
Any good features distinguish this book, not the least of them being the well deserved tribute paid to the great Catholic scholar and Islamist, Louis Massignon (d. 1962). On the other hand the menu presented is extremely bland. There is something to satisfy people of any religious persuasion or none, so inclusive is the terminology used in describing Islamic beliefs. Moreover, many of the insights here set forth, excellent as they are, cannot be regarded specifically Islamic. This appears, for example, in the discussion of the ethical ethics of work where Nasr writes: "... to produce a work of ... requires the love of the maker for that work. ... Such a work ennobles the soul of the person who creates it and fulfils deep religious ... needs, the transmitting to the person who obtains the work ... a joy which ... possesses a definite religious significance." Thoughts like these recur in the writings of religions other than Islam, as well as in the works of writers with definite religious convictions.

This fact may also have prompted the question Nasr proposes in his preface, rephrased, "Who claims to speak for traditional Islam?" or perhaps, as the question might better be put, "Who can speak for traditional Islam?" Such a query would seem to set aside the fact that great latitude as to what anyone may embrace exists among Muslims. A sacred Tradition even cites Muhammad himself as saying, "Divergences in my community are a mercy." The important thing in Islam centers is not around points of dogma, but, as in Judaism, the interpretation of the sacred law. In the same context the author notes at the real situation when he notes that a Western Islamist may at times press a more balanced view on topics now disputed among Muslims. This is precisely because he is not personally entangled in the present-day intellectual tensions that beset the Islamic world."
Nasr is especially vehement in his condemnation of modern thought. But “modern thought” as he explains it does not mean thought that is up-to-date or useful for dominating the world of nature. Rather it is thought cut off from the Transcendent, from the immutable principles governing the universe and made known to man through revelation (p. 98). In Islamic belief a knowledge, including mathematics, is regarded as sacred. In effect then modern thought reduces all knowledge to the profane (p. 229) and so is identified with secularism. Throughout his critique Nasr ignores the need in Islam for the kind of sound secularization stressed in the Second Vatican Council (Gaudium et Spes, n. 36). This would withdraw the cultural and scientific realms of knowledge from the direct domination of religion as such and would see all created things and societies as endowed with their own stability, truth, and proper laws. Instead, throughout the book secularization is identified with secularism, that is, with irreligion or loss of the sense of the sacred.

His harshest censure is reserved for evolution, an idea he considers detrimental to all religion. This doctrine

instead of being considered as a hypothesis . . . is paraded around as if were a proven scientific fact. . . . . . . . . . . . . there is no possible way to harmonize the conception of man (Iśād) as he to whom God taught the ‘names’ and whom He placed on earth as His khalīfah [vicegerent] and the evolutionist conception which sees man as having ‘ascended’ from the ape (p. 105).

To understand his opinion of the wide spectrum of beliefs now labeled Islamic fundamentalism, it is necessary to recall that Western writers use the term by analogy with the Protestant movement emphasizing the literal interpretation of the Bible. All Muslims believe literally in a Qur′ān free from error. Hence they cannot hold this as a distinctive belief. Instead, fundamentalism among them emphasize, not fundamental tenets, but practices. For them the Sharī'ā or revealed law of Islam must be literally interpreted and enforced in all its rigor. Nasr blames the so-called “Fundamentalists” in contemporary Islam for their superficiality; that is, they wish to reconstruct Islamic society merely by reestablishing external legal and social norms instead of trying to bring about a revival of Islam through inner purification.

His words on dialogue echo the pessimistic tone reflected throughout much of the book. He describes a situation in which he sees fewer and fewer religious and moral principles being defended and which is being progressively realized both among Christians and among Muslims. This, he holds, makes future dialogue less and less likely to prosper.

Today everyone talks of ecumenism and openness in religious dialogu
but in most cases this exercise does little to produce better understanding among religions because one is asked to sacrifice or dilute the principles and doctrines of each religion in order to carry on dialogue. There is, however, little about which one can have a dialogue when there are no principles to be defended (p. 263).

Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, S.J.


In trans such as Jesús Gayo Aragón, Horacio de la Costa, and Lucio Gutiérrez, not to speak of earlier writers, have called attention to the key role played by "Synod of Manila" of 1582 in setting the direction for Spanish colonial officials and encomenderos, which undoubtedly spared Filipinos the abuses that attended colonization in America.

Nevertheless, there has not been until now any full-length systematic study of the synod itself. What has been done by the above-named historians as well as by the nonspecialist. Father Valentín Marín y Morales, O.P., published extracts at the beginning of this century in his Ensayo de una síntesis de los trabajos realizados por las Corporaciones Religiosas Españolas de Filipinas. More recently Father Pablo Fernández published photostatically in a volume from the archives of the University of Santo Tomas a facsimile of the proceedings of the synod. Its 17th century calligraphy, when edited in preparation for the fifth centenary celebration of Columbus' discovery of America. The treatment is exhaustive. After an introduction on the Spanish and Philippine background of the synod, there are biographical sketches of the two key figures — Bishop Domingo de Salazar, O.P., and Father Sánchez, S.J. The editor then reproduces the key passages from the synod documents of the seventeenth century to the present, in which the less abundant reference is made to the synod. From a study of these