Is Islam Against Modernity?

Modernity is an exclusively Western concept that has no equivalent in other cultures and civilizations. Linguistically, most world languages adopted the same concept with slight etymological variations. Those which did not, provided their own alternatives, which, in essence, were closest single-word interpretations of the term's meaning and substance. In Arabic, translation of the term oscillates between the words of *hadathah* and *'asriyyah*, with different forms of the words of *tajdid*, *tatwir* and *bid'ah* being occasionally used in order to cast more light on some secondary nuances of the term of modernity.

Islam is the final revelation revealed to the final messenger to mankind, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). As such, inspired by its finality, two of Islam's underlining characteristics are its universality and applicability till the end of this earthly life. Their essence is summed up as follows.

In its revealed and perennial sources, the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, Islam contains all the essential spiritual and moral truth required my humankind to live honourable, consequential and accountable lives. Just as the world has its universal and constant physical laws, it also has its universal and constant spiritual and moral ones. While the former permeates and is inscribed on the "pages" of the physical aspects of life, the latter permeates all levels of existence and is inscribed on the pages of the revealed Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah. Both sets of laws are indispensable for living a successful and happy life, individually and collectively. Doing so furthermore means striking a delicate balance between the two poles of existence. Resorting to either pole at the expense of the other, upsetting thereby the intended ontological equilibrium and harmony, leads to devastating consequences at all levels of the human presence on earth, which will be proportionate to the level of imbalances and tensions.

The Modernity that Islam Endorses

The changes that Islam allows revolve around developing certain worldly means, methods, techniques, applications, contexts and milieus with regard to certain secondary and rather practical issues and aspects. That means that Islam must be always rendered relevant and applicable in the vicissitudes of time and space factors. To be Muslim and practice Islam at once as a philosophy, worldview and a total code of life, denotes balancing between the permanent and transitory, the immutable and fluctuating, heaven and earth, spirituality and civilization, and between yesterday and today.

To do all this, Islam provided its followers with a host of flexible opportunities that stem from the normative revealed knowledge, such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *qiyas* (deductive analogy), *ijma'* (consensus or agreement of scholars), *shura* (consultation) and '*urf* (unwritten customary law). While applying Islam in such a manner in different places and times, priorities are never to be confused and muddled. Heaven, the soul and moral wellbeing of people and their societies are not to be compromised for earth, the body and people's material wellbeing respectively.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said: "At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah (community) someone who will renew its religious understanding" (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith No. 4291). This means that every time many people deviate from the path of the religion of Islam which has been perfected by Allah, Allah sends to them scholars or a scholar who has deep knowledge of Islam, and a wise caller who helps the people to develop a proper understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and protects them from innovation and warns them against newly-invented matters, and brings them back from deviation to the straight path of the Qur'an and Sunnah. This is called renewal of the ummah, not renewal of the

religion that Allah prescribed and perfected. Changes, weakness and deviation happen time after time to the ummah; as for Islam itself, it is protected by means of the protection of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), which explains the Book of Allah.[1]

Almighty Allah explicitly says that He had perfected for people their religion, completed His favours upon them, and had approved for them Islam as the only religion (al-Ma'idah, 3). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said: "Beware of newly-invented matters, for every newly-invented matter is an innovation, every innovation is a going astray, and every going astray will be in Hellfire" (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 867). That is, Islam prohibits any invented way in religion that is aimed at worshipping or drawing closer to Allah, and which is not based on the Shari'ah and its authentic sources. Truth is absolute and ageless. It is immune to the slants of evolution, maturation and variability.

Inventing legitimately in pure worldly matters is something else and is entirely permissible. However, it is right at the point where the spiritual and worldly realms converge and their respective frontiers unite that problems start. The nature and extent of such a unification, and its endless corollaries for conceiving and living everyday life, always dictated the dynamics of Islamic history and its civilizational proclivities. So much so that it could be asserted that following in religious matter and inventing in worldly ones contains a blueprint for a Muslim existential superiority, whereas the opposite, that is, inventing in religious matters and following in worldly ones, contains a prescription for a Muslim existential degeneration and fall. Also, through the lens of the rendezvous point between the heavenly and

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[1] *The hadith "At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah someone who will renew its religious understanding",* (https://islamqa.info/en/answers/153535/the-hadith-at-the-beginning-of-every-century-allah-will-send-to-this-ummah-someone-who-will-renew-its-religious-understanding, 2017, accessed on June, 16 2019).

terrestrial domains, should the concept and phenomenon of modernity in Islam be observed.

Thus, modernity as a state or quality of being current, contemporary, and to be characteristic or expressive of the present, now and here, rather than dwelling in the past, or being entirely associated with it, while being confronted with new and modern issues and challenges, is a natural, yet required and looked-for, thing. Man is always to look forward to new things and events - as they keep coming anyway - and to try to deal with them as creatively as possible in the light of his cumulative religious, traditional and technical knowledge, skills and experiences. He is neither to be overwhelmed, nor incapacitated, by what is coming. As both the traditional and present-day being, man is to be somewhat in control of the future and to dictate its terms, rather than the future being in full control of his life and destiny.

Thus seen, modernity is a result of the natural flow of time and history, where man - if he wants to stay faithful to himself and his earthly mission and purpose - intrinsically naturalizes and adapts to the conditions. Every current phase of history, it stands to reason, is regarded as a modern phase. Once it is overtaken by a new one, the former phase is transported to the past where it joins the harmonious assembly of earlier phases and historical chapters. They together create an inclusive whole where everything except the totality of truth and its application is rendered relative. This way, in an unstoppable process, history and tradition are being continuously expanded and enriched. There is no rupture of any significant kind, nor intensity – let alone conflict - between the past, present and the future. As independent notions, they are perceived as utterly inconsequential. This is irrespective of whether time is regarded as being cyclic, or linear, irreversible and progressive, or even static.

This harmony is reflective of the harmony in man and his beliefs, values and thought. Man and his life should serve as a quintessence and microcosm of truth, as much as history in general, and human culture and civilization should. Truth knows no boundaries between

the past, present and the future; nor does it recognize the meaning of modernity and tradition either. Truth is timeless and immaterial. For man to grasp, actualize and live it, he too in the otherworldly sense, ought to free himself from the fetters of time and space and dwell on a higher level of meaning and experience. Modernity and tradition are relative concepts invented by man with the purpose of measuring and evidencing his relative successes and definite failures.

This seems to be the message of Almighty Allah when He swears in the Qur'an by time, in a chapter that carries the same name: *al-'Asr* (Time). Allah relates time to believers' success in life, because they manage with His divine help and guidance to rise above its stifling yokes, and to control it, so to speak; and to the loss and failure of non-believers, because they become trapped forever in time as a consequence of their rejection of the divine guidance, and end up thinking and acting but according to time's artificial parameters and standards. Allah says: "By (the token of) Time (through the ages)! Verily man is in loss, except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of patience and constancy" (al-'Asr, 1-3). Certainly, it is not a coincidence that time, truth, faith and collective performance, with respect to actualizing certainty, patience and constancy, are interrelated.

In the above-explained sense, Islam is not against modernity; hence, Muslims should not be either. On the contrary, Islam goes all out for it, and so, Muslims should do too. Islam is as alive, pragmatic, relevant and matter-of-fact today as it was 1400 years ago. It would be a crime against Islam's dynamism, strength, energy and feasibility if it were demoted and fully confined only to the sphere of a particular historical, geographical, cultural and socio-economic context. Such would be a crime not only against truth, but also against human nature, logic and experience.

Along the same lines, certainly, the relationship between Islam and tradition – and indeed every other generated-by-man concept and phenomenon - is to be viewed. Islam is bigger than all of them. They

are to be studied against the backdrop of the world of Islam. The case should never be the other way around.

How serious and encouraging Islam is about those things testifies the *hadith* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) predicated on which a person (judge) who makes decisions, while striving to solve unavoidable problems by means of *ijtihad*, will be abundantly rewarded. If he gets things right, he will get two rewards; but if he gets things wrong, after he sincerely tried his best and made decisions to the best of his ability and knowledge, he will still get one reward (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 7352).

It is apparent therefrom that sincerity, honesty, dedication, hard-work, productivity and faithfulness, regardless of outcomes, bring nothing but approval, praise and rewards. Similarly, being wrong in the processes of striving and demonstrating commitment and devotion, is also fulfilling and rewarding. A person is wrong only when he deviates and gives up, and when he becomes indolent, unproductive and pathetic; in other words, when he becomes not his inherent self, and so, becomes a liability and burden. Owing to the same slant and meaning, Islam also denounces deadening formalism, narrow-mindedness and every form of discrimination. All the above applies as much to individual as collective performance.

The Modernity that Islam Rejects

However, Islam is against the notion of modernity as advocated in the West as a result of Western man's continuous struggles again tradition and religion, i.e., against his very self and his spiritual identity. Today's idea of modernity carries the very essence of those struggles, bearing witness to Western man's recurring ontological ups and downs. Consequently, all sacred and moral frames of reference have been destroyed in the process. Modern man divorced himself for good from Heaven, and from any potential source of spirituality,

epistemology and moral values, other than what he perceives through the prism of his own newly-fashioned scientific, secular and nihilistic worldviews. Everything in life became desacralized, except man himself and his unholy scientific and technological crusades, which, consciously or otherwise, became solely idolized and worshipped. Man and his genius became a "deity", scientific discoveries the "revealed knowledge", technological innovations and advances the "sacred artefacts", and industrial complexes as well as commercial centres became modernity's "temples and holy shrine".

Through modernity, Western man pretended to be the master of the earth, and if possible, the whole creation. At any rate, evil and flawed enterprises cannot but beget extra evil and more flaws. There is no immoral and wrong course of action that can eventually lead to good, just as there is no good and moral course of action that can lead to bad. Modern man has chosen his destiny, and now he has to live and die with his decisions. Some of the most detrimental consequences of modern man's behaviour are the two World Wars, imperial colonialism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the Cold War, bottomless materialism, greed and consumerism, and the global environmental destruction. Indeed, a great extinction is on the brink, thanks to modern man and his "scientific and technological advancements" steeped in perennial doubt, uncertainty and insecurity. Man is set to die by his own hand. As Jesus once said: "Live by the sword, die by the sword." The situation is worsening by the day so much that one starts wondering if modernity was an experiment that went horribly wrong, and from which very little is being learned today.

For example, in Islam man is a servant of Allah, the Creator and Master, and His vicegerent on earth. The earth has been created and subjected to man in order to function as a milieu and physical framework for man to discharge his duties towards his Creator, the order of nature, himself and the rest of mankind. To do so, man must cultivate a culture of learning and spiritual devotion, more than anything else. Thus, when Muslims think of knowledge, they think primarily of what could be called "knowledge for living and

worshipping". When a Westerner, on the other hand, thinks of knowledge, it is mainly of "knowledge for power", that is, such knowledge as enables one to control the forces of nature, material objects, human individuals and societies.[2] Hence, Francis Bacon's declaration that "knowledge is power" (*scientia potentia est*). Knowledge, therefore, does not enlighten and refine, but perverts and deludes, modern man; nor does it enrich, uplift and tranquilize, but rather impoverishes, defiles and upsets, him.

Without a doubt, this and similar doctrines enshrined in the Western conception of modernity and civilization-building, Islam sees as blasphemous and counterproductive in the long run. It is this version of modernity that Islam is against, whereby everyday new and more sophisticated (modern) means and channels are created for repudiating Almighty God and Heaven, and for pushing man deeper into the anguish of venerating his own self, his physical desires and his unfeasible selfish goals only. All the positive dimensions of modernity – and there are many of them - are not in a position to offset its proliferating poisonous negative ones.

The problem of modernity was compounded by the fact that its proponents' vision was infused with a sense of moral superiority. Less civilized generally non-Western peoples, it was taught, could only profit from embracing this new life paradigm. This view is a legacy of Western centuries-old colonialism. Colonization of the world was not only regarded as economically advantageous, but as a moral act as well. By introducing the savage to modern Western civilization, he was raised thereby to a higher plane of existence. To the missionary who followed upon the commercial colonization, the cultures he encountered were only anachronisms, to be eradicated through conversion. The self-righteousness and sense of superiority that underlay colonialism stemmed partly from Christian teaching, which was represented as the one true religion to which all must be converted, and partly from the shift towards materialism brought on by the industrial revolution. Civilization had become measurable in

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[2] William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 13.

material terms, and the West realized its phenomenal potential to produce signs of civilization in overwhelming quantities.[3]

The colonization of Muslim territories began with the rise of European empires, the conquest of India, and the scramble for Africa in the 19th century. Its last phase included the division of the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.[4] Consequently, most Muslim nations and their cultures succumbed to the unrelenting advances of modernity and the colonizers' aggressive modernity-proselytization drives. The effects spilled over into the rest of Muslim territories. Even though they had not been directly colonized, such countries were not immune to the sweeping events and phenomena around them. Sometimes the indirect exposures and experiences were as impactful as the direct and immediate ones. For Instance, despite the fact that neither Turkey nor Iran was colonized by any European Imperial power, both of them in the end became perhaps most modernized states in the Muslim world. What is more, they became symbols of Muslim modernity (Westernization).

Expectedly, due to the slant of West-inspired modernity, it and its advocates in the Muslim world immediately set themselves on a collision course with the teachings and values of Islam, with ulama as the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of religious knowledge, of Islamic doctrine and law, and with religious especially educational institutions. What suffered most were the entrenched religious educational systems, education in general, the roles and functions of mosques as community centres, the status and role of women, the family and house institutions, media, entertainment, fashion, moral values, urbanism, arts and architecture.

When one speaks about the modernization of the Muslim world, what comes to the fore and stands out are the issues that pertain to moral and spiritual values, such as anti-veiling campaigns, "emancipation" of

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[3] Brent Brolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture*, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1976), p. 45.
[4] Vali Reza Nasr, *European Colonialism and the Emergence of Modern Muslim States,* (Oxford Islamic Studies Online,http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/book/islam-9780195107999/islam-9780195107999-chapter-13, 2019, accessed on June, 16 2019).

Muslim women by abolishing gender segregation and allowing them to participate more freely and more productively in public life, abandoning and greatly debilitating the institution of madrasah and other religious educational institutions, de-spiritualizing people's attitudes and behaviours, etc. In short, Muslim modernization project signified a process that aimed at a more determined break with the past, and with all habits and norms coded as traditional, uncivilized, false or backward. The process was synonymous with westernization. That was done under the banners of cultural reforms and cultural modernization projects. Little gains procured in the military, urbanization, political and economic fields paled in comparison with losses in other more crucial sectors. The losses were in relation to people's identity, consciousness, thought and spiritual as well as moral disposition.

The Fruits of Muslim Modernization

So, what were the fruits of Muslim modernization?

One thing is certain: Muslims never achieved the level of economic prosperity, political maturity, cultural sophistication and urban coherence and sustainability as witnessed by their Western counterparts. Nor were they enabled to do so, as such was never on the agenda. If they were, that would have defeated the purposes of direct and indirect colonialism: physical, economic and cultural, and that of westernization, and the forging of relationships between the savage and civilized, the backward and progressive, and the superior and inferior, would have become distorted and even untenable.

By the same token, Muslims never managed – nor were they allowed – to become fully independent, free and democratic societies with just and strong governments, good track records on equality and human rights, strong and dynamic colleges and universities that could serve the long-established interests of the local communities, robust

economic entities, etc. But they became second to none when it came to importing and consuming the cultural and ideological trash of the West and its civilization. While the former was rarely the focus, the latter never ceased to be. Moreover, oppressive and unjust regimes, puppet governments, weak and corrupt legal systems, and dishonest media and entertainment sectors, were often instituted and employed for the sake of sustaining the latter. Everything was attempted to leave the door open for people "to follow the line of least resistance before modernism and to surrender to their passions or to the transient passions of the day, however demonic they may be."[5]

Furthermore, since it was inherent in the philosophy and movement of modernity that all forms of tradition and religion should be completely discredited and eschewed, the proponents of the modernity crusade and its main actors in the Muslim world – both outsiders and insiders – found it more appealing and gratifying to apply yet more vigorously their creed on the religion of Islam and its traditions among Muslims. That was so because to them, Islam was more than a religion and the source of a tradition, which needed to be assailed as such.

Besides, Islam and Muslims were the political, economic and civilizational rivals to the West. The threat, therefore, had to be decisively dealt with in its totality, as a total compendium and at all planes of its existence and operation. By Islam's claim of its finality, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness and a sense of superiority, and by possessing the undistorted revealed Holy Word (the Qur'an) and the rich history and profound cultural and civilizational legacy to back up its claims, the promoters of modernity felt vulnerable and endangered in areas where they could be hurt most: the worldview, knowledge and morals. Such was not the case insofar as the Christian faith was concerned because, after all, it was still the official religion of the West, and many modernists still felt certain sentimental and nominal affiliation with its realm. Christianity was still theirs. They could not live together, but could not be fully separated either.

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[5] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2002), p. 191.

It goes without saying that Islam with its comprehensive and consistent worldview, belief and moral systems, was the biggest obstacle for colonialism, modernity and westernization in the Muslim lands. In view of that, the modernists' main focus always remained Islam. If they managed to upset the relationship between Islam and Muslims, and to keep them apart, they knew that controlling and manipulating Muslims: their being, mind and behaviour, will then become a much easier proposition. That is why, for instance, the conquest and colonization of Algeria is called a "conquest of knowledge".[6] Whoever refused to imitate blindly even the most vulgar products of Western civilization was criticized as reactionary or decadent. Later, such terms as Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism and ultra-conservatism were coined for the purpose of discrediting and smearing the opponents of modernity, and for supporting and paying homage to its champions and supporters.

Thus, the pinnacle of the modernity campaign in the Muslim world were the attacks against the integrity of the Sunnah and *hadith* literature, together with the attacks against the authority of the traditional commentaries of the Holy Qur'an and the Qur'an itself, and their respective roles as primary sources of Islamic legislation, ethical frames of reference, and Islamic epistemology. The opponents of the Islamic tradition knew that as long as the Sunnah was respected and kept intact, there remained within the Islamic community a divinely appointed norm by which to judge human behaviour and, along with the Holy Qur'an itself, the means to provide the basis for the collective life of human society as well as for the inner religious life of its members.[7] Such served as the antithesis of modernity's paramount doctrines. As if the message of the raiding European modernity to the religion of Islam was to the effect that the Muslim world wasn't big enough for the both of them.

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[6] Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Violent Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 19.
[7] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, p. 190.

Reactions to Modernity

Towards the end of the 19th century when the European colonialism project was at its peak, and when more of the products of the European technology and industry became available, modernity as a global phenomenon increasingly grew to be unavoidable. In the eyes of some, it was becoming a necessary evil. To others, it was a godsend. Muslim responses to it varied.

The rulers wanted to "modernize" their countries; first it was armies and modern weapons of war, then railways, then the amenities of domestic life such as electricity and running water, then automobiles and factory equipment, and finally all the new inventions of the 20th century. As the Western-educated class grew in numbers and wealth, it also wanted to share in Western comforts and luxuries. As time went on, more and more ordinary people too wanted to partake in the new standards of living being developed in the West.[8] Western-type education, both in the West and back home, was also ultimately coveted and pursued, in that it was the most warranted path to a modernity status.

There was no shortage of intellectuals and even ulama who on a philosophical basis tried to justify and promote this attitude. However, their apologetics merely reproduced the worldview of an all-conquering, self-absorbed Eurocentric world. The Islam they described was flawed because it mirrored back to Western critics of Islam the most positive and alluring image of that religion as these critics would interpret it. Instead of understanding and interpreting Islam as Muslims have believed and practiced it, such modernist intellectuals and ulama "have been content to fashion Islam within parameters set by outsiders who are, at bottom, inveterately hostile

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[8] William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, p. 46.

to it. They have therefore betrayed Islam into the hands of its enemies."[9]

Others, on the other hand, spearheaded by either traditional scholars or conservative reformers and activists, propagated a minimal, conditional and selected imitation as well as following of the West and its modernity drive - if a total rejection was not possible. To them, the unsatisfactory conditions of the Muslim world were only partly due to the West and its influences. More accurately, the problems lay in the weaknesses of traditional Islamic educational systems, coupled with the spread of Westernized local systems of education, which produced ineffectual, weak and narrow-minded citizens. What was wanted most urgently was a more rational understanding and presentation of Islamic truth and the reassertion of its traditional self-image, so that the contemporary burgeoning challenges could be confronted more adequately and more effectively.

However, nobody could stay completely aloof from what was happening inside the Muslim world and beyond, as far as the impact of Western modernity was concerned. Those who thought they did perhaps succeeded in ignoring the causes, which were the various dimensions of modernity, but could not close their eyes to a myriad of effects and consequences which they had to deal with at the various levels of the Islamic and Muslim socio-political and religious reality.

What was critical, yet was poorly grasped as much by rulers and scholars as by the general public, was the fact that there has been a strong link between social change and the acceptance of Western technology. Those responsible for bringing in Western technology and industry failed to realize that it would eventually lead to great social upheaval. It was impossible not to be affected by Western values and thought in the process, because the same technology and industry were the product of such values and thought. Using the former in complete isolation from the latter was unfeasible, and any such attempt was pointless and, at most, a short-term procedure. As

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[9] Martin Forward, *The Failure of Islamic Modernism?*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 136.

William Montgomery Watt puts it, most of the Muslim modernity-associated problems originated from the exposure of their traditional worldview to the contemporary Western outlook. "They might also have come to see that they could not share in Western science and technology without also sharing in those aspects of Western thought on which science and technology are based, and that these could not be wholly separated from the historical and literary criticism which threw doubts on parts of their traditional worldview."[10]

It was on account of all this that most of the earlier and recent genuine calls for reforms in the Muslim world revolved around: restructuring and improving education in general, and religious education in particular, and what mode of relationship ought to exist between the two; Islamization of knowledge; de-westernization of knowledge; the integration of religious and worldly sciences; the reconstruction of Islamic thought; alleviating the crisis of the Muslim mind and soul; solving the problems of ideas, thought and values; etc.

Modernity is Here to Stay

The problem is no longer one pertaining to the past, present or the future alone, or to either the spiritual or material realm, or to either the West or East alone. The problem is so ubiquitous, all-encompassing and global that it must be treated as such. Escapism, compartmentalization, or reductionism of any kind or degree is not acceptable either, as none of them is a match for the size of challenge modernity poses.

The advantages of modernity should be embraced and seamlessly integrated into the fabric of Islamic culture and civilization, while its disadvantages should be reasonably neutralized and rejected. In lieu of them, more appropriate Islamic alternatives should be sought and

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[10] William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, p. 50.

developed. Why cannot Muslims simply evaluate modern civilization according to the principles and values of their own tradition and simply forsake what is opposed to those principles and values? To do that, nonetheless, an appropriate state of mind, as well as soul, is required. Cultivating such a state should be the foremost priority of each and every reform.

In any case, modernity is here to stay, however we tended to look at, and deal with, it. For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, facing it stoically and dealing with its threats as successfully as possible on all fronts represent a form of *jihad* or holy struggle. He says: "The contemporary Muslim must and cannot but wage a continuous holy struggle (*jihad*), not only within himself to keep his mind and soul healthy and intact, but also outwardly to protect what he can of the marvellous spiritual and artistic heritage his forefathers have bequeathed him in the expectation that he too will preserve and transmit it to the next generation."[11]

Lastly, it should always be borne in mind that Islamic society and its culture and civilization never really stalled or became stagnant and decayed. What normally happened were those intermittent historical episodes whereby occasional forms of decadence in both thought and civilization came to pass. However, they were too peripheral, so much on the fringe, and were overwhelmed so rapidly by the spiritual presence of the tradition and those who held firmly to it,[12] that they should be seen as natural phases in the growth, adjustment and refinement of cultures and civilizations, and nothing short of reactions to the permanent work of historical and civilizational laws and procedures. That Islamic society, culture and civilization became stalled and declined is a narrative born in the West as part of their colonialism and modernity crusade. The reality is very different. Because this particular narrative is one of failure, it is very insidious.

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[11] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, p. 26.
[12] Ibid., p. 123.

It is something that distorts Muslims' understanding, and it is poison to the young.[13]

The whole idea is born from the shallow framework of Western values and norms, according to which every civilizational output is to be judged. That framework gives emphasis to Western modernity's raison d'etre only, which is the advancement of science and technology. It would be preposterous therefore that a society is considered civilized only because it generated high levels of scientific and technological output, and another society is not considered civilized only because it did not produce science and technology, or it did, but very little. As fascinating and useful as science and technology are, in no way should they be accorded a worship-like attitude and be reckoned the justification of existence. Their relativity, variability, conditionality, temporality and even mutability will eventually prove their own ontological undoing.

Islamic society was always highly civilized because it never abandoned en masse its endorsement and application of absolute truth. In its midst, the road to truth was always clear and the journey towards it always encouraged and facilitated. That road was continuously trodden by great multitudes. And truth alone, including the extent of its implementation and the scope of people's affiliation with it through their spiritual, moral and intellectual wellbeing, is the norm in respect to which a society's status as being civilized or otherwise could be determined.

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[13] Umer Nangiana, *Islamic Society Never Got Stalled*, (https://m.gulf-times.com/story/439003/Islamic-society-never-got-stalled, 2019, accessed on June, 18 2019).