Educating about Islam and Learning about Self: An Approach for our Times

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Abstract

The article will argue that the emergence of the era of terrorism, fuelled in part by a form of Wahhabist Islam, impels a religious education imperative of improving understanding about Islam, both in terms of the historical roots with Judaism and Christianity, as well as ongoing conflict between the three traditions. On this basis, the paper will propose content for religious education that challenges Westerners, especially of Jewish or Christian heritage, to come to enhanced understanding about their sibling relationship with Islam but also considers growing counter-propositions that this same Western world is the mortal enemy of Islam. In the case of both the positive and negative interpretations of the relationship between Islam and its sibling religions, the educational challenge is to enhance understanding of self through increasing knowledge of the other.

Introduction

There lies behind the article an assumption that inter-faith dialogue possesses an educational and formative potential quite beyond that which is normally taken as the limits of religious education. The species of knowing and understanding that can be traced to Aristotle and Aquinas, and that stands at the centre of Habermas's Ways of Knowing thesis, promises a profoundly critical and self-reflective knowing that necessitates that any claim on the part of an individual to 'know' is accompanied by practical action [or what Habermas (1974) describes as '*praxis*']. The first part of the article will briefly explore these theoretical perspectives, while the second part will make application to renewed ways of 'knowing' Islam that have potential to inform Westerners about current world politics around Islam, as well as helping them to see their own tradition reflected in its history and beliefs. It will be argued that this is an especially important educational goal, granted the inter-faith challenges presented by Islam today.

Knowing Self through Knowing Other: The Challenge for Education about Islam

Jurgen Habermas (1972; 1974) challenges us to consider the different ways in which we claim to 'know'. Knowing facts and figures (the 'empirical-analytic') is important, as is the knowing of communication and meaning-making (the 'historical-

hermeneutic’), but the knowing that most truly marks out human intellectual endeavor and has the capacity to transform self and community is critical or self-reflective knowing. This is a profound knowing of self which issues in *praxis*, practical action for change. In a word, one cannot know in this profound sense without being changed. It is through the process of coming to know self, invariably entailing an agonizing struggle, that one gradually strips away the inherited knowledge, the familial and cultural baggage, and the ignorance that is so often the source of intercultural misunderstanding, bigotry, hatred and violence. Habermas offers a sharp challenge to social educators, including religious educators, to go about their business in a way that facilitates their learners treading the path towards this sort of knowing.

Connections are possible between the Habermasian position and the epistemologies of Aristotle and Aquinas. First, in attempting to moderate between the intellectualism of Plato (1987) and the pragmatism of Protagoras (Plato 1989), Aristotle (1985, 1992) proposed an entirely new way of knowing altogether. This was a way of knowing that arose primarily from one’s need to be authentic in what one claimed to know.

Eudaimonia (literally, ‘happiness’) was Aristotle’s supreme good, a profound happiness that resulted from complete conjoining of what was known with what one did in practice. The kind of judgment essential to the pursuit of *eudaimonia* was what Aristotle finally described as a ‘practical’ judgment, a cognitive action that led necessarily to practical action. This happiness could only come from the integrity of practicing what one preached, from living practically by one’s deepest conviction. This seems clearly to be a precursor to the Habermasian notion of *praxis*.

Second, Aquinas (1936) was also caught between the highly intellectual tradition of Augustine (1972) and the range of earlier more ‘sensual’ traditions of Christianity that continued to fascinate him, especially after the works of the Islamic scholars came under his gaze. At least one of the Muslims with which Aquinas interacted, Abu al-Ghazzali (1991), was responsible for a number of the texts included in what is becoming known in our time as the Muslim Gospel (cf. Khalidi 2001). Having these works before him quite likely gave Aquinas some rare glimpses of pre-Nicene and pre-Augustinian Christologies. Like Aristotle before him, Aquinas not only conjoined these positions but, moreover, elicited a new form of knowing one’s faith. This is

captured in the concept of *synderesis*, described in the Summa as an inborn facility that urges us not only to seek truth but to put it into practice.

Granted the emphasis of this article on Islam and its relationship with its fellow ‘People of the Book’, it is worth noting a couple of short excerpts from al-Ghazzali that would likely have influenced Aquinas in his postulation of *synderesis*. In *The Book of Religious Learnings* (Volume 1), al-Ghazzali (1991), in speaking about the benefits of knowledge, states: “... the best of people is a believing learned man who does good.” (pp. 15-17) In another place, and as part of the Muslim Gospel, al-Ghazzali attributes to Jesus the following words: “How can someone be considered a man of learning if he desires speech to relay it to others rather than to act upon it?” (Khalidi 2001, 166). In similar vein, Aquinas regarded the knowing of truth as, firstly, knowing on the inside what the truth meant for oneself and, secondly, acting accordingly. If one did not act accordingly, one could not claim to know at all. Again, this is particularly reminiscent of the Habermasian thesis about authentic knowing issuing in *praxis*.

Clearly, these are challenging thoughts for educators of any kind, but for religious educators in particular, whose objectives and intentions would seem to be about ‘making a difference’ through practical curriculum goals. While indoctrination and freedom-denying forms of enculturation should always be avoided, it is nonetheless possible that one can become so obsessed with the dangers of privacy invasion that the educational process becomes overly cognitive and bare of passion, so negating the potential to make a practical difference. The thesis underlying this paper is that the current situation with Islam demands much more in terms of an educational response. The religious education required for Westerners, and especially those of direct Jewish and Christian origin, to truly understand Islam is one that must make a difference, a difference not only to head knowledge but, in true Habermasian, Aristotelian, Thomist and al-Ghazzalian terms, a difference in the way these Westerners ultimately act towards their fellow ‘People of the Book’.

Islam has clearly become one of the globe’s most potent forces with the capacity to re-shape human society as we know it, and so our motivation to understand it is naturally enhanced. Our sources of knowledge are also much improved on the past,

with new and friendlier translations and explanations of the Qur'an, as well as a rash of scholarship among Western educators attempting to understand Islam (cf. Nettler 1995, Kramer 1999, Armstrong 2000, Peters 2003, Rogerson 2003). Of even greater significance, however, is the fact that we now have available to us a renewed Islamic scholarship directed at understanding and/or re-interpreting its own origins, including its relationship with the broader world of religion and especially with Judaism and Christianity (cf. al-Ashmawi [in Nettler 1995], Talbi 1995, Tantawi & al-Fattah Tabbara [in Nettler & Taji-Farouki 1998], Nasr 2002). This work cuts both ways in terms of building or destroying bridges with Islam but, either way, it is vital work for Jews and Christians, and indeed the entire global community, to know. In either case, there is the potential for Jews and Christians to engage in the kind of self-reflectivity that leads to knowing self through knowing the other.

Islam, Judaism and Christianity: The Positive Interpretation

One of the most important contemporary Islamic scholars is the Tunisian, Mohamed Talbi. Talbi (1995) argues that all revealed religion is equal in status so long as it is faithful to its essential charter to be a spiritual and ethical force, rather than a political one. On this basis, there can be no inherent claims towards exclusivity or singular pathways to salvation. In the face of much Islamic scholarship of the day, Talbi writes:

... the dialogue with all men of all kinds of faiths and ideologies is from now and onwards strictly and irreversibly unavoidable. Man has never lived in isolation, and man's history may be considered as an irreversible process of an unceasingly extending communication. Man's fulfillment is in community and relationship. And this is written in the Qur'an: 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other ... If this can be admitted ... we can think of the whole of mankind as a brotherly 'community of communities' – or God's Family as the Hadith states – in which everyone has the right to be different, to be accepted, and fully respected in his chosen differences. (p. 61)

Talbi's quest is to re-establish the ethics of tolerance and inter-faith dialogue that, for him, lie at the heart of the tradition and are also the key to Islam's ongoing relevance in a pluriform world. Islamic scholarship of Talbi's species is what Western

scholarship and education at all levels must engage with seriously in order to challenge the relative ease with which the Wahhabist agenda has been rolled out and taken seriously in the West as representing the essential face of Islam. Without serious scholarship that creates a bridge between more inclusivist Islamic interpretations and similarly ecumenical views among non-Muslims, the Talbis of this world are left without support and their views eventually crumble against the combined tide of spawning militaristic exclusivism within Islam and forms of anti-Islamic prejudice found commonly in the non-Muslim world.

The theology of a Talbi, therefore, with its capacity to interpret anew the most sacred of Islamic texts, is of profound importance to Islam and to a world challenged by Islam. At the heart of the importance lies the foundational perspective that the revelation given to Muhammad was inherently about the establishment of radical forms of social justice, such that tolerance, equity and charity were essential to the ideology and, therefore, necessary artefacts to the community that would spring up in its name. Furthermore, Talbi's theology is vital to those whose commitment is to an Islam that can only be understood as an inextricable part of the tripartite 'People of the Book' tradition, to Judaism, Christianity and Islam as a mutually inclusive trinity of semitic monotheism and all that it has spawned.

Talbi is highly critical, for instance, of some forms of modern inter-faith ecumenism that seem, none too subtly, to be merely less direct efforts at proselytism. He singles out the current Vatican approach to dialogue for his harshest treatment in this regard, not because it is the worst representation of Christian exclusivism but largely because he expects so much more, granted the common intellectual thread between Islam and Catholicism. For Talbi, failure to deal with difference and its legitimacy simply perpetuates the tensions that have torn so many generations apart around the divisions between Jewish, Christian and Islamic belief. As far as Talbi is concerned, God's plan was always intended to be unfolded in many stages, with one Three-Act Play at its centre. Only through the most profound acceptance of this truth can age-old misunderstanding and violence, including the forces that threaten our civilization today, be turned around.

Ronald Nettle (1999) writes of Talbi:

The Qur'an, as basis and foundation of the whole structure, is Talbi's ultimate source. He sees in his theory of pluralism a 'modern' idea from the depths of revelation. Despite his obvious debt to modern thought, Talbi's point of departure is from within the sacred text and its early historical context. His approach to that text and history presupposes there is a humanistic message of the Golden Rule and an empirical validity in historical sources such as the constitution of Medina which support that message. (p. 106)

Nettler's reference to the constitution of Medina provides one of the clues to the importance of the theological connection with Judaism and Christianity and to the practical importance of Islam for those Jews and Christians who wish to re-visit and understand the essential inspiration of their own origins, in other words, to come to new knowledge of self through knowing the other. The clue provided by Nettler is about the reforming agency role of Islam; it is about the highly contentious issue of Islam as a practical social reform including, at least in part, its role as a reformer of Judaism and Christianity. Midst the great traditions of reformation within both Judaism and Christianity, and indeed as part of their relationship with each other, these two religions might consider Islam as a reformation of both of them. Karen Armstrong (2000), one of the world's leading authorities on Islam and its relationship with the West, is adamant in her assertion that Muhammad was not so concerned to found a new religion as to renew the old faith in the one true God, and to bring to fulfillment his Promise to Abraham to build a new nation as a light to the nations of the world. Herein are clues about the positive interpretation of the relationship between the three religions, powerful clues for those Jews and Christians wishing to re-visit their own traditions.

Nettler's (1999) reference to Medina was to the kind of *Ummah*, or community, that Islam first established around the belief that it was the light to the nations, that model community that God had wanted to establish in his name. It was this conception of the Islamic *Ummah* as the true 'People of God' that would go on to inspire the great Islamic civilizations that spawned from northern Africa to Spain and beyond. Remarkable among their characteristics, granted the benchmarks of the day, was the practice of ethnic and religious tolerance. Also remarkable were their social welfare systems, attempts at universal education and healthcare and, possibly most

contentiously, their approach to women's equality issues. Around a thousand years before the so-called Enlightenment in the West began the move towards these features, they were part and parcel of early Islamic civilizations. In trying to determine why this is so, we gain important insight into the vital relationship with the inspirational worlds of Judaism and Christianity.

The ethic of ethnic and religious tolerance was practised by Muslims essentially because of their strong belief that Islam truly was the fulfilment of God's ancient Promise to establish a model community in the midst of the nations. This would be a community that would reflect God's deep desire that humankind should live in peace and practise forms of personal integrity and social justice. This would be the community that would show the rest of the world how to live well and under God.

For Muhammad, it was Islam that finally took up the challenge to be this community, this *Ummah* of Allah. Inspired in part by both Moses and Jesus, Muhammad went on to establish the community that, it would seem, he saw as essential to the core of both Judaism and Christianity. As far as Muhammad was concerned, Abraham was the first Muslim (cf. Nusse 1993) because he was the first to submit totally to God in his attempt to further the Promise. Similarly, both Moses and Jesus were Muslims, as were the ancient prophets, John the Baptist and Mary, Jesus' mother, as well as all whose lives were marked by submission to God's will and striving to fulfil the Promise. So too, any Jew who lived by the Ten Commandments or any Christian who followed Jesus' Great Commandment (to love God and neighbour), was a Muslim, and so to be respected and accommodated as such. Armstrong (2000) seems clear that this perspective on Muhammad's part was not symptomatic of his proselytizing intentions but rather of his profound sense of the intertwined beliefs between his new movement and Judaism and Christianity. It was part and parcel of being Muslim that one should have a profound understanding that Judaism and Christianity were sibling religions in their common commitment to the prophetic interpretation of the Promise.

As with ethnic and religious tolerance, social welfare was not there merely by chance. Muhammad had taken to heart the message of the ancient Jewish prophets, and Jesus, that God does not want sacrifice and ritual but justice and mercy that flow like a river. As a result, we find in the Islamic *Ummah* a practical social welfare scheme of tithing

that saw everyone giving a percentage of their goods to the community. Similarly, education was considered crucial as a religious as well as a social duty. Religiously, it was important because Muhammad had understood the censures of the prophets, including Jesus, about the leaders of the people establishing their own power on the back of the disadvantage of others. So, education, especially about religious knowledge and law, was important in the early Islamic communities. Arguably, the model imam of early Islam, Abu al-Ghazzali, cited the views of Muhammad himself in suggesting:

The learned are the heirs of the prophets ... the best of people is a believing learned man who does good ... a learned man is a trust of God on earth ... God has not given any man more excellence than the knowledge of religion. (al-Ghazzali 1991, 15-17)

In the view of al-Ghazzali, one of the reasons that Muhammad was so committed to education was to ensure that there would be no religious elite, no groups which could use their religious knowledge to lord it over the uneducated, as he saw in both Judaism and Christianity.

Similarly, the so-called ‘Muslim Jesus’ texts are used amply in the *Hadith*, including by al-Ghazzali himself, to demonstrate both the importance of knowledge in the tripartite tradition, as well as the dangers of abusing it. In a text showing a proper appreciation of knowledge, one attributed to al-Ghazzali, Jesus converses with a leper who is overheard to be saying: “Praise be to God who healed me from what he has inflicted upon so many of his creatures.” The conversation continues with Jesus asking:

What kind of affliction can I see that has not been visited upon you?” The man replied: “Spirit of God, I am better than him in whose heart God has not planted the share of His knowledge that He has planted in mine.” “You have spoken truly,” said Jesus, “Give me your hand.” The man stretched forth his hand – and behold, his face and form were transformed into the fairest and most comely ... Thereafter, he accompanied Jesus and worshipped him. (Khalidi 2001, 178)

Texts like this show the extent to which Islam relied on its ‘love affair’, as Khalidi describes it, with Jesus and the entire *Isra’iliyat* heritage. Muhammad crafted Islam, at least in part, around the ideals he found in Judaism and Christianity, and early Islam

utilized much from within the broader scriptural worlds of Judaism and Christianity in extending the crafting of Islamic civilizations. Between them, the texts of the *Isra'iliyat*, those 'stories of the prophets' that became part of early Islam's folklore largely through the influence of Jewish converts, together with the texts of the Muslim Jesus, represent the strength of the relationship between the three siblings. On the one hand, this illustrates the fairly well known fact that both Judaism and Christianity were instrumental in the inspiration and origins of Islam; on the other hand, however, is the less heralded but potentially more significant point that Islam's capacity to re-engage both Jews and Christians with their own origins has only just begun to tickle the imagination.

In this case, knowing other truly has capacity to know self. The Muslim Gospel is a case in point. According to Camilla Adang (1996), this Gospel relies heavily on the non-canonical texts of Christianity, on " ... apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and midrashim, rather than canonical scripture." (p. 3) As such, the Muslim Gospel has potential to play a particularly significant role in Christianity's long-held desire to re-discover the historical Jesus beyond the Christ of their faith, so heavily interpreted by historico-political events beyond those pertaining merely to Christianity's primal inspiration. These are the kinds of benefits of open inter-faith dialogue and mutual discovery that Talbi sees as essential to the communities of revealed religion and in which he sees Islam playing a particularly contributive role.

Sadly, the times seem to be working against the ecumenism of a Talbi. The very scriptures that have so much potential to unite are increasingly being seen as an insidious force within Islam which has to be extricated in order to re-establish 'true Islam'. This re-assessment of the roles played by Judaism and Christianity, and their respective insidious scriptural attachments, can only be understood by employing the long historical lens.

Islam, Judaism and Christianity: The Negative Interpretation

Without recounting all of the sad history, nor apportioning blame, suffice it to say that the medieval Crusades not only destroyed much of the original Islam but also much of the credibility about Christianity (and to some extent Judaism) that Muhammad had extended to it. Whole generations of Muslims came to see Christians in much the

same way that many Westerners today would regard *Al Qa'eda*, as artisans of mindless terror. Against their live experience of the worst kinds of barbarity that Christian civilization could heap upon them, the kindly and equable sentiments of Muhammad in the *Qur'an* became less and less believable. Elisseeff (1993) shows how the likes of Nur al-Din, leader of the first effective Islamic counter-attack after the fall of Jerusalem, and Ibn al-Athir, the thirteenth-century historian, turned around earlier ecumenical conceptions so effectively, while at the same time actually using the Crusades as a model for Muslims to follow. This so-called 'Western Jihad' provided the template for all future conceptions of *Jihad* as '*Da'wa*' (Holy War), while the calls to zealous murder and martyrdom offered to the Crusaders by the likes of Pope Urban II and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux became the stuff of later Islamic terrorism. Fuelling further the antipathies, there is a raft of medieval and modern Islamic scholarship which argues that the destruction of the original *Ummah* by the Crusaders happened as a punishment by God for Muslims tolerating Jews and Christians in their midst in the first place (cf. Nusse 1993). Sections of the *Qur'an* are brought forward to illustrate that such compromise was always against God's explicit will and that such must never happen again. Hate truly does beget hatred, and the same scriptures that had been used by generations of Muslims to justify tolerance are turned on their head in justifying its opposite.

This re-interpretation of past events does not stop with the Crusades. For some modern Islamic scholars and agitators, the entire history of the tradition dating back to Abraham is re-interpreted in light of recent events, including the re-establishment of Israel in 1948 (otherwise described variously as 'the Second Crusade', or more accurately the 'Ninth Crusade') and even more recent events that have seen the so-called Christian West in global conflict with the forces of Islam.

As illustrated, one version of the Judaeo-Christian conspiracy theory is wrapped in the language of 'Crusade', while another, equally acerbic language centres on the notion of 'Zionism'. The European Jews who migrated to Palestine in the later part of the nineteenth century used the title freely. As such, it became associated with the notion of invasion and of ideological threat to Islam. It therefore became an appropriate way in which revisionist history could interpret earlier empire-building on the part of the Jews (and Christians).

According to this view, there are seen to be three great Zionist establishments. The first is represented by the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel built at the expense of the original ancestral Muslim inhabitants and on an inauthentic interpretation of the Promise. The second Zionism is seen in the events of the Crusades and the plundering of Islamic civilization and spirituality. While the Christians are the obvious perpetrators this time, nonetheless the Jews are implicated as part of the grand Judaeo-Christian Conspiracy. The third Zionist episode then becomes the establishment of the modern state of Israel on May 14, 1948, achieved largely in the face of explicit failure to appease the Arab (largely Muslim) majority in Palestine.

Against events like this, one can easily imagine how one with a conspiracy theory of the sort described above is likely to interpret the events of the Iraq invasion of 2002. The fact that the invaders with troops on the ground were the old largely Christian foes, and that those being invaded were mainly Muslim, does nothing to soften the conspiracy theory, nor dampen the more violent interpretation placed on the notion of *Jihad* since the 'Western Jihad' of the medieval Crusades (cf. Shatzmiller 1993).

In our own time, the heritage of all this has been in the creation of unusually hostile forms of Wahhabism to be found in groups like Palestinian HAMAS. HAMAS is typical of forces to be found as part of the modern terrorist front that employ Islam as inspiration and ultimate cause. HAMAS plugs into age-old prejudices against the West and, in particular, Israel and the USA. Its spiritual arm, found typically in the sentiments of its fallen sacred hero, Yassin, uses scriptural passages in the *Qu'ran* 3 as proof that it is forbidden for any Muslim to so much as maintain friendly relations with non-Muslims, described in parts as 'unbelievers'.

A HAMAS newsletter from 1990 is used by Nusse (1993) to illustrate the spirituality that underpins the organization:

They ... characterize the Jews as 'the people upon whom God's anger came (= in the Qur'an). ... God's anger came upon them because they did not follow properly the religion He had sent them, but killed his prophets and distorted the original godly Jewish religion. They have, especially tried to harm and dominate the Islamic Ummah because this Ummah is the 'new international force bringing an authentic civilizing and godly programme to mankind'. (p. 102)

...Muslims are warned not to take Jews or Christians as friends because such people are 'friends only for each other' (p. 104)

The uncompromising goal of HAMAS is the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine:

For the Islamists, the question of Palestine is ... pre-eminent in shaping the future of the Islamic Ummah ... Control over Palestine announces control over the whole world ... the only means to reach the proclaimed goal ... is Jihad ... The link between Jihad and the purification of Muslim society is founded in the necessity of Islamic consciousness, and widens the notion of Jihad beyond simply military conflict. Intellectual elites are called to contribute ... by writing books and articles. (Nusse 1993, 109-113)

In this context, one of the key intellectual contributors is Muhammad al-Ashmawi, Professor of Letters at Alexandria University. His work (cf. Nettler 1995), on the surface seemingly more moderate than many of his peers, actually has potential to do more long-term harm to the sibling relationship between Islam, Judaism and Christianity than most. He appears to base his case on the need for Islam to rid itself of its political face and return to its true spiritual roots. While blaming Judaeo-Christian influence, and specifically the *Isra'iliyat*, for infecting Islam with its current political agenda, he appears to exonerate Jews and Christians on the basis that they do not have the benefit of the final manifestation that God revealed to Muhammad, a manifestation that clarified once and for all that the Promise was always to be understood in spiritual rather than political terms.

Because Jews and Christians do not have the benefit of this manifestation, they can be forgiven for clinging to their more primitive interpretations. He draws a heavy line between Islam and Judaism, in particular, in declaring that the latter was never intended to be more than the legislative and institutional force that many Muslims see today. While not blaming Jews and, by inference, Christians personally, he nonetheless relegates their religions to such an inferior status that it becomes inconceivable that they could have anything positive to offer to Islam. Hence, the entire history of Jewish and Christian influence on Islam is re-interpreted as being regrettable and in need of urgent redressing.

In trying to explain what has gone wrong with Islam and why it is imperative that Muslims unite to return Islam to its true roots, al-Ashmawi is quoted as saying:

Isra'iliyat is ... the 'Israelite thought' which entered Islam in spite of its being completely alien to Islam ... Islamic thought has most certainly followed in the footsteps of Judaism, without being aware of the differences between the essence of Moses's mission and the essence of Muhammad's mission ... and that the former is a legislating mission and the latter a mission of mercy and ethics ... Confusing the foundation of the two missions and directing Islam in the way of Judaism is to alter the basis and nature of (the Islamic) mission, to corrupt it, and to repudiate it in order to make it adopt the colouration of the Isra'iliyat and the forms of Judaism. (Nettler 1995, 179-181)

The problem with Islam is, therefore, its 'Judaization', a problem that goes back to Islam's foundations when it allowed the foreign influences of Judaism and Christianity to sully its mission. While one does not find the kind of vilification in al-Ashmawi that one finds in so much revisionist Islamic scholarship of the day, nonetheless there are none who revise the orthodox history more dramatically. Under al-Ashmawi, even some of Islam's own traditional sacred heroes are effectively written out of the script. The inevitable logic would seem to be that neither Moses nor Jesus can be seen any longer as Muslims in any sense, nor should they be allowed any influence. They become little more than unwitting functionaries responsible for wholly imperfect religious forms. One could only conclude that they, along with their imperfect traditions, must be expunged from Islamic thought and tradition if Islam is to return to its allegedly 'true roots'. Under the guise of an apparently moderate and non-punitive re-assessment of the history, al-Ashmawi has actually provided the theological rationale for the obliteration of Islam's long-held-to-be siblings, be it in terms of revisionist history or political solutions for today. For those who want to take it so far, he provides the perfect justification for the extermination of the modern state of Israel and for wholesale *Jihad* against the West.

Conclusion

These Islamic views, both positive and negative, are challenging to those whose faith is wrapped around the traditions of Judaism or Christianity, as well as to all Westerners. These views, however, are held by millions, including many who inhabit

Western lands like the USA, Australia, the UK and Europe, which have largely been formed under the inspiration of Jewish and Christian beliefs and values. A religious education that took its charter of personal formation and social education seriously would deal with these views, sensitively with their commonalities but robustly and boldly with their differences.

Indeed, with reference once again to the notion that the supreme form of knowing is to be found in self-knowing, one is inclined to say that grappling seriously with the knowledge, insights and claims of Islam could well impel a more profound understanding of their tradition than the Jewish or Christian Westerner would find anywhere else. As an important ancillary objective, it might well instil a greater appreciation of the huge contribution that Islam has made to these traditions and to civilization generally. This would be especially the case with the positive interpretations above.

To the even more challenging negative interpretations, one can only hope that by more profound forms of education all around, including those that impel self-reflection and honest self-knowing, some of the sores that have led to these views might heal or, at the very least, we might understand better the world in which we live and the issues that have to be addressed. Either way, there is no effective religious education today without strenuous education about Islam. Such education has potential to provide religious education with its mightiest and most noble end yet. This would be the kind of religious education that would be bound to make a difference in a world currently starved of solutions.

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