

On Islamic Tolerance

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Why does one hear so much about tolerance today, when as little as a few decades ago it was considered an obsolete virtue, anachronistic and outstripped by the progress of our civilization? When a virtue is lacking we remember it most! Must we conclude from the emphasis placed on tolerance these last few years that we have entered an era of generalized mutual incomprehension? The conquests of the intellect; local, national and international juridical practices; education open to global issues; the intermixing of humanity that has never before "moved" so much under the combined effect of emigration; tourism and the developments in transportation and vast information exchanges served by efficient techniques that make communication one of the greatest benefits of our culture; all this could have led mankind into a surplus of exchanges on all levels, and better mutual appreciation leading to more tolerance.

Intolerance or the Dialectics of Contempt

And yet a kind of evil spirit has done its best to distort interpersonal and international relationships. Modernity, in no longer putting into contact people, communities and cultures but rather individuals and masses, has perhaps contributed – without anyone paying enough attention despite the many warning signs – to fashioning an unexpected human "landscape" that is arrogant and rude, leading us back to the worst moments of our history. The era of mechanized masses has developed a sort of universal contempt for the other: precocious children kill babies, the language of the bomb takes over the planet, State terrorism and just plain terrorism abandon themselves to an infernal one up-manship. In the

end intolerance, coming to the fore of inter-human relationships on all levels, would appear to be the widespread cancer of our times. The mystery of the other, the taste for difference, the kindly and gracious attention to the things that make my brother my peer, that is, both "same" and "other," pale before a terribly negative vision. We have leapt right into the era of frantic reductivism. This appears in the basic abstractionism, on many levels, of our current life on this planet, whether we are speaking of great intellectual and philosophical "demands," great economic and commercial strategies of economic world powers and multinational *firms*, or the chaotic reactions that all this produces. We are steeped in monism: the monism of "unique" thought, televisual standardization of customs and taste, with all this crowned by the pseudo-new world order. And since contempt is essentially contemptible, contempt answers contempt in kind, and intolerance finds an un-hoped for function taking shape in many a gospel, many a political program or simple world vision ... This is a suicidal behavior that must be analyzed and if not brought to term, than at least curtailed.

In Praise of Difference

The problem of tolerance, of course, presents itself in its original terms, with due consideration being given to the nature of our world and questions of context. But its founding principles are themselves permanent, universal and indefeasible. More specifically, the Islamic culture to which I belong is one of the cultures that suffers the most from the rise in violence and intolerance even though essentially it bears a great message whose explanation, development and practice benefit us all. Islam was and still is a great school of tolerance, and if we are convinced that it will remain so for a long time, we are just as convinced of the need for a prolonged effort to avoid destructive deviations and mad excesses. As a religion, it takes its place among other beliefs. As a culture, it emphasizes the value of difference. As a civilization, it integrates the other, all others, as such.¹ I know that in France in particular, from Voltaire to Claude Lévi-Strauss at least, and among other

important writers, there has been a long tradition that has propagated the false and pernicious idea of Islam as the epicenter of fanaticism and intolerance.² In fact, in our effort to promote the spirit of tolerance, the principles written at the heart of the message of Islam today serve, as they did yesterday, as a precious tool.

One cannot broach the subject of Islam without returning to its sources. This recovery of origins is all the more necessary since the inexistence of a church or canonical institution invested with the mission of having the last word on what is or is not Islamic leaves the believer perpetually face to face with the founding texts: the Koran and the *sunna*, the words and deeds of the messenger of Islam. This face-to-face situation is double-edged: it can authenticate my choices and attitudes through a permanent return to the sources, but it also leaves the door open to meddlers who assume the right to interpret things unilaterally and to legislate, without appeal, in my stead. Only through a salutary return to the sacred texts will we be able to put an end to all the fallacious interpretations coming from within as much as from without.

In short, a major declaration runs through the whole Koran: the diversity of the world, and men and the essential affirmation of this diversity is not a chance or accident, but is part of God's design. It cannot therefore be reduced or even minimized. On the contrary, it must be received as a sign of moral, intellectual and cultural plenty. "Men, We created you as males and females, We made you into peoples and tribes in view of your mutual understanding. The most worthy of you in the eyes of God is he who acts with the most piety" (Koran IL 13). The hierarchy among men is based neither on gender, race, language, religion or wealth. Only piety creates a hierarchy among men in the eyes of God. Furthermore, the Koran insists: "Among the signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth is your differentiation into men of different colors and languages" (Koran XXX 22). The more the other is different from me, the more he bears witness to the divine desire to create a world based on differences. An entire philosophy of difference has been unanimously developed by Muslim specialists throughout the ages, countries and cultures embracing Islam. Based on this vision that not only accepts diversity, but also guarantees its legitimacy in the essential, founding and governing

choice made by God himself, openness and tolerance are imposed on every Muslim. To be Muslim is to accept all the manifestations of difference, to feel a great joy in them and embrace them with awe. The Koran is an encomium of diversity, and Muslim theology is first of all a theology of difference. The unfolding of life, the blossoming of the individual, the affirmation of the richness of the world come from a single diversifying vein. "Travel," orders the Koran, "go around the world!" (XVI 36), (XXIX 20, XXX 43), "Explore the byways" (LXVII 15). The pluralism of landscapes, nature and human societies is a striking illustration of a pluralism that is generalized and consistent with itself. The resulting divergences are not a flaw in the diamond, and still less a defect in workmanship. They must be regarded within the framework of a concept of difference that Islamic cultures – in both successive and diverse ways – themselves strove to develop in a continuous manner. To be open to the other is a pressing duty. Muslim prayer is aimed at discovering a field of new exchanges every minute. There is no solipsism in Islam. The worst calamity is to be reduced to a prolonged moral, intellectual and social isolation. The Prophet said that a lone traveler is like a devil. Straightaway, then, and for important reasons, openness to the other is the normal condition of the Muslim, and it is in this sense that Islamic fraternity encompasses, it goes without saying in passing, the totality of the human race. Islamic education is an education in the other and in difference. One must assume this difference in going beyond oneself. The movement that projects me toward the other is in fact a movement that brings me closer to God and projects me into His creation. In this sense, the standardization of man is not only a contradiction in terms, but like a sin against creation. Specificity is a trait linked to an inalienable character of the personality whatever the level, as much for individuals as for communities. Irreducible to one another, we all bear witness to the universal, which creates in each of us an autonomy bearing a freedom that shapes our daily lives in a unique and exemplary fashion. By extension, accepting oneself as a source of creativity and freedom implies accepting the other with the same prerogatives. Taking responsibility for oneself involves a double movement: going beyond myself and opening myself to the other. The quest

for self and the quest for the other flow from the same source and are part of the same movement.

Reciprocal Amenities

The Arab word for tolerance (*tasâmuḥ*), like all the derivations of the sixth semantic form (*tafâ ala*), means both reciprocity and self-control. *Tasâmuḥ* means reciprocal amenity. Tolerance, in this case, is the duty to overcome one's own faith and convictions, to go beyond the object of one's own belief, in order to place oneself as if in parentheses, welcoming the other. Furthermore it is a *sine qua non* condition to make him accept me. "Be tolerant, and people will be tolerant of you," recommends Mohammed, for an essential feature of tolerance is being reciprocal and universal. Much more than this, in Islam, tolerance is raised to the status of a divine virtue. For God Himself tolerates my failings and my faults. God makes a "strict rule of clemency," says the Koran (VI 12). He accepts my errors and sins. He absolves them, for He is all pardon and mercy. Tolerance between men is but the human projection of the same attitude that God adopts in His relationships with His servants.

Mohammed never ceased, in this pedagogy of mutual tolerance, insisting on the reciprocity of consciousnesses that creates another reciprocity on the next level, with regard to God Himself. "Be as tolerant toward My servants as God may be toward them."³ One might say that tolerance is an absolute virtue cut from the same cloth and of the same essence, whether on the level of the Supreme Being or that of daily realities. It is tolerance that allows man, in situating himself in a position of reciprocity with respect to his peers, to strive toward ontological dignity. My spirit of tolerance makes me worthy of God's mercy. At the same time it reminds me of my humble origins. "All of you come from Adam and Adam himself came from clay": such is the last message Mohammed delivered on his Farewell pilgrimage just before his death.⁴ The spirit of tolerance, without at all leading me to renounce my own faith, implies a little more modesty, a little more humility. I have the right to be proud of myself, my culture and my world view. But what saves me and authenticates this personality is my awareness that these

are merely sources of pride among so many others, which are valid for me as well as for them, and that in the last analysis all men have issued from the same race and originated in the same element.

Freedom as Basis for Tolerance

Islamic tolerance does not stop halfway. Consistent with itself, it is taken all the way. Religious in essence as in practice, it is by nature open to other religions. The unity of faith calls for going beyond one's own religion in order to accept the other with his own specificities. Since the famous works of Louis Massignon, the West is better acquainted with the fundamental unity of Abrahamic faith; Judaism and Christianity are authentic religions (*hanîf*), whose meanings were simply altered during the course of history. Later the tradition added Buddhism and Hinduism by analogy. While Islam is proclaimed the true religion, it is so not through rupture, but through continuity with all the other manifestations of faith that preceded it. The perception of original diversity mentioned above implies the plurality of religions and beliefs, good or bad, including disbelief. "If your God had so desired, every last one of the earth's inhabitants would have faith. Is it therefore your task to force faith upon another?" (Koran X 55). The call of Mohammed is but a reminder of eternal faith that excludes all forms of coercion. "You are here only to remember. You are not a bearer of oppression" (Koran LXXXVIII 21/22). Hence the sole technique of diffusion of Islam is persuasion: "Call others to the path of your God, with wisdom and fine speech. Discuss with others according to the best paths" (Koran XVI 125). The founding texts of Islam are steeped with this will to not do violence to the consciences of others. Truth is self-evident – faith being its own foundation – and it is fallacious and contrary to the divine order to seek to impose one's own truths on another. "Say: truth comes from God, let he who so desires believe and he who so desires disbelieve" (Koran XVIII 29). Or again, "Whosoever heads toward the right path does so only for himself; he who wanders off does so against his own interests alone. And I am not your tutor" (Koran X 108). One cannot better highlight the autonomous nature of a faith that does not

suffer any intervention from outside the person, believer or not, not even on the part of the Messenger of God, *a fortiori* from no other man whatsoever. Hence the great Koranic principle: "No constraints in matters of religion. The true path is very different from delusion" (Koran II 2). Freedom of consciousness is therefore found right within the Koranic program. From it tolerance issues from the start, and intolerance is designated as a cardinal sin. The maxim *lâ ikrâha fildîni* (no constraints in matters of religion) has been very salutary over the centuries. How many lives were spared when in the middle of wars, conflicts and pogroms in which the Muslim societies, like so many others, were the theaters, did one man, emerging from the crowd, armed with these four words, intervene to remind people of the Koranic message and reverse the course of events? Mehrez Ibn Khalaf⁵ saved the Jews in Tunis in the tenth century, and the Emir Abdelkader the Christians in Damascus in the twelfth century. So many others were the active witnesses of this constant and unique Islamic tolerance, which reserves the right to believe or not to the individual consciousness and assures every man the right to live free and secure within Muslim society, whose most pressing duty is "to protect his conscience, life, honor and goods" according to the famous principle that the jurists inscribed at the head of the true Islamic *châri'a*.

This amenity of the appropriate behavior with regard to the other is not limited to the religious sphere. The principle of tolerance is spread by the Koran through the ensemble of our inter-subjective relationships and is raised to the status of universal principle in our interpersonal relationships. "Deflect a bad deed with a better one, and he who opposed you in mutual enmity will become like a close ally" (Koran XII 34). Here it is as if a wager were placed on human nature being inherently good, and hostility but a passing accident. "It is possible that God create an affection between you and those with whom you are hostile. God is all capability, all pardon, and all mercy" (Koran IX 8/9). In the same verse – and in the same context – the Koran sets the rules/limits to maintain with the enemy. "God does not forbid you to observe, with regard to those who are not fighting you because of your faith and have not driven you from your own homes, the normal rules of piety and equity with regard to your peers. God forbids you only to make pacts with those who

fight you because of your faith, have expelled you from your own homes or who have decided to do so" (Koran IX 8/9). In fact there is much more: the nature of the Islamic faith itself is based on this wager on man, even one's adversary, and from this coextensive hope for humanity as a whole. Only they who have no faith can despair of a peer since "they despair of the afterlife or the dwellers of the tomb" (*ibid*). In these conditions, tolerance is a veritable hymn to creation. It issues from the awe of the believing consciousness before the diversity of the divine work that is an infinite and open profusion. There is no need to reduce this diversity in order to feel oneself more secure. On the contrary, allowing oneself to be carried along by its exploration (mental, intellectual, physical ...) produces a joy and a priceless peace. This peace with oneself is the basis for peace with others and with the world. Such polycentrism flows from the transcendent unity of God, manifested in the diversity of His work. Tolerance is based on this mutual "pardon" which will never have any meaning if the believer does not first apprehend himself as a person capable of surpassing and "transcending" himself.

The Thresholds of Tolerance

Free conviction is the basis of the freedom of conviction of others. I could not deny my peer's conviction without ruining my own. My freedom is nurtured by his freedom, and his freedom is nurtured by mine. In matters of faith, my conviction justifies itself to the exact extent that freedom of conscience is an unconditional universal. The *tasâmuḥ*, reciprocal inter-amenity, can only be fully and positively played out within the context of this reciprocal ethics of conviction. It is the common denominator of all faith, which is only as essentially good as the exact extent to which it does not close itself in upon itself and does not mask egotistical and closed passions. Faith must be tolerant, or it ceases to be faith.

Does this mutual character of tolerance imply limits? Is my pardon unconditional? Many, in Islam and elsewhere, have raised the question of the limits of tolerance. Can one accept everything in the name of tolerance? Doesn't a tolerance that accepts everything, and thus anything, including its opposite, intolerance,

destroy itself? Only the thresholds of tolerance can allow tolerance to play its role.

Concretely, moreover, the harshness of history projects me into the aleatory and risky sphere of the measuring of ethics and the responsibilities of city life. And, in fact, while it is important forcefully to reaffirm the profound principles of Islam, it is just as important to see how they have “functioned” in daily life. The Koranic vision of ethical pluralism and the diversity of the ways leading to truth is one of the strong points of Arab philosophy. The *Traité décisif* (decisive treaty) of Averroès on the relationships between reason and faith, as well as the Appendix (*dhamîma*), present a version that has not aged at all. Truth is one, but it can be reached by multiple paths, of which Revelation and Reason are the most important. The monism of truth, by reason of its universality, joins with the pluralism of methods and access routes to truth that are but the result of the diversity of human cultures. It is on the level of this diversity that the scope of our responsibilities unfolds, based on our abilities to distinguish the true from the false, good from evil, the licit from the illicit. On this level, the idea of norms relates to another analysis of “tolerance,” conceived not only as a recognition of a principle of freedom granted to the other to believe or disbelieve in what he thinks necessary to follow by choice, but as a “limit” to that which is acceptable in the historical game of the relationships governing people and communities. Hence tolerance takes on a practical aspect and designates the “threshold” of what is acceptable by all, inside a social system as well as outside it. In this way tolerance takes on the guise of a consensus. From this perspective, the concept of *had* was and still is central in Islamic law (*fiq*), and it designates the point at which the action of an historical subject that exceeds or violates a certain norm leads to rupture, provokes exclusion and thereby becomes liable to punitive sanction. Everything, in fact, has a limit, except the clemency of God, which sets no limit on its own tolerance, but assigns one to human behavior. Let us note once and for all that we are no longer dealing with an issue of faith, but rather a very earthbound one, concerning the “commerce” of men, the *mu’âmalât*, that is, the social consequences of our acts. It is in this sense, and this sense alone, that we can speak of more or less tolerant Muslim societies, that is, those ready to

accept a "deviant" "charge" in their midst, which they accommodate or, contrariwise, considerably subjugate if their cohesion, for example, finds itself threatened. The *fiq*, from this point of view, has functioned like a gigantic machine for saying what is licit (*halâl*) and what is illicit (*harâm*), as a result of the concrete conditions of our acts. In Europe, ever since Pascal's *Provinciales* (Provincials), casuistry has had very bad press. In Islam, it is a very banal method of analysis of all the possible cases that makes it possible to determine, in a variable fashion, according to the authors, but also according to the rites, trends, moments and anthropological and sociological foundations of a group, what it is possible to allow as far as deviant behavior is concerned, on a daily basis. It is a veritable dialectic of the dualism *yusr/usr* (easy/difficult) that regulates the game of tolerance and rigor and which is left up to the reasoned appreciation of the jurist. A twofold tendency has emerged and marked the history of mores in Islam: the first seeks to set the standard very high, and to allow a minimum of infractions; the second, more lax, minimizes the "immoral" character of our behavior and puts the maximum number of consciences at peace with themselves. The majority of so-called "orthodox" tendencies belong to the first, known as "the golden mean" (*wasat*), but some belong to the second: Hambalite or Wahhabite moral rigor have played a very important role. In Islam and within the same basic community, either one closes one's eyes to all shortcomings or peccadilloes, or one opens them wide on any infraction, as minor as it may be. It would be fascinating to follow this culpabilizing and deculpabilizing dialectic in detail. But at the same time we would leave the domain of Doctrine for the more unstable one of habits and customs that are on a sociological plane rather than an ethical and even less a theological one. The definition as well as the assessment of deviance derive from the system of social prohibition destined to maintain social equilibrium and preserve collective cohesion.

Rigor and Tolerance

On this level of analysis, we should first of all note that the coexistence of contradictory opinions at the heart of one same collectivity

is itself the sign of great tolerance, and within an Islamic community there are always many and diverging responses that are equally authoritative with regard to the same questions. This pluralism has proliferated all the more in Islamic lands, since they have never known a legitimized authority entitled to define what is orthodox and what is not in a unilateral and definitive way. The divergence of opinions is indeed considered to be an authentic sign of the clemency of God (*Alikhtiâf rahma*). Within a single and same reading of Islamic ethics, there is always room to proceed with judicious modifications of the law to adjust it to any given situation, especially regarding penal matters. The *châri'a* is above all an ensemble of intentions (*maqâssid*) that are universal. But they are modified according to the situation. They aim above all to summon authorized people to equilibrium (*l'tidâl*), harmony (*istiqâma*) and respect for juridical norms. But this effort, *ijtihad*, or better still, this struggle of self with self, is always an "invention" in the strongest sense of the word, that is, a radical will to understand concrete diversity through a summons, coming from within, which must take into account not only the nature of an action and its context, but also the profound intentionalities of the moral subject. Mohammed said that only intention creates the value of our acts (*innamâ al-amâlu bil-niyati*) and he adds that "to each man comes only that which he had the intention to do" (*li-kulli imri-in mâwa*).

Islamic Tolerance and Objective Conditions

These fundamental conditions of tolerance are not mere abstractions. They were formulated in very real societies and subsequently brought up to date. Hence in order to understand what has taken place and is currently taking place, we should place the Islamic religious perspective within a reciprocity of outlook with the social framework and practical "needs" of the interested communities. Since Islam has embraced hundreds of cultures and its sway spread over more than fourteen centuries, one can find the most varied responses in this gigantic ensemble, ranging – with the help of surviving customs – from the most rigid closing of the system to the most unexpected laxity. One same Muslim society

can walk a veritable tightrope, according to the circumstances, can be in turn (or at the same time) open and closed. In general, when Muslim peoples are on the defensive, when their very survival is threatened, a closing takes place; but when the threats lessen or disappear, openness reigns. Herein lies a precious anthropological grid that makes it possible to “read” Islamic social issues and the interpretation of all its nuances without necessarily bringing into discussion the foundation woven by the Koranic principles. It is also necessary to consider what Islamic tolerance was in reality, based on the facts. Undeniably – and this was noted by many historians from within as well as from without – the spirit of tolerance largely prevailed. And it is with regard to what we call the protection of minorities today that this appears most clearly. Of course there have always been barriers between Muslims and non-Muslims. But they were more or less permeable depending on the contingencies. What could be more normal? However, it was almost always juridical and social barriers that defined the communities, without the disparagement of any group, and which allowed them to coexist. We know today the extent to which these relationships of belonging play an essential role in the formation of a consciousness of self within any grouping. The collective identity is forged – we know all too well, and it is just as true for minority groups as it is for the majority – in its way of emerging from within each global society. The identifying feeling of belonging to a clan, a community or class, and the specificities that come into play, both within and without, are but the counterweight of the diversifications that operate within the whole. In Islam, this differentiation implies a respect for the other. We know just as well, however, that beyond the principles there is a margin of appreciation, valorization and devalorization which is revealed as much on the inside as on the outside, underscoring or masking such specificity. In any society, there are forces at work, both centrifugal and centripetal forces, structuring it, reinforcing its cohesion, underscoring or gluing together the dividing lines and nuances, even accentuating them. Any human grouping is always haunted by the passionate pursuit of founding values and distinctive signs that form the essence of its manner of being present in history. Need we further stress this dialectic between conscious-

nesses that define themselves by opposing each other and in opposing each other define themselves? And this is true on both sides of the “barriers,” so that the “question” of “minorities” is just as much, if not more so, that of the “majority.” Such a situation is completely within the order of things and plays itself out “objectively.” But it is of utmost importance whether the perception of the other community be made in terms of recognition and respect, or, on the contrary, in terms of apprehension, fear and in the end oppression. We have already analyzed the meaning of the Islamic response, based on the spirit of tolerance and a humanistic concept of inter-individual and inter-community relationships. The status of “protection” (*dhimma*), so misinterpreted, we must not forget, by Western rationality in the many twistings and violations of which it was the object during the course of history, keeps track of the interests of all and in particular the necessary peaceful coexistence based on the freedom of conscience. *Dhimma* means, *stricto sensu*, that the Muslim state is “responsible” for the security of minority groups integrated into the global society. Let us also remember that the relationships between minorities and majorities are of a political, and not a religious, order: Muslims can very well find themselves in the minority without that in the least changing the meaning of their faith or their beliefs. Once they become the majority, nothing changes in their obligations and duties with regard to other communities that live within them, which implies new duties and responsibilities. *Dhimma* is the “responsibility of the ensemble of those who have power,” who must maintain coexistence and social cohesion and make the obligations and responsibilities of everyone respected, while taking into account their belonging to respective communities. Without going into detail, let us note that the status of *dhimma* does not give any particular group – minority or majority – the right to oppress other groups. The model was formerly given by the constitution of Medina, in the first year of Islam, which is the ultimate reference and a constant reminder of the obligations incumbent upon Muslims. Until his last breath Mohammad maintained this requirement, which his Farewell Sermon reiterated as a last reminder.

As a whole, such protective rules have been very efficacious in spite of the excesses that all the Oulemas have condemned and

against which they struggled, not without success. Let us cite one of our best specialists, Claude Cahen:

Inside the Muslim States, the situation of non-Muslims is (...) decent. Let us be neither idyllic or anachronistic. The *dhimmis* receive discriminatory treatment with regard to the *fisc*, inter-professional justice. There were (...) distinctions in their clothing (...); there was often a sort of aristocratic disdain on the part of the Muslims. Nevertheless, considering and comparing them with the other societies at the time, it does not appear that life was difficult for the non-Muslim faiths: those who lived on the borders and could have emigrated did not do so (...). Christian culture became established (...), Jewish culture expanded and the Muslim world was culturally and economically a paradise for the tenth and eleventh century Jews (...) *There was never any segregation, never the equivalent of our ghettos. There were at times, but rarely, for reasons related directly to the faith, instances of mob violence, but those in power intervened to maintain order, even at their own expense.*⁶

Intolerance for Reasons of Security and Intolerance Due to Resentment

Such judgments make the scandal experienced by the Muslim conscience today seem all the more extreme, as it witnesses the rise of dogmatism, fanaticism and terrorism within its own breast. We think we have sufficiently demonstrated how foreign these tendencies are to the letter and spirit of Islam. But it is not enough to show this, nor merely to denounce it. One must try and understand how we got to this point and work for the return of the spirit of tolerance that ennobles man. By demonstrating the "mechanisms" that come into play in our societies, we contribute to the illumination of this path. If we have emphasized the concern for identity that, by placing the accent on actual specificities, comes almost naturally to extreme positions, it was to show that so-called Islamic fundamentalism is first and foremost political. Indeed, it is almost exclusively so! Islam today does not operate within a void any more than classical Islam did, for it is growing in almost pathological conditions: people driven by the struggle for survival or victims of all types of injustices are only too open to overcompensation. When social contradictions, inequalities and exclusions are pushed to the breaking point, when men are denied in their own lands, they become easily open to all doctrines of salvation. This infernal spiral has been

going on for a few centuries, almost without interruption. Many have thought for a moment that national liberation, the construction of a modern state, the fight against under-development or the building of a new society would really change the course of history. They have had to sing a different tune. New rules of the game have appeared in local and world relationships, which are far from favorable to them. The dictatorship often associated with that of a sole party, generalized extortion raised to the level of administrative management, back-room Socialism held up as a universal panacea, the ambiguity of countries secured by experts in the politics of "double standards," and the unconditioned and unconditional support of the interests of only the dominant groups here and there, all this has led the Muslim peoples from defeat to defeat, to the ruin of their moral forces. Is one surprised that so many peoples are waiting, and that today almost all are on the defensive? Are they not seeking identifying references? What could be more natural for them, at this point, to seek themselves in Islamic culture? This culture has a great need to be renewed in the sense of the openness that once appeared essential to us, but which does not always come with a wave of the hand. Things are more serious still: the intolerance and fanaticism that have developed dangerously around us these last years do not merely bear witness to a desire for an identifying withdrawal into the self. When it is mixed with a search for a scapegoat, who will answer for our defeats and humiliations? Our statesmen, our intellectuals, the West, have all in turn been designated as those to strike out against and deny! Intolerance, here, is no longer on the order of an identity-securing mechanism, but pure and simple resentment. Intolerance is but the cement of bad conscience walled up in its own certitudes, but basically unsure of itself. It is the grimace of fanaticism lurking in the darkness of ignorance and moral barrenness. Thanks to a detestable historical, social and economic climate reigning among Islamic peoples, this resentment is so deep that it succeeds in touching some of the most venerable institutions. Hence it is all the more urgent to do homage to our great sages, who knew so well how to assume the heritage of Islam in adapting it to modernity. Sheikh Shaltut, Tahar Ben Achour, Abdelaziz Kamel and so many others all revealed the true tolerant face of Islam.

To resolve a question so serious as that of Islamic tolerance, I would like to say that we must go straight to its core: freedom. Divine transcendence gives it its ontological foundation. The sense of human experience gives it its anthropological dimension. The responsibility of historical agents gives it its concrete content. Finally, tolerance proves itself and is embraced in concrete frameworks in spite of their contingencies, but also by reason of the great promises inherent to life. The sense of struggle between tolerance and fanaticism indeed takes place, both yesterday and today, in the full recognition of freedom in all its complexity, authenticity, but also in the cruel ambiguity of its insertion in the course of history. And if today the struggle for tolerance is once again an issue, it is in fact because modernity rises a bit everywhere like a challenge to freedom. It is here, at the heart of public freedoms, that the true debate takes place and where the truly decisive struggles will unfold.

Notes

1. The literature on this is extensive in Arabic, English, and French. Here it is sufficient to refer to the relevant chapters in UNESCO's *Individu et société en islam*, Paris, 1994.
2. Voltaire's *Mahomet ou le fanatisme* is written in the same vein as his *Traité sur la tolérance* (1762). He focuses on the fanaticism of all religions and all ideologies. The lack of information at the time, the desire to be effective and escape censorship, led Voltaire to "blacken" Mohammed. But surprisingly Voltaire's real struggle against intolerance is the same as that led by the real Mohammed. The thoughts of Claude Lévi-Strauss at the end of *Tristes Tropiques* (p. 429 in the first edition of 1955), however, are surprising coming from a great anthropologist.
3. Suyûti, "Al-jâm'i al-saghir," in: *Recueil des dits de Mahomet*, p. 123.
4. See R. Blachère, "L'Allocution d'Adieu de Mahomet," in: *Analecta*, 1975, p. 140: "Oh people! Your Lord is unique and so is your forefather. You all descend from Adam, and Adam was born from the earth; the noblest of you in the eyes of Allah is the most pious. ... The only superiority of one arab over another is through piety."
5. See A. Chennoufi, "La Tolérance comme valeur à travers l'histoire tunisienne," in: *Al-Hayat Al-Thaqafiya*, No. 76 (June 1996), pp. 22ff. See also the definitive and very learned study by H.H. Abdelwahab, "L'Apport ethnique des étrangers en Tunisie," in: *Cahiers de Tunisie*, No. 69/70, pp. 158ff.
6. C. Cahen, *Orient et Occident au temps des croisades*, Paris, 1992, pp. 18-9.