

# ESSAY 1

## WHAT IS MODERNITY?

In this paper I use the word ‘modernity’ to describe a basic outlook on life and a system of ideas and values that gradually evolved in the West since the Renaissance. Subsequently, I shall try to define or explain what I understand by the expression ‘religious modernity’. Towards the close of the essay I shall discuss the relationship between religious modernity and traditionalism. I shall end with a brief statement of my own authentic position with regard to Islamic modernity.

The word ‘modernity’ is, obviously, derived from the English word, ‘modern’ (Latin *modo*) meaning ‘just now or in current use or fashion’. The word came into general use (perhaps in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century) much later than the cognate word ‘modernism’ that was first used by traditional Catholic critics and opponents of the scientific outlook in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Modernism’ then had a pejorative undertone, and denigrated the then rising liberal and scientific outlook of modernized Christians. Though never restricted to the purely religious sphere, the word ‘modernism’ became associated with the domain of religion. Thus, the word ‘modernity’ is later as well as more general than ‘modernism’.

The adjective ‘modern’ (in the literal sense) means what is new or current ‘now’ without specifying the actual coordinates in space and time. Thus, the adjective performs an umbrella function rather than the descriptive. But the noun ‘modernity’, in contemporary discourse, broadly refers to a predilection for or acceptance of the basic concepts and values of Renaissance and post Renaissance Western Europe in the different spheres of life. Modernity in the generic attitudinal sense may be imitative/reactive, or creative. Imitative modernity may appropriately be termed ‘fashionism’ and is at bottom a kind of ‘inverted traditionalism’. ‘Imitative/Reactive modernity’ is a more or less sharp and superficial reaction to a situational challenge. Creative

modernity, on the other hand, is not a time bound fixed response but the reflective choice of an autonomous human being.

‘Creative-responsible modernity’ is an authentic response to the ever-changing human situation that demands creative awareness rather than mechanical adaptation. Reactive modernity may prove as futile or barren as static traditionalism. In the final analysis, it is not the fascination for what is contemporary or blind loyalty to the tradition, but the creative quest of value, the ceaseless search for the better, rather than contentment with the good, which is the fountainhead of all progress.

## ANALYSIS OF WESTERN MODERNITY

Every epoch or society has a unique cultural configuration or *gestalt*. This configuration consists of:

- (a) a conceptual framework or system of ideas to make sense of human experience in general. This conceptual system is woven on the warp and woof of a number of basic concepts.
- (b) a distinctive value system.
- (c) a distinctive artistic or aesthetic sensibility.

A full understanding of the culture of an epoch or society requires the understanding of all the above three dimensions of culture: cognitive, ethical and aesthetic; in their dynamic interaction.

Every society has also its own socio-economic structure, including laws, customs, diverse associations and institutions. Marx did pioneering work in showing the impact of the socio-economic structure upon the cultural *gestalt* of a society, that is, its philosophy, ethics, religion and art. The elements of truth in his approach are undeniable, though he, perhaps, underestimated the plastic role of the society’s traditional thought-cum-value system in the march of history. The role played by the sentiment of nationalism in Western Europe, and the role being played now by nationalism in the current Sino-Soviet dispute, or the role played by religious sentiments in the socio-political affairs of present-day India, are serious reminders of the qualifications that must be made in classical Marxian theory.

I shall now enumerate and briefly elucidate the basic concepts as well as

the values of Western modernity, that is, of modern Western Europe from the Renaissance onwards.

**1. Natural or intracosmic causation:** This concept is the foundation of the modern conceptual framework. It implies that every event has a cause located within the total system of events rather than outside the system, and that this total system is an interrelated cosmos having stable patterns of events. This concept does not entail any particular monistic theory of causation constructed on the basis of particular models; say the model of mechanistic physics, quantum mechanics, biological evolution, or human teleological action, etc. All monistic theories result from our being gripped by a particular model. The implication of the concept is merely that the causes of events are to be located in the event-nexus rather than in some transnexus, or, in other words, in a supernatural or super-cosmic nexus. This directly suggests the second concept of empirical explanation.

**2. Empirical explanation:** This concept is the logical completion or progression of the first. If natural causation be universally operative, then knowledge of the interconnections between events becomes no less essential than the mere description of discreet events. Complete knowledge is not merely description but description plus explanation or descriptive explanation. Apart from this intellectual value, explanation is the basis of all control or regulation of events. Control over events presupposes a prior explanatory framework of events. Now if this framework be such that preferred explanations cannot be checked empirically in accordance with clear and previously agreed rules, then they cannot serve as reliable guides to successful human control over events. This does not imply that there are no other types of explanation or modes of interpretation of human experience, or that such modes are inferior or invalid in principle.

Indeed the poetic, metaphysical, religious and mythical interpretations have their own functions and logic, and the model of empirical or scientific explanation is only one of the modes of unifying or organizing human experience into meaningful patterns. Nevertheless the emphasis upon empirical explanation, that is, explanations that are testable through sense perception, is the peculiar and the most striking feature of the modern temper. It was this that fostered the growth of quantitative methods and of observation under controlled conditions, which in turn fostered the contemporary technological society. More than two thousand years ago metaphysical interpretation had displaced magic, myth and ritualistic

religion from their dominant place in the 'thought' of cultivated minds. In the modern age metaphysical interpretation has itself been pushed into the background due to the dominant position and prestige gradually acquired by scientific or empirical explanation.

**3. Universal evolution:** This concept posits variability in the heart of all things. The accumulation of minute variations is the means both of growth and development as well as of decline and destruction. The concept of evolution implies that change is inevitable, and that reality is a dynamic, living and growing cosmos, rather than a static or completed Divine artifact, or an accidental product of the blind dance of atoms.

The conception of evolution combined the theories of chance occurrences and of purposive creation. Different features of the universe evoke both these theories and worldviews. The conceptions of Divine Creation and of chance configuration resulted from a selective rather than a comprehensive concern with the diverse features of the universe. The concept of evolution attempted to interpret the totality of these features in accordance with the principle of economy of assumptions.

To begin with, evolution was applied to organic life. But gradually the concept acquired universal applicability. This brings us to the fourth concept of social causation.

**4. Social causation:** This concept was implicit in the wider concept of natural or intra-cosmic causation, assuming that the word 'natural' is used not in opposition to 'social', but in the sense of 'intra-cosmic' as opposed to 'extra-cosmic'. But this concept was made explicit only in the last century, when social phenomena came to be viewed, as much subject to laws as were physical phenomena. Marx has undoubtedly given a powerful impetus to sociology through his concept of historical or sociological materialism. But social causes are highly complex and the contemporary multi-dimensional approach to social causation is definitely an improvement upon Marxian economic determinism.

**5. Relativism:** This is being used in a very wide sense, which would include positivism and Kant's 'phenomenalism', no less than Einstein's conception of relativity. The implication of this concept is that pure formal logic or mathematics apart, all factual knowledge is relative to the knower and all evaluation is relative to the ethical norms that are the faith axioms for the evaluator, just as perception is relative to the human perceptual ap-

paratus. Hence, both physics and metaphysics operate only with ideas and concepts relative to human understanding. This realization played a crucial role in the rapid development of the natural and social sciences in the post Hegelian Western world. The grip or fascination of 'Absolutism' waned, not only in the sphere of knowledge, but in all other spheres of human life and religion, morality, language, art, and so on. The 20<sup>th</sup> century even led to 'relativity' in the sphere of mathematics in the sense of the creation of non-Euclidean geometries and modern algebra.

**6. Dimensional integration:** This concept implies that reality is sufficiently complex for any one set of concepts or any mono-dimensional approach to be adequate to a multi-dimensional reality. We must always avoid the fallacy of 'reductive simplism' while describing or explaining things. Human disagreement is very largely the function of mono-dimensional perspectives. Their critical and systematic reintegration dissolves all avoidable and unnecessary controversy and directs the human mind to really fruitful lines of enquiry. It leads to a sense of release or deliverance from the clash of partial perspectives to an irenic all-inclusive approach in all enquiry or investigation. This promotes the growth of all the different dimensions or conceptual systems in the spirit of 'epistemic co-existence' and co-operation, that is, dimensional integration. Thus this concept supplements the concept of epistemic relativity, and the two in fact are jointly responsible for the rapid growth of positively verifiable and quantitative sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The above concepts are not exhaustive, though, I believe, they constitute the core of the Western conceptual framework. There is nothing rigid about this scheme, since the basic concepts can be separated or combined according to one's choice and sense of aesthetic elegance. Thus, for example, one could posit 'Naturalism' and 'Universal Causation' separately as two basic concepts instead of combining them into the concept of 'Natural or intra-cosmic Causation', as I have done. The interplay of these concepts generates the worldview, and their analysis helps to crystallize this worldview or total perspective.

I now turn to the basic values of Western modernity. The following list is again illustrative rather than exhaustive. But I believe it includes the core values.

**1. Life-affirmation or this-worldliness:** This does not mean hedonism or the pursuit of pleasure, though happiness is one of the elements of life-affirmation. This does not exclude belief in life after death. All that this value implies is that this life is important and must be lived as the good life for its own sake and not merely as a preparation for salvation in the hereafter. The emphasis is on the fullness of life and self-realization rather than on renunciation and salvation. This may be called the typical Greco-Roman ethos, as distinct from the Judeo-Christian ethos of West Europe in the pre-Renaissance era.

**2. Affluence:** This implies giving high importance to the external conditions or socio-economic soil of man's growth and activities. It may be called the typical American ethos, which is only a development of the West European value of 'decent living'. Affluence is not necessarily connected with life-affirmation, but life-affirmation tends to generate affluence through technological progress.

**3. Humanistic love and dignity of the individual:** Humanistic love is love and respect for the human essence or the person as such independently of the various accidents of his birth, like religion, race, region, language or status etc. The dignity of the individual is a corollary of humanistic love. This love transcends the loyalty to fragmentary groups like the tribe, nation, or church, though it is not incompatible with sincere patriotism or a sense of emotional identification with an ideological group.

Democracy as a way of life and as a political form or institution is a corollary of the dignity of the individual.

**4. Spiritual autonomy:** This value is closely related to the dignity of the individual. It means that the individual must be inwardly free or self-legislative. His commitment must be to his own higher self or the God within him rather than to any external Authority. The conception of the sovereignty of the people is nothing but individual spiritual autonomy writ large. This inner freedom again is not incompatible with religious belief as such, though obviously it is incompatible with all authoritarian religious systems.

**5. Polymorphous equality:** This is a very recent extension of the value of humanistic love and dignity of the individual. It may be said to be a new dimension added to the merely political equality of voting (or the maxim of one man, one vote) as posited by classical democracy. It means that equality must be polymorphous or multi-dimensional rather than mono-dimensional,

that is, confined to a particular area of life. Thus, there should be equality of opportunity in every walk of life for every individual irrespective of sex, as far as is humanly possible. The ultimate criterion or essence of social justice is seen to lie precisely in the degree of equality of opportunity generated in society. Equality of opportunity must not be confused with literal or bare equality. It is not incompatible with gradations in status, power or wealth. All that it entails is that such gradation should be earned and not inherited. They should be the reward of individual effort under conditions of polymorphous equality, rather than the antecedent gifts of the accidents of birth. It will be seen that no traditional religion has practiced or even preached such polymorphous equality, though some religions have given greater importance to equality, than have others. Socialism is itself partly a means to the realization of the equality of opportunity.

**6. Dynamism:** This value is a corollary of the theoretical concepts of natural and social causation. Since reality is 'Becoming' rather than 'Being', malleable rather than immutable, it calls for the ethic of action rather than of resignation. Not only must nature be controlled, but also disease, poverty and other social evils must be abolished through planned and systematic effort. Mere contemplation of virtue without the life of action is futile.

**7. Ceaseless creativity of values:** By virtue of spiritual autonomy inherited values must be conserved, as well as new ones should be created by man. A dynamic, self-critical and perennially open value system is more desirable than a closed and static one. Values grow, and our insight into them matures and new levels or dimensions emerge even in the case of basic values like love, justice, equality, etc. Thus no particular value system can be accepted as final.

## SCALE AND DEGREES OF MODERNITY

On the basis of the above concepts and values we may construct a scale of modernity and can measure the degrees of the modernity of a person, society or epoch. The advantage of such a scale lies in the consideration that the concept of modernity is not simple or atomic, but complex and multi-dimensional. Consequently, an individual or society may be modern in one respect or facet, and medieval or ancient in some other, or more modern in some and less modern in other respects. Moreover, these concepts and values are not the unique features of the modern age in the chronological sense.

With the help of this scale of modernity we can make a more accurate and concrete assessment of the qualitative modernity of cultures or societies, irrespective of their chronological or temporal modernity.

When we judge an epoch or society as being modernist or medieval, we obviously refer to its dominant or preponderant character. There is no implication of the total absence of concepts and values contrary to the dominant thought-cum-value system.

## WHAT IS RELIGIOUS MODERNITY?

The following are the essential features of religious modernity and they jointly and severally constitute its essential features:

(1) Stress on the fully integrated human personality as distinguished from a fragmented or compartmentalized one. This integration takes into account all the dimensions of human experience like reason, feeling, and morality without suppressing any basic existential or personality need.

(2) Distinction between religious experience and its conceptual interpretation.

(3) Distinction between the essential core of religious faith and the concrete social, cultural and political *gestalt* of the religious group concerned.

(4) Distinction between salvation in the sense of continuous spiritual growth and in the sense of the 'saving' of souls in life after death.

(5) Distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values.

(6) Stress on the cultivation of basic spirituality rather than any one of its diverse forms as represented by particular religions.

(7) Emphasis on spiritual autonomy and the reconciliation of any possible conflict with religious authority.

(8) Emphasis on ceaseless creativity of values and extra dimensional progress, as distinguished from the conservation of values and intra-dimen-



sional progress. In other words, the stress is on creative fidelity rather than mechanical conformity to the past.

(9) Authenticity/authentic being as an individual's undistorted awareness of or insight into one's depth feelings, attitudes and responses to one's own situation and existence as a whole. In practice to be authentic means to excel in the Buddhist value, '*vipassana*'.

The above-mentioned nine points sum up the essential features of religious modernity in the West and are more or less self-explanatory. I shall however, comment on the first three points and the ninth point which are foundational:

The first feature of dimensional integration of personality is a much more inclusive and richer concept than rationalism. Full integration includes the cultivation of reason but is not reducible to it. The hallmark of 19<sup>th</sup> century religious modernity in the West was rationalism, which was a legacy of the previous age of reason and enlightenment in Europe. But this mono-dimensional approach has given way to a multi-dimensional approach.

The second basic feature of religious modernity is the distinction between religious experience and its conceptual interpretation. This distinction applies to all forms of human experience and not merely the religious. Religious modernity emphasizes the significance and role of both experience and interpretation in the religious sphere. But, it insists that the two should not be confused, as is actually the case with most popular conceptions of different religions. Religious experience is *sui generis* and cannot be reduced without remainder to other forms of experience like the aesthetic, the moral and the logical etc. Hence, religious modernity is not synonymous with pure ethicism or humanism, which are attempts to reduce religion to the purely ethical dimensions of human experience.

Religious modernity does not accept humanism or ethical religion as fully adequate, because they fall short of and miss the transcendental/mystical dimension of human experience. Man's growth remains incomplete without the flowering of his potential spirituality or spiritual sense as distinguished from his moral potentiality or moral sense. The distinction between the spiritual and the moral sense is analogous to the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic sense. The quest for the existential interpretation of man's experience is a deeply engrained human personality need. Like

religious experience, this quest is also *sui generis* and different from the quest of scientific explanation. Mere descriptive knowledge and scientific explanation do not fully satisfy man's yearning for an existential interpretation or significance of the human situation within the total cosmic context. This interpretation, however, is a distinct activity from the original and primary religious experience of man as such. Most religious persons do not make any distinction between religious experience and its interpretation. Consequently, they suppose that the denial of their particular interpretation amounts to a denial of the experience as such. Moreover, they are not aware of the essential relativity of all interpretation to socio-cultural space-time. In other words the popular traditionalist believers of different religions remain unaware of:

- (a) the distinction between experience and interpretation, and
- (b) the organic connection of the interpretation with the socio-cultural conditions and the inherited conceptual framework of the society in which a particular religion grows.

The systematic conceptual interpretation of religious experience is essential and indispensable. The supposed self sufficiency of mere morality or even religious experience is a romantic illusion born of difficulties or rather man's despair at arriving at a final and universally acceptable conceptual interpretation of the human situation.

Sober religious modernists in the West like Whitehead (d. 1947), Bergson (d. 1941), Hocking (d. 1966), Tillich (d. 1965), Niebuhr (d. 1971), Marcel (d. 1973) and Buber (d. 1965) *et al*, thus do not reject a metaphysical or philosophical theology, as superfluous, but attempt to reconstruct the basic religious concepts of the Christian or Jewish tradition. Their aim is to remove the conceptual difficulties that flow from the traditional meaning given to such concepts as 'God', 'Son of God', 'creation', 'revelation', 'prophecy', 'providence', 'grace', and so on. All creative interpreters of the different religious traditions have always attempted such re-construction. But the distinguishing feature of modern and contemporary religious re-construction is that it must be done under the umbrella of science and the scientific method.

The third foundational feature of religious modernity concerns the distinction between the essential core and the concrete *gestalt* of a reli-

gion. This distinction has been suggested and developed as a result of the growth of sociology of religion on the one hand, and the phenomenology of religion on the other. The sociology of religion shows that all religious traditions have socio-economic determinants as well as dimensions. The phenomenology, of religion, on the other hand, draws our attention to the nature of the essential core of the total religious *gestalt*. This core consists of a thought-cum-value system in organic interaction with the general conceptual framework prevalent in the parent society in which the religion originates. This thought system is the same as the conceptual interpretation mentioned above.

The value system underlies concrete rules, regulations and precepts of a particular religion and should not be equated with these concrete rules. The thought system and the value system jointly entail the precept system of a particular religion and give meaning to its symbolic life. The concrete *gestalt* of a religion, on the other hand, is influenced by the concrete conceptual and social soil in which the religion grows. The concrete personality or *gestalt* of different religions, however, includes a system of institutions over and above the thought-cum-value system, even as a living organism has secondary qualities distinct from its essential attributes.

The practical significance of this apparently academic distinction is crucial. Once this distinction is conceptually registered, we are at once liberated, as it were, from an emotional fixation upon a particular cultural *gestalt* whether Islamic, Christian or Hindu. The confusion between the pure essence and the accidents of its concrete exemplification in social space-time is removed. The 'Idea of Islam', or the 'Idea of Hinduism/Buddhism', in the Platonic sense, generates both conceptual space and an inner freedom of movement without thereby repudiating the concrete *gestalt* of these religions. The possibility of conflict between loyalty to the past and aspirations for the future is reconciled. As a member of the kingdom of ceaseless growth, man is liberated from enslavement to the past as distinguished from a creative fidelity to his religious tradition.

The ninth value of religious modernity, 'authenticity' is, perhaps, the most crucial and foundational of all. It is extremely significant that this value, in some form or other, is regarded as the key value in all religious traditions of the human family. It is the life breath, the essence of spirituality, since, in practical terms, it means that the individual has inner clarity and courage to face whatever lies in the depths of his inmost being.

The foregoing analysis of Western religious modernity should also throw into relief the profile of its contrary, that is, religious traditionalism. But the difference between the two is a matter of degrees, rather than of kind.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MODERNITY AND TRADITIONALISM

The creation of new values and the conservation of the old that have stood the test of time are both equally necessary. In fact they depend upon each other. The creation of new values pre-supposes a valuational base or support. Similarly, the effective maintenance of this base demands awareness of the subtle changes in the nuances and rhythms of human experience. Eternal and intelligent vigilance is the price of keeping old values alive in the condition of dynamic interaction with the environment rather than as showpieces in the museum of man's heritage.

Creativity ever spun man to go ahead in the realm of values and to yearn for the better rather than be content with the good. The function of tradition on the other hand, is to strike a note of caution, lest the pace of change increase to the point of giving diminishing returns. The function of tradition is not the stoppage of growth but only the regulation of the speed of growth. The conservative approach thus, has its own function in the economy of human progress, provided it does not over reach itself.

Creativity and conservation should therefore dovetail into and supplement each other. Without creativity conservation leads to fossilization, while without conservation, creativity leads to irresponsible experimentation. While such adventures in the realm of art and literature may not be injurious, they could prove catastrophic in the realm of moral and social relationships. The new sex morality of Western Europe and America, according to which the game of sex may be played between any two willing parties without any mutual obligation arising there from, has played havoc with the spiritual growth of the contemporary Western man. It appears to me that the west is gradually realizing this and that a more balanced interpretation of sex is in the process of crystallization. Similarly the limitations of different movements like nationalism, capitalism, socialism, and scientism are being acknowledged. Humanity would have been spared countless tears, had human judgment been more balanced and well informed. But man is neither a mathematician nor a fly in the fly bottle, or a rat in a maze. He is an

honest evaluator who commits errors of evaluation. He blunders and pays the penalty in the course of time and gradually forges ahead.

It is precisely man's continual blundering that grips the imagination of the champions of the traditional interpretation of Divine Revelation. They constantly reiterate man's incapacity to regulate his own affairs and point out that the only way open to man is the complete submission to the word of God and the example of His Prophet. These persons are however, not aware of the different meanings of submission to God. They accept only one conceptual model or meaning, namely the model of the dutiful son or subject submitting himself completely to the will of the authoritarian father or king who acts through his agent.

Similarly the traditionalists do not realize that their concept of revelation is based on the conceptual model of human communication through the spoken language. This model generates its own conceptual difficulties, which the traditionalists tend to ignore in the interest of preserving the integrity of their faith. This evasion of conceptual difficulties has, however, very harmful consequences, though apparently it may serve to keep the faith alive. This type of conceptual pain killing, as it were, leaves man with no intellectual motivation to explore other possible conceptual models for the interpretation of the Prophet's religious or mystical experience of which the Quran is the concrete product. Thus the traditionalist Islamic approach remains unconvincing to the mind alive to the complexities of the human situation.

Those individuals whose conceptual framework has kept pace with the continual developments in the natural and social sciences of the modern West have outgrown the conceptual clothes or models, which appealed to medieval man whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian. These are the people who yearn for a new language and idiom for the articulation of their own authentic religious experience. It appears to me however, that the Islamic tradition is not a monolithic mausoleum but a garden where a hundred flowers have bloomed, and may still bloom. While getting depressed at the arid deserts of extreme orthodoxy, rigid conservatism and intolerance in the 1400 year old journey of Islam, we must not lose sight of the magnificent mountains and deep rivers that also greet and cheer the traveler. I refer to such liberal intellectuals as al-Farabi (d. 1950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), Ibn-Rushd (d. 1198), Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), Rumi (d. 1273), Ibn-Arabi(d. 1240), Khayyam (d. 1131), and al-Biruni (d. 1048), *et al.* Islamic modernists

or those who may reject the Islamic tradition outright, unnecessarily deprive themselves of the resources that ought to have been judiciously harnessed for the continuing cultural growth of the Muslim community, instead of being ignored or forgotten.

Every age must look afresh and reinterpret its heritage of concepts and values. The task of revaluation and reconstruction of the Islamic thought-cum-value system will ever remain incomplete as long as man continues to grow and exercise the privilege and the duty of the ceaseless creativity of values.

In the context of Indian Islam such a fresh look by Indian Muslim intellectuals is absolutely essential for giving enlightenment and guidance to the common Muslim who stands totally baffled and perplexed by the antagonistic pulls of theocracy and democracy, clericalism, and secularism, traditionalism and modernity. The average Indian Muslim is more or less a split personality and must be helped to integrate himself. There can be no doubt that the integration should be oriented towards modernity rather than traditionalism. Like, it or not, the human family, as a whole is steadily moving in this direction. The angularities and imbalances that are inevitably generated in different societies are in the process of being corrected, although this process is bound to take a fairly long time to be completed. Different religions are at different stages of modernization, and within the same religion, different groups are likewise at different stages. Even within these groups individual differences obviously exist. But the push of science and the pull of the values of modernity are definitely working to the advantage of modernization.

The need of the age is an authentic dialogue between Islamic modernists and traditionalists. The spirit of polemics only generates mutual resistance in both the quarters helping neither the cause of modernity nor the cause of traditionalism. Unfortunately, many Muslim modernists and traditionalists have a genius for giving offence to each other through various devices. The traditionalist is prone to lament over the opportunism and disloyalty on the part of the modernist. The modernist, on the other hand, is irritated at the fixation or rather fossilization of the conservative or traditionalist mind. The way out of this unfortunate predicament lies in greater tolerance and an authentic dialogue between modernity and traditionalism. The outcome of such a dialogue, to my mind, should be the reconciliation between the two through the liberating concept of 'cultural emergents' that combine continuity with change. The effective promotion of this approach is much more

difficult than the downright denunciation of modernism or traditionalism, just as, in a very important sense, living the good life is much more difficult than rejecting life through suicide.

The study of the history of other religions is very useful for a deeper insight into our own religion. It is always easier to detect the psychological defense mechanisms and motives of self-interest, or confusion of ideas and inner contradiction in the case of others than in one's own. The same applies to groups. The limitations of other religions are much more easily grasped than those of one's own. Consequently a critical sociological survey of other religions helps us in a better understanding of the stages and laws of growth of our own culture or religion, its strength and its limitations. This comparative sociology of religions tends to dissolve our natural ethnocentricity and group self-conceit. Self-conceit prompts us to treat our own religion as a class by itself, and hence exempt from sociological laws that apply only to religions other than our own. Having outgrown this natural ethnocentricity and 'group snobbery', if I may call it, we are in a much better position to appreciate the points of excellence of our own religion and its unique contribution in the economy of the human family at large. Moreover, the realization of the variegated changes wrought by time in the fabric of the religious tradition, sets our creative imagination at work. Fresh visions are stirred that make us forward-looking, and growth oriented as distinguished from backward looking and tradition oriented.

Creative growth, however, implies the conservation of the values of the past. Cultural borrowing from others is one of the means of such growth. Early Islam was conspicuous for its spirit of assimilation of Greek, Iranian and Indian cultures. The cross-fertilization of intercultural concepts and values is an ever-recurring world process, though it usually operates at the unconscious level. Its conscious practice, however, does not render it any the least objectionable.

Cultural assimilation need not be confused with imitation or a patchwork synthesis. At its best, cultural assimilation is neither imitative nor synthetic but creative. It pre-supposes a critical evaluation of the culture of others no less than one's own. It is precisely this creative fusion that leads to 'cultural emergents'.

The basic ingredients of the different world religions are essentially the same, namely a thought-cum-value system, a precept system and an institutional system that is certainly an organic part of the total cultural *gestalt* but

not included in the religious core. Provided the genius of a particular religion has been grasped, its basic nuclear content can be preserved and cherished in the midst of a conscious assimilation of other concepts and values without impairing the basic integrity and personality of that religion.

To my mind, the concepts and values of religious modernity (as I have enumerated above) need to be consciously integrated into living Islam together with some basic values of ancient Indian and Chinese spirituality. The value of 'authenticity' as it has emerged in Western Europe, under the joint impact of modern science, linguistic analysis, sociology and psychoanalysis, is a key value (quite irrespective of creedal faith) and is integral to both Western modernity as well as Eastern spirituality at its best.

The contemporary age is the age of spiritual crisis and nihilism. A simple faith, whether in religious or secular values, has become more or less impossible for the sensitive and informed person, unless he first goes through a period of intense self-searching. One is, therefore, sorely tempted to cut short this arduous and long journey in the dark night of the soul in order to reach quickly the haven of faith and certitude. Man is eager to end the painfulness, nay the torture and agony involved in the loss of faith and a naked exposure to a total nihilism. The value of authenticity is an appeal to man not to fall a prey to intellectual dishonesty, self-alienation, and the compartmentalization of his personality, in order to escape doubts or the awareness of conflict between his different attitudes and beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

There is no unbridgeable chasm between religious modernity and traditionalism. The ideal is to be a growth oriented person rather than be a traditionalist or modernist. The growth oriented approach implies that no one vision can be accepted as final. Ghazzali's great synthesis in the 11<sup>th</sup> century between the strands of rationalism, mysticism and legalism was a monumental achievement. But no vision or interpretation can be allowed to become static.

The conceptual interpretation of the totality of human experience is a collective and progressive enterprise that should transcend the barriers of region and time, language and religion. The task of interpretation can never be completed. Human experience grows, yielding fresh factual data. This, in its turn, reacts or should react upon the conceptual interpretation



in the lap of which the data first confronted man. This dialogue between experience and interpretation (leading at times to the discovery of fresh facts and at others to the formulation of fresh interpretations) is a part of the unending human adventure or man's quest of value. To give only one example of this dialogue, the conquest of poverty and disease and the control of human population have profoundly modified the conception of a personal God. On the other hand, it was the concept of a Supreme and Just Creator that had centuries earlier helped in the emergence of the concepts of cosmos and science. The important thing to note is the organic character of the interpretative framework, which attracts data from every dimension of human experience.

The reconstruction in the meaning of traditional symbols and images takes time. There is a 'conceptual/cultural lag'. Loving tolerance towards tradition oriented persons is absolutely necessary. In this respect, the ancient Chinese and Indian tradition of many sided truth and the ethos of creedal tolerance is highly useful. Linguistic analysis as practiced by modern analytical philosophers is also very illuminating. These philosophers hold that different philosophical theories arise because they select different facts for emphasis. Hence the important thing is not the acceptance or rejection of any theory or verbal formulation but rather the full awareness of the complexity of the situation concerned. Provided this complexity is grasped, any formulation may be retained. This principle may aptly be called the 'principle of formulational tolerance'. This principle together with the concept of conceptual lag should help our modernists in carrying out an authentic and fruitful dialogue with the traditionalists, as recommended above.

The principle of 'formulational tolerance' is also a notable feature of Islamic mysticism or *Sufism*. The well-known story of *Moses and the Shepherd*, in the *Mathnawi* of Maulana Rumi (d. 1273), is perhaps the most striking and pregnant recommendation for the acceptance of this principle. Indeed, Rumi goes on to say that the violation of this principle leads one to 'conceptual idolatry', that is, the worship of one's conception of God, rather than of God Himself.

Earlier still, both Ghazzali and Ibn Rushd had posited the principle of 'formulational pluralism': truth must be communicated to suit the mental level of the hearer. This concept releases us from the monopolistic grip of traditional formulations as well as the jargon of all interpretative systems: Marxism, Positivism, Idealism, Theism, Vedanta, or what not.

Every thought and value system has limitations which must be acknowledged and overcome. This applies to every historical individual and epoch, including Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. To accept this however, in no way, compromises the absolute sincerity, integrity and status of the Prophet, in the light of clear Quranic texts that affirm that God alone is all Powerful, all Knowing and Infallible.

The quest of growth must not however blind us to the power of the symbols and images of a tradition. These symbols must be retained and at the same time they must be reconstructed. If the symbols are discarded, the new ideas and values have no legs to stand upon, or no vessels to be poured into. If on the other hand, the symbols are retained, it becomes very difficult to make them first absorb or assimilate and then convey the new ideas and values in question. The symbols cast their shadows and tend to obscure and distort the fresh stirrings of the human soul. Moreover, even if this difficulty be overcome, there is another dilemma. If the symbols are retained in their traditional sense, the reformer is heard but barely understood by the group, which does not move forward or towards the vision of the leader. If the leader retains the symbols but deconstructs and revises their operational meaning or practical significance, those members of the group who have no reason to feel dissatisfied with the traditional interpretation of the symbols actively oppose and resist the reformer's interpretation of basic concepts and values.

Every creative individual, therefore, has to solve this predicament. The fear of the charge of hypocrisy should not deprive him of the advantages of his membership of a living church or tradition (provided he feels an emotional involvement with the tradition). To my mind, if the many elements of value in the tradition genuinely inspire and motivate the reformer he should go ahead with the task of revising and deepening the tradition rather than breaking away from it. The charge of hypocrisy, after all, is not more serious or demoralizing than the charge of *Kufr* or apostasy that was in vogue in both medieval Christianity and Islam.

The charge of hypocrisy will be valid only if the individual distorts his authentic meanings in order to get an audience. But, if the recommended reconstruction of the operational meaning or function of the traditional symbols are not concealed but fully and frankly acknowledged, then using them to promote the inner spiritual growth of the community can never be regarded as hypocrisy. Indeed this is the only way to promote the peaceful

and harmonious growth of the human spirit in an ever-changing human situation. Buddha, Socrates, Christ, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Gandhi, and (in an important sense) even Marx, all followed this basic ethical principle or maxim.