at the same time actively try to prevent others from committing moral suicide* are certainly saved by God: the conviction that active goodness (not passive) must finally succeed lies at the very root of the Qur'ānic moral world-view. We shall elaborate on it while discussing prophethood, but we may refer here to the numerous Qur'ānic passages using the verb "We saved" or "We save" (*anjainā, najjainā, nunjī*).

This "deliverance" or "success," however, has nothing to do with the Jewish doctrine of the "remnant" in the Old Testament; one must guard against over stretching antecedents to the Qur'ānic concepts or locutions in earlier Semitic religious documents. Thus, in his anxiety to show that the Qur'ān upholds the Jewish doctrine of the "remnant" (we have in this chapter already quoted evidence from the Qur'ān to contradict this idea), John Wansbrough in *Qur'ānic Studies* (cf. the Bibliographic Introduction above) refers on page 4 to certain alleged verses of the Qur'ān containing the words *baqīya*, *bāqiya*, and *bāqiyūn* (although quite apart from the fact that the last never occurs in the Qur'ān, it is grammatically absurd and should be *bāqūn*), which are supposed by him to mean "remnants" in the Old Testament sense.

There is no truth in this statement: there is only one such verse in the whole Qur'ān, "We made his [Noah's] progeny to survive him" (37.aṣ-Ṣāffāt:77) —but even there it means not Noah's physical progeny but his ideological followers. (As we learn

from 11.Hūd:46, his son was not saved from the Flood, for God told Noah, "He does not belong to your family for his deeds are unrighteous.") For the rest, no word in the Qur'ān derived from the root *bqy* means "surviving remnants"; in 26.ash-Shu'arā':120 the active participle plural is used in the accusative, again referring to the people of Noah, but it means not the surviving remnants, but on the contrary "the remnant that was destroyed." *Bāqiyāt* means "good deeds that survive the doer" (18.al-Kahf:46; 19.Maryam:76), while *bāqiya* in the singular means "Abraham's teaching that survived in his progeny" (43.az-Zukhruf:28), or "anything that remains" (69.al-Hāqqah:8). As for *baqīya*, of its three uses (2.al-Baqarah:248; 11.Hūd:86, and 11. Hūd:116), none means "remnant" and the last of the three, which Wansbrough actually quotes as an example of the Jewish "remnant" and which we have translated as "people possessed of excellence and virtue," would become absurd if translated as "remnant": consider "people possessed of remnant!" The entire idea of the "remnant" is, in fact, eliminated by the Qur'ān's telling the Muslims that if they will not struggle and fight in God's cause, He will find a substitute; they will not be indispensable for His plan.

Such is also the case with the so-called "election" theory in the Qur'ān, on which Wansbrough and others insist: "Divine justice is here mitigated by what seems clearly to be a reflex of the Biblical election tradition" (*Qur'ānic Studies*, p. 4). We have said enough on the interplay of the naturalistic and non-naturalistic (religious) idiom of the Qur'ān in the preceding chapter to require no repetition here: God's blessings on a person, or more obviously on a city, or His choice or election of a person or a nation, can equally be and, indeed, *are* stated by the Qur'ān in terms of natural causes. Certainly there is no irreversible election in the Qur'ān: when God told Abraham He was going to appoint him leader of men (whether He had chosen him or Abraham had earned this by various deeds, including his willingness to sacrifice his son) and Abraham asked about the destiny of his progeny, the answer was, "My promise does not extend to unjust ones" (2.al-Baqarah:124). Again, the Qur'ānic reply to the question about why God "chose" Muhammad (PBUH) as Messenger is a "naturalistic" one (6.al-An'ām:124), while it is also said, "Do these people distribute the mercy of Your Lord?" (43.az-Zukhruf:32); the Qur'ān mentions (6.al-An'ām:83-86) seventeen Biblical personalities from Noah and Abraham onwards and says, "We chose them and guided them to the right path" (6.al-An'ām:87), but read in the next verse, "But if they had associated [anyone with God], all their previous deeds would have come to naught." What does "election" mean in the face of this and other evidence?

In fact, "choice" and "election" are, for the Qur'ān, other names, a different idiom, for the natural processes. In the preceding chapter we have tried to point out the significance of this idiom in the Qur'ān; it can also be seen in the Qur'ānic account of the decline and decay of nations. This process has a thousand and one specific causes, but the basic cause is undoubtedly the moral perversion on the part of some and moral apathy on the part of others which is the exact opposite of *taqwā* or keen moral perception and motivation. In general, man appears incapable of wielding peace, prosperity, and power; something impels him to commit one of the various forms of *fasād fil-arḍ*, so that he loses all these three—which are, indeed, also the supreme object of his desire and priceless blessings of God: "Rather, we gave them and their forefathers prosperity, so that too long a time has passed over them" (21.al-Anbiyā':44; also 25.al-Furqān:18; 43.az-Zukhruf:29). The moral diseases caused by perversions of the search for peace, prosperity, and power and the resulting process of decay and destruction are also called the "command of God": "When We

want to destroy a town [i.e., a civilization], We command its luxurious ones, so they commit unrighteousness in it—and when the judgment becomes ripe upon it, we destroy it utterly" (17.al-Isrā':16).

When a people is set in negative and evil ways so that it loses the capacity to discern and therefore cannot make right judgments, it can no longer define its purposes and goals but is simply adrift. At this critical juncture God sends a Messenger who invites its members to truth and goodness—which, of course, they cannot recognize and hence reject. However, the Message does trouble them, particularly because they are afraid that some among them, particularly men without the means of a luxurious life, might accept it. Hence they start to resist with devices and strategies which the Qur'ān calls *makr*, a term denoting a stratagem within the process of a struggle: "And so did We cause in every town [i.e., society or civilization] the foremost of its criminals to resort to devices and stratagems; they only victimize themselves therewith, however, but they do not know" (6.al-An'ām:123). Just nothing seems to work, though, for "God is the best executor of stratagems" (3.Āli 'Imrān:54; 8.al-Anfāl:30; 10.Yūnus:21; 27.an-Naml:50); "even though their stratagems might be capable of crushing mountains out of existence" (14.Ibrāheem:46).

What, then, is the real stratagem? Not to let the power of discernment and correct judgment die; to keep the keenness of the sense of moral responsibility [*taqwā*] alive—this is the purpose of studying the fate of past nations:

How many a town have We destroyed because it did wrong [to itself]; it was laid waste with its roofs crumbling down to its foundations, its defunct wells and its desolate castles hewn out of rocks and strengthened with lead. Have these people not traveled on the earth so that they might come to possess hearts [i.e., minds] wherewith they can understand or ears wherewith they can hear—for it is not [the physical] eyes that become blind but the hearts that are set in breasts. (22.al-Ĥajj:45-46)

Physical avenues of information may remain intact—in fact, may improve vastly—but "the heart," the instrument of perception and discernment, is dulled; the inputs and outputs of computers continue—indeed, become ever more efficient; only the capacity to ask the right questions, the humanly relevant questions, fails.

When a people becomes decadent and its civilization decrepit, it becomes a burden on the very earth from which it had once sprouted with so lush a promise. It may prolong its existence somewhat by various devices, but its exit is inevitable "for none can defeat God" (8.al-Anfāl:59; 22.al-Ĥajj:51; 34.Saba':5, 38; 9.al-Tawbah:2-3; 6.al-An'ām:134; 10.Yūnus:53; 11.Hūd:20). This phenomenon, which has a certain inevitability about it (judging from the Qur'ān), is on the whole good, although it involves a certain loss for mankind, since the very struggle brings fresh blood to the veins of an aging humanity—it is as though dead earth has quickened and blossomed once again. This struggle between good and evil, fresh and stale, new and decrepit, between the vigor of moral youth and the dotage of senility, is of positive benefit, for it keeps the perennial moral values alive:

But for the fact that God repels some people at the hands of others, churches, synagogues, places of God's worship and mosques—wherein God's name is so frequently mentioned—Would be razed; but God must help those who help Him and God is, indeed, powerful and mighty. These are the ones [those who help God and

God helps them] who, when We establish them on the earth, shall establish prayers, pay *zakāt*, command the good, and prohibit evil, and to God belongs the ultimate end of all issues [i.e., His command is eventually successful]. (22.al-Ḥajj:40-41, on the occasion of the earliest pronouncement by the Qurʾān of *jihād* by the Muslims against pagan Arabs; cf. also 2.al-Baqarah:251)

From the foregoing it must not be imagined that wealth and its earnings are bad *per se*: we have said this before but it must be re-emphasized. What is all-important is how one pursues wealth and wields it. We have already quoted 30.ar-Rūm:7 and 53.an-Najm:30 to the effect that Meccan traders "knew the externalities of life" very well but were heedless of "its ends" and that this was "the height of their knowledge." In fact, the Qurʾān insists that when a society declines morally, its prosperity also departs; so long as it preserves a keen perception of the Message, it prospers: "Whoever turns away from My reminder [or remembrance] shall have a highly straitened life and [also] on the Last Day we shall raise him up as blind" (20.Ṭā Hā:124); again:

If the People of the Book were to believe and develop *taqwā*, we would remove their evils, and cause them to enter the luxuriant gardens. If they were to establish the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been sent down to them from their Lord [the Qurʾān], prosperity would be showered upon them [literally: "they would have eaten"], from above and from beneath them. (5.al-Māʾidah:64-66)

Had the people of the towns [the pagan Arabs of Mecca and elsewhere] believed and developed *taqwā*, we would have opened up for them the blessings of the heavens and the earth. (7.al-Aʿrāf:96)

In discussing evolution and discontinuity of civilizations, we have already said that although the Qurʾān often speaks of the discontinuity of civilizations, i.e., of making a fresh start with an altogether "new generation" of people, it is on the whole optimistic about the future because "the inheritance of the earth is given to good people." A word also must be said about the legacy of civilizations for their successors. Here again there is a tension between two opposite directions. On the one hand, the history of civilizations is cumulative and evolutionary because while the "foam on the top of a torrent disappears, that which is beneficial to mankind [the alluvium] settles down upon the earth" (13.ar-Raʿd:17). This means that while the negative side of men's conduct departs, the constructive side does leave a positive legacy for mankind. On the other hand, the evil legacies of earlier peoples do affect the quality of performance of later ones. In a sense, every earlier civilization is a forerunner of or an example for later ones; hence the tremendous responsibility to future generations. It is not clear whether this influence is due to the fact that later civilizations actually learn of the earlier ones—and try to vie with their foolish deeds—or whether their legacy becomes embedded in the unconscious of the later ones and becomes, as it were, part of their moral genes—in which case it is cumulative and the entire historic movement is like a spiral, not a cycle. The Qurʾān does state that successor communities will accuse their predecessors of having had a negative influence upon them:

When a [new] community enters [Hell], it shall curse its sister[s] [i.e., its predecessors], until when all have reached down into its depths, every successor shall say of its predecessor, Our Lord, these people misled us, so give them double

punishment in the Fire; God will reply, Each one of you is experiencing double punishment, but you do not realize it. (7.al-A‘rāf:38; also 38.Şād:59 ff.)

A part of humanity influencing others in evil ways through example, pressure, or even education is a frequent theme in the Qur’ān, for those who influence and educate and form or inform others' minds bear a direct responsibility for the conduct of those they affect: "Those who have disbelieved shall say [on the day of judgment], Our Lord! show us those two who led us astray from among the humans and the jinn, so that we put them underneath our feet that they be among the lowest [inhabitants of Hell]" (41.Fuṣṣilat:29). It is against this background that such frequent Qur’ānic terms as "guidance," "right guidance," "Truth," "the right way," and "the straight path" become invested with their full-blown significance: the whole fate of man, whether he will be "successful" or "shall perish," depends on whether he can and does "take the right path"—something that most men take very lightly, as though it did not make any difference to the future of humanity.

A particularly insistent theme is that the stronger constantly attempt to influence or pressure the weaker to take a certain course of conduct, against the better judgment of the latter. The genesis of this theme, of course, lies in the society of Mecca, where generally (although not exclusively—see Appendix II) the early adherents of Muḥammad (PBUH) were the socioeconomically weaker classes who were under constant pressure from the “aristocrats [*al-mala’*’]” to abjure the Prophet:

Those who have disbelieved say to the believers, Follow our way, and we shall bear [the burden of] your sins—but they will never bear any of their sins; they are only lying. They shall, of course, bear their own burdens, and additional ones, too [for trying to hoodwink the weaker members of their society]. (29.al-‘Ankabūt:12-13; also 7.al-A‘rāf:75)

The Qur’ān vividly portrays the accusations brought on the Day of Judgment by the weaker ones against the stronger and influential ones:

The weak shall say to those who thought they were big, But for you we would have been believers. Those who thought big of themselves shall say to the weak, Did *we* block your way to the Guidance after it came to You? Indeed, you yourselves were criminals! The weak shall reply, Rather, it was your cunning strategies day and night [that prevented us from believing]—when you [constantly] commanded us to disbelieve. (34.Saba’:33)

The corruption of religious leaders, who were expected to be the source of spiritual force and regeneration, is the last step in the of decay of a community. The natural path their corruption takes is the easy conscience by which they come to compromise truth with the wayward “whims [*ahwā’*’]” either of the rich or of the community at large. In either case, they first yield to pressure and subsequently their consciences become easy and they compromise, with money or popularity or both. We have already referred to verses where religious leaders fail to give the erring community the correct advice because this would be unpopular. The Qur’ān also often accuses Jewish religious leaders and occasionally Christian of corruption. Against Jewish scribes and rabbis the common charge is that they "sell God's words for

a paltry sum of money" (2.al-Baqarah:41, 79, 174; 3.Āli 'Imrān:77, 187; 16.an-Nahl:95):

Then a generation succeeded [the earlier Jews] which inherited the Book but which accepts the paltry benefits of this world [and corrupts religion] and says, We will be forgiven [by God], but should they have another opportunity to accept such paltry benefits, they will take them. Has the Covenant of the Book not been taken from them that they shall not speak about God but truth and they have already studied [that truth] in that Book? (7.al-A'rāf:169)

Further,

O you who believe! many a learned Jew and Christian monk consumes the properties of people by false means and blocks the path of Allāh—but those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend them in God's cause, let them have the good tidings of a painful punishment. (9.al-Tawbah:34)

The Qur'ān is adamant that every community or nation gets what it deserves by "what its hands have earned": "What would God gain by punishing you if you are grateful [for His blessings] and believe [in Him]?" (4.an-Nisā':147); "God is not the one who would destroy towns [i.e., civilizations or peoples] unjustly while their people are active in goodness" (11.Hūd:117; also 6.al-An'ām:131; 10.Yūnus:13). God does nothing but operate through those unchangeable laws that govern the rise and fall of peoples: "God does not change the condition of a people until they change it themselves" (13.ar-Ra'd:11; 8.al-Anfāl:53). There is a religious sense in which everything is authored by God, since God is the extra dimension in all nature, but in ordinary parlance it is correct to say that man does everything to himself and for himself, and is responsible for it. Against this background there was brought into existence the Muslim Community (*umma muslima*), which was formally instituted in Madina about eighteen months after the Hijra when the permission for *jihād* was enunciated:

[This is] the Community of your forefather Abraham, who already named you Muslims [i.e., those who surrender to God] before this; let the Messenger [Muhammad] be a witness over you in this regard and let you be the witnesses over mankind. So establish prayers, pay *zakāt* and hold fast to God Who is your Protector—what an excellent protector and what an excellent helper! (22.al-Ḥajj:78)

About the same time the Qur'ān says, "Even so have we constituted you as a median community [i.e., between the imperviousness of Judaism and the liquidity of Christianity] that you be witnesses to mankind and that the Messenger be a witness over you" (2.al-Baqarah:143). They were defined as "The best community produced for mankind who command good and forbid evil and believe in God" (3.Āli 'Imrān:110; also 3.Āli 'Imrān:104) and their function was to be, "Those who, if we give them power on the earth, shall establish prayers, pay *zakāt*, command good, and forbid evil" (22.al-Ḥajj:41). The Qur'ān also clarified that by "prayers" it does not simply mean standing up facing the Ka'ba and making certain gestures with the body and the tongue; although prayers are undoubtedly among the cardinal duties of a Muslim, they are a mere farce without a wholistic view of Islam:

It is no virtue that you turn your faces east and west [in prayer]. Virtuous are they who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book [in a generic sense, i.e., all Revealed Books], the prophets, who give of their wealth—despite their love for it—to needy kinsmen, orphans, the poor, the wayfarer, those who ask for financial help and for ransoming war captives, who establish prayers, pay *zakāt*, fulfil their pacts when they make them, are steadfast in hardship, adversity and war—these are the true [Believers]. (2.al-Baqarah:177)

Throughout these characterizations of the task of the Muslim Community, the words "commanding good, forbidding evil, establishing prayer, and paying [and, of course, collecting] *zakāt* recur. There is no doubt that the Qur'ān wanted Muslims to establish a political order on earth *for the sake of creating an egalitarian and just moral-social order*. Such an order should, by definition, eliminate "corruption on the earth [*fasād fil-ard*]" and "reform the earth." To fulfil this task, to which every people whose vision is neither truncated nor introverted pays at least lip-service, the Qur'ān created the instrument of *jihād*—indeed, 22.al-Ḥajj:41, describing this function of the Muslim Community, follows directly upon the verse laying down the principle of *jihād* for the first time.

The Qur'ān also envisaged, or at least called for, cooperation between like minded communities: "O People of the Book! Come [let us join] on a platform [literally: a formula] that may be common between us—that we serve naught except God" (3.Āli 'Imrān:64). It should be noted that the proposition "that we serve naught except God" is a statement of the *platform*, not of the *task* that has to be performed on earth and whose details are supposed to flow from this platform or formula of "service" to one God. It should also be noted that this invitation is for cooperation in building a certain kind of ethico-social world order and is not of the nature of contemporary forms of "ecumenism," where every "religious" community is expected to be nice to others and extend its typical brand of "salvation" to others as much as it can! For Islam, there is no particular "salvation": there is only "success [*falāḥ*]" or "failure [*khusrān*]" in the task of building the type of world order we are describing. It is striking, indeed, that even in "ecumenism," Christianity, which never envisioned any social order, thinks inevitably in its own terms and will envisage inter-confessional relationships only within the parameters of those terms which primarily surround the cult of Jesus.

But when human religio-social endeavor is envisaged in the terms in which we have understood the Qur'ān, *jihād* becomes an absolute necessity. How can such an ideological world-order be brought into existence without such a means? Most unfortunately, Western Christian propaganda has confused the whole issue by popularizing the slogan "Islam was spread by the sword" or "Islam is a religion of the sword." What was spread by the sword was not the religion of Islam, but the *political domain* of Islam, so that Islam could work to produce the order on the earth that the Qur'ān seeks. One may concede that *jihād* was often misused by later Muslims whose primary aim was territorial expansion and not the ideology they were asked to establish; one must also admit that the means of *jihād* can vary—in fact, armed *jihād* is only one form. But one can never say that "Islam was spread by the sword." There is no single parallel in Islamic history to the forcible conversion to Christianity of the German tribes *en masse* carried out by Charlemagne, with repeated punitive expeditions against apostates—although, of course, locally and occasionally isolated cases of such conversions may well have taken place.

*Jihād*, indeed, is a total endeavor, an all-out effort—"with your wealth and lives," as the Qur'ān frequently puts it—to "make God's cause succeed" (9.al-Tawbah:40). We shall elaborate in Chapter VI on the nature of this endeavor and the purpose of this order, although as we have hinted, the concept of the ultimate end of this endeavor (*al-ākhirah*) is pivotal to the whole system of Qur'ānic thought. The concept of *ākhirah* implies that man needs not *just* economic justice; economic justice itself is for a higher end, for man does not live from hour to hour and from day to day like animals but his vision must see through the consequences of his actions and aim at the end which constitutes the meaning of positive human effort. This is the end which cannot be achieved without *jihād*, for it is God's unalterable law that He will not bring about results without human endeavor; otherwise those who endeavor and those who do not would become indistinguishable (3.Āli 'Imrān:142; 4.an-Nisā':95; 9.al-Tawbah:16, 24, 86; 29.al-'Ankabūt:6-8; 61.aṣ-Ṣaff:11; 47.Muḥammad:31).