


Can Islam Be Rescued from Islamism?

by Mordechai Nisan



Islamic terrorism in its violent expressions coexists with Islamic terrorism in thought. The blatant and barbarous aspect of Islamism, its murderous activities in New York and Jerusalem, Bali and London, Paris and Nairobi, Argentina and the Philippines, Madrid and Mumbai, Syria and Sri Lanka, mesmerizes world attention. Yet the terror of thought is no less, and perhaps more, menacing and paralytic: it constricts freedom of consciousness, intimidates free speech, and submits and smothers society under conformist Islamist religious forces. Islam from its beginning promoted both jihad warfare “in the path of Allah” and *dawa* missionizing to advance the new religion and make it supreme, if not exclusive, in the world.

Salim Mansur, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario, is a believing but dissident Muslim. Among Muslim reformers and free thinkers in the West, like his fellow-Canadian Irshad Manji, also Nonie Darwish and Boualem Sansal, are those who categorically denounced Islam, pointing to the obscenity of compulsory female genital mutilation and “honor killings,” beheadings, and brutal massacres. Some left the fold; among these apostates are Ibn Warraq, Mohamed Sifaoui, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Some dissidents in Muslim lands fled into exile and required police protection. A noteworthy and particular case was that of Nobel Literature laureate Naguib Mahfouz, a Muslim secularist, who was assaulted by fanatics in Cairo, survived the attack, and remained in his country.

In *The Qur'an Problem and Islamism*, published by Mantua  Books in Canada, Salim Mansur offers an exceptionally courageous and principled Muslim narrative of his personal beliefs and philosophy of life in a world where Khomeinism, Al-Qaeda, Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and ISIS, dominate and suffocate the Islamic conversation. Islamism is a “monstrosity,” affirms Mansur, reflecting the rot in the Muslim world. Its savagery in murdering thousands of innocent human beings in Nigeria and Pakistan, France and Spain, Egypt and Iraq, has brought shame upon many good Muslims globally.

Which Islam?

As a classic liberal and modern-day political conservative, Mansur is an intellectual savant whose worldview includes rationalism, individualism, and enlightenment, buoyed by loyalty to Canada and her roots in liberty and law. In his quest to sustain Islam as a religion embodying morality and humanism, Salim Mansur reads, with an open and critical eye, the Qur'an and the life of Muhammad, who spread “the Word of God.” Manifestly explicit passages in the Islamic holy book call upon believers to practice righteousness, to give alms to the poor, to treat orphans with fairness, and honor and show

kindness to parents; faith demands belief in Allah and the final Day of Judgment. Muslims are to attend to their prayers and reject idolatry. They are obligated to refrain from imposing their faith on non-Muslims.

With support from the Qur'an, Mansur reaches out to "one human family" with a universalism to encompass all people and believers – not only Muslims – in the One God. The Qur'an that "makes things clear" is part of the prophetic legacy in monotheism. Islam is one path and not the only one toward this truth. In his writings and interviews, Salim conveys his love for humanity whatever people's background or faith. This is for him the message of Islam writ large in daily life.

So where is the problem? It is in the totalitarian ideology of Islamism, this "crippling of Islamic culture and civilization," which abandoned philosophy and reason, and formulated a "fascistic" and perverted version of Islam. Great Muslim thinkers like Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Averros), and Jalaluddin al-Rumi, have been ignored or rejected. The infamous preachers advocated jihad, militancy, and martyrdom. Among the radical fundamentalists were Ibn Taimiyya, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb. Islam, now reduced to warfare and blood, metastasized into *Islamism*. This is Mansur's central claim and he is therefore at one with non-Muslim authors like Bat Ye'or, Robert Spencer, and Andrew Bostom, who have elucidated the warlike and expansionist ambitions of a conquering Islam pursuing the vision of a world caliphate.

One chapter in the book deals with Muslim anti-Semitism that, for Mansur, is a diabolical strand that has no inherent foundation in the Qur'an and Islam. Anti-Jewish bigotry is foreign to the holy text and Jews indeed survived and even sometimes flourished in Muslim lands. There are ways to interpret the Qur'an through the method of abrogation (*naskh*) and contextualizing to invalidate the contemporary relevance of harsh Qu'ranic verses. The text then becomes subject to the meaning the reader gives to it. Yet, radical Muslim preachers

today are rife with blistering Qur'anic-based attacks against Jews as cursed, vile people, murdering prophets and breaching agreements, to the crescendo of likening them to apes and monkeys. For Mansur, the Qur'anic demand that Jews be reduced to "humiliation and misery" (Ch.9, 29) is limited to an earlier period of history alone.

When Muslims promote hatred for Jews and Christians, this is in the view of Mansur a deviation and distortion of Islam's basic tolerance for other monotheistic religions.

Is There a Non-Political Islam?

Salim Mansur and other Muslims who share his frustration and rage confront the Islamist domination of Islam's agenda and activity that possess vast financial and educational networks with a radical program to Islamize the world, America and Europe included. Over a thousand years ago, the fanatical Hanbali Muslims in Baghdad raided houses if they found wine and poured it away; if they found a singing girl they beat her; if they saw a man going with a woman, they charged them with immorality and dragged them to the police. These scenes of oppression sound familiar in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan of today.

However, other Muslims a millennium ago evoked a very different sensibility. Avicenna, born in Bukhara (Uzbekistan), was educated in the Qur'an and jurisprudence, also in mathematics and logic, Aristotelian philosophy, astronomy, geometry, and medicine. He was a man of learning and open to acquiring knowledge from whoever could teach him. In Baghdad Islamists hounded the people in the name of Islam, in Bukhara and beyond Avicenna sought the horizons of scholarship in tandem with Islam. The debate regarding the true version of Islam continues until today.

Salim Mansur is a modern man, valuing reason while not discarding revelation, though choosing the former over the

latter. He seeks coherence and comprehensiveness in knowledge, without sacrificing his deep faith in Islam. Perhaps he is trying to square the circle, hold the rope from both ends. He confidently recognizes the cultural continuity in evolving revelations, Muhammad's included, throughout history. As a Muslim believer, he seems drawn to the softness and individuality embedded within the Sufi track, as in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi who identified the "Oneness of Being" for the mystical climb to be at one with God. This is an invitation for all human beings regardless of their particular religious affiliation. God transcends all, and distinctions among men dissolve with the common quest for a god-like experience and life. Mansur's is a personal religion rather than a political religion; the classic characterization of Islam as *din wa-dawla* (religion and state) is alien to Salim's sensibility.

His nobility of character in an age of extremism is exceptionally admirable. He feels engaged in the vortex of a historical moment that imperils both Islam and the West. In Ontario, where he lives, he had to change the mosque he attends. He was threatened for his 'unorthodox' ideas. No less, he is a spiritual brother to the Jews and a vigorous supporter of Israel. These convictions fly in the face of the ideological rigors of Islamism.

Overall, Mansur wants an Islam of "many faces." He chooses the West for its modernity and openness, individual liberty and the rule of law. This he found in Canada, the country he adopted and embraces. He hopes to enter Canadian politics; as a Member of Parliament he could be a commanding voice for moderation and common sense to challenge the vagaries of multi-culturalism, religious fanaticism, and anti-Semitism.

As of today, the chicanery of Islamophobia and Political Correctness control much of the language and discussion. The West has been artfully and partly disarmed of its heritage – including Christianity, and values of equality and liberty,

progress for all – choosing to privilege Islam by accommodating its parallel society separatism, sharia courts, and execrable youth marriages (as in parts of Europe today). In the East, Islam has persecuted and terrorized the Christians; but in the West, Islamist Muslims have been free to advance an Islamist agenda – in schools, in mosques, in public and political fora, in the media – successfully intimidating the weak-willed while glorifying the supremacy of Islam over all other cultures and religions.

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