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ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND WESTERN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

Points of Tension

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, I elaborate an idealized type of Islamic philosophy of education and epistemology. Next, I examine the crisis that Islamic schools face in Western societies. This will occur on two fronts: (1) an analysis of the relationship (if any) between the philosophy of education, the aspirations of school administration, and the actual character and practice of Islamic schools; and (2) an analysis concerning the meaning of an Islamic curriculum. To the first issue, I argue that there exists a disjuncture between Islamic educational ideals (as expressed by Muslim philosophers of education), the aspirations of school administrators, and the manner in which Islamic schools operate in practice. Concerning the second item, I argue that Islamic schools, notwithstanding their own insistent claims, must struggle to define what an Islamic education entails that is uniquely distinctive to Islamic

schools. Finally, I argue that Islamic educators need to encourage open-minded discussions concerning issues on which there is no settled opinion. I illumine this discussion by drawing upon minority Muslim voices that encourage further dialogue and debate. Above all else, this chapter is an attempt to highlight the challenges that Muslim educators in the West face as they aim to reconcile an idealized caricature of Islamic philosophy of education with the on-the-ground needs of Muslim children socialized in a non-Islamic society.

[The] culture of a traditional society is dominated by harmony and unity; all branches of social life are deeply integrated. Education is an integral part of life and so are philosophy and knowledge, and these are deeply interrelated.

—Hadi Sharifi (1979)

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalists usually endeavor to respect the educational needs of each child according to their cultural orientation; similarly, multiculturalists are keen to promote equal educational opportunities. This includes incorporating curricular perspectives missing from the Western canon, attuning students to the underlying assumptions and biases that inform knowledge constructions and enabling students to think and act as empowered citizens. Yet there remain problems with this approach, including the manner in which multicultural curricula often resort to stereotypical and reductionist depictions of non-European cultures and ways of life. It has been claimed that these depictions only increase—or at the very least, solidify—the inequalities suffered by ethnic and cultural minorities whose interests multicultural lessons are meant to promote. Consequently, parents are increasingly choosing comprehensive religious schools for their children, which they hope will do a better job in maintaining their cultural and religious identities. Islamic schools are an important example of this trend, and as their numbers in Western countries climb there may be reasons to think that their aims replicate those of multiculturalism, albeit within the private educational sphere.

In what follows, I attempt to provide an overview of the general philosophy behind Islamic education. What I describe is a highly condensed version of Islamic philosophy of education, followed by a brief account of Islamic epistemology, as provided by some of Islam's finest scholars. Such philosophy is necessarily *theology,* inasmuch as all considerations of human endeavor in Islam have God as their point of reference. In my account of an Islamic philosophy of education, I render an undifferentiated consensus view, one that would appear to contradict the internally diverse *ummāh* as well as the experiences of Western Muslim educators. Therefore, much

of what I describe is an ideal type. *The synthesized ideas I will lay out do not exist anywhere in reality.* This is because the reification of abstract ideas necessarily requires interpretation and varied application according to need, organization, competence, and circumstance. It remains to be seen whether Islamic school educators in the West will develop a philosophy of education rooted in the experiences of practitioners.[1]

The incongruence between an ideal type of philosophy of Islamic education and the heterogeneous body of Muslims and Islamic schools in the West is admittedly an antinomy of sorts. In part, this tension exists because virtually all Islamic philosophy of education derives from the so-called Muslim world (e.g., Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia), while this study focuses on Islamic schooling in a Western context. This disjuncture poses a serious quandary for anyone attempting to understand the philosophical ideas that inform practice, particularly when a distilled, decontextualized stereotype emerges to inform the highly specific, context-specific practices in Islamic schools. In many ways, this chapter is an attempt to highlight the challenges that Muslim educators in the West face as they aim to reconcile an idealized caricature of Islamic philosophy of education with the on-the-ground socialization needs of Muslim children in a non-Islamic society.

Following an idealized description of Islamic philosophy of education, I describe what Islamic schools aim to provide. Islamic schools are as diverse as the individuals who establish, work, and study in them. It is therefore impossible to describe what an Islamic school, in any pure sense, looks like. The synthesized and ideal description I give is based largely on accounts provided by Western Muslim educators in Europe and North America—diverse in their own right—but I supplement these reports with interviews conducted with Islamic school principals, teachers, and former students from four Midwestern states in North America. My account focuses on what Islamic schools in the West *have in common,* allowing for different degrees of emphasis and implementation.

In my assessment of Islamic schools, I will examine the crisis that Islamic schools face in Western societies. This occurs on two fronts: (1) an analysis of the relationship (if any) between the philosophy of education, the aspirations of school administration, and the actual character and practice of Islamic schools; and (2) an analysis concerning the meaning of an Islamic curriculum. To the first item, I argue that there exists a disconnect between Islamic educational ideals (as expressed by Muslim philosophers of education), the aspirations of school administrators, and the manner in which Islamic schools operate in practice. Concerning the second item, I argue that Islamic schools, notwithstanding their own insistent claims, must struggle to define what an Islamic education entails that is uniquely distinctive to Islamic schools. Finally, I argue that Islamic educators need to encourage open-minded discussions concerning issues on which there is no set-

Islam versus the West?

Though changes in thinking are afoot, a majority of Muslims[2] and non-Muslims continues to cast the opposition of Islam versus the West rather sharply. One commonly encounters the paradigm, infamously advanced by the likes of Samuel Huntington (1996) and Bernard Lewis (1993) some years ago, of two incompatible cultures.[3] The voice of Noura Durkee is not atypical:

> [Religiously-minded Americans] could become Muslims. They might be among the best of us. They have, in general, lived through and come out of the frantic quest for money pursued by most Americans, born or immigrant. They have lived richly and poorly and don't care so much anymore. They do see the poverty in secular humanist materialism. But instead of becoming Muslim, they proceed to invent humanitarian causes like "World Hunger Day," "LiveAid," "Save the Whales." Why? Because Islam is something they know less than nothing about. They live in the Jahiliyyah [state of ignorance, idolatry, and anarchy]. Some of them are Hanif [believers in the One God]. Some of them know they are waiting for something. All of them are misinformed. (1987, p. 56)

Western values, many Muslims allege, assume a secular starting point, operate on the pretense of neutrality, unduly emphasize rationalism—and are accordingly limited by empiricism. Neutrality, Yusuf Waghid argues, "separates practice from theory, theory from fact, and fact from value" (1996, p. 44). Islam, conversely, posits the dual nature of humanity. Human beings possess not only a body and a mind but also a spirit (*rûh, nafs*). While Western scientism acknowledges the human heart as a muscle that pumps blood through the body and sustains its biological functions, the heart (*qalb*) in Islam denotes the core reality of humankind (Sharifi, 1979); its reality is not, ultimately, of this world but lies in union with God so that one may attain *adab* or the inculcation of goodness, leading to the "perfect human" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Religious faith (*īmān*) is not a separate compartment unattached to one's daily experience; rather, Islam purports to be a total way of life (*Dīn wa Dunya*). Islamic education, then, reposes in a transcendent reality and recognition of this leads to wisdom (*hikmah*).

The perceived antagonism between Western and Islamic educational goals is subsumed within the familiar dichotomy of the abode of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) versus the abode of war (*dār al-harb*), though both are increasingly believed to be outmoded expressions (Khan, 1998; Ramadan, 1999) and neither is to be found in the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah*.[4] Some Muslims describe Western societies as *dar al-Kufr*, or the abode of unbelief, where

Islam is neither the dominant religion nor are Muslims under special treaty relations with the state. Yet, obvious difficulties immediately arise; a country like the United States, for example, cannot be understood as an abode of unbelievers. Indeed, a majority of its inhabitants would be classified, in Islamic nomenclature, as People of the Book (*ahl-al-Kitab*). Yet acknowledging this does not prevent some Muslims living in the West from conceptualizing this opposition, often for polemical purposes.

Proponents for Islamic schools, joining the thousands of other denominational schools, sometimes echo this belief. Islamic educational ideals hold a great deal in common with, for example, Evangelical Protestant and conservative Catholic and Jewish schools. Each in its own way offers an alternative pedagogical vision to the materialist, secularist, and careerist impulses that permeate Western society generally. Each of these traditions recognizes that humans possess a physical and spiritual self. Islamic education aims to address this whole self, guiding the student along a path conducive to righteousness by integrating faith and spirituality into one's entire life. Increasingly, though, Muslims in Western contexts express skepticism concerning the ability to maintain this spiritual ideal. While democratic liberals will typically view a secularist political apparatus as nondiscriminatory and fair, Muslims are more likely to see secularism as an uncompromising force "sweeping the world in all matters of public life" (Hewitt, 1996, p. 72), an agenda set on relegating religious values to the private sphere. Secularism in public life is itself believed by some (Yousif, 2000) to be discriminatory. Muslims who view their situation in Western societies in this way are endeavoring to vanquish the secular foe, and they will seek to do so in a resolute, confrontational manner (Bleher, 1996). Thus Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi writes:

> The only way to combat this evil is to make arrangements for the widest possible dissemination of the Islamic *Da'wah* [witnessing to the faith], the spiritual-moral teachings of Islam through good healthy literature and journals propagating ethical norms and the awe of God in public dealings. If necessary, laws should be enacted for the purpose and those found offending these rules of conduct should be punished. (Husain & Ashraf, 1979, p. 21)

Thus, though Western countries operate explicitly or implicitly on moral axioms and policies originally framed around religious arguments, there is the impression—from within and without the Islamic community—that the West operates on principles *opposed* to religious faith.

Islamic Philosophy of Education: Aims and Objectives

At the center of Islamic education is complete submission to the will of God. This is what it means to be a Muslim. The curriculum in an Islamic

school, both explicit and hidden, ought to reflect an Islamic orientation. This is because Islamic education is an all-encompassing project, one not reserved for Muslims only. The surest educational proposal for an Islamic education, Muhammad Qutb posits, requires that one make "Allah's doctrine rule supreme" (Husain & Ashraf 1979, pp. 28–29). Islamic education, like most other forms of religious education, is concerned with the whole person. Its ambit includes the spiritual as well as the intellectual student. Syed Muhammad al-Attas explains it this way:

> The training imparted to a Muslim must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality and creates in him an emotional attachment to Islam and enables him to follow the Quran and the Sunnah and be governed by the Islamic system of values willingly and joyfully so that he may proceed to the realization of his status as [vice-regent] to whom Allah has promised the authority of the universe. (al-Attas, 1979, pp. 158–159)

In Islamic theology, one encounters the idea that humans are born in a state of *fitrah* (*by decree*), that is, the innate capacity for worship (*'ibādah*) and obedience (*ta'ah*) to the will of God.

Muslim educators are occupied with the need to combat a materialist mindset that fails to place Allah at its center. Islamic education seeks to overturn this materialist thinking by laying the stress on purpose and unity in the universe. Underlying this is the concept of *tawhīd*, the oneness of God that permeates all aspects of life. *Tahwīd* entails the complete integration of all that one does; it includes the physical as well as the spiritual. No dichotomy of sacred and profane exists, for all of life is called to submit to the divine will. All separation between science and spirituality is therefore believed to be a Western secular innovation (*bid'a*).[5] Harmony between faith and empirical work, between knowledge and values, must be maintained so that individuals participate in the noblest achievements of Islamic society. Even class differences are rejected inside the Islamic school, and complete equality among all students is the ideal (Ahmed, 1990).[6]

If there is an explicit purpose to Islamic education, it is this: to "teach us how to worship God and so fulfill our task of *Khalifah* [vice-regent] on earth" (Mohamed, 1991, p. 15). An Islamic education will bring up children according to their developmental needs and provide the student with

> the creative impulse to rule himself and the universe as a true servant of Allah not by opposing and coming into conflict with Nature but by understanding its laws and harnessing its forces for the growth of a personality that is in harmony with it. (al-Attas, 1979, p. 159)

This vice-regency is not to be seen as being in conflict with one's civic responsibilities. The society in which one lives, and not only an Islamic society, is one's *ummāh*. Islamic schoolteachers frequently discuss civil rights, civic responsibilities, and encourage their students to engage actively in the democratic process, though *da'wa* is usually the motive. Some believe that *da'wa* denotes active proselytizing of unbelievers in the community through interfaith alliances; for others, *da'wa* entails a life of prayer and pious living, that is, living one's faith. Either way, the goal of *da'wa* is to testify to the truth of Islam as the best way to enjoy inner peace and spiritual satisfaction.

Islamic education is impossible unless one has first accepted the revelation (*Wahi*) of God to humanity through the angel Jibrā'īl (Gabriel) to the last of the prophets, Muhammad. Without these premises, there can be no Islamic education. Beyond this prerequisite, Ghulam Sarwar (1996) elucidates the objectives of Islamic education:

1. Prepare and train the future generation to work as agents of *Allāh* on Earth.
2. Ensure the promotion of *Ma'rūf* (good) and the prevention of *Munkar* (evil) in a society.
3. Ensure the balanced growth of the total personality of a person.
4. Promote spiritual, moral, cultural, physical, mental, and material development in children in preparation for the responsibilities, experiences, and opportunities of adult life.
5. Develop all the faculties to realize the full potential of people.
6. Develop the skills required to enable people to face real-life situations with a clear consciousness about their responsibility and accountability in the *Ākhirah* [life after death].
7. Prepare people to work toward the economic and material growth of a society with a strong sense of the unity of the human race and ensure equitable distribution and proper use of wealth.
8. Develop a sense of social responsibility for the efficient use of resources to eliminate wastage, avoid ecological damage, and safeguard the well-being of all created beings.
9. Encourage competition in good things to promote excellence and the highest achievements for the greater welfare of people and society.
10. Ensure that children grow up with a strong belief in sharing opportunities, equity, justice, fair play, love, care, affection, selflessness, honesty, humility, integrity, and austerity (pp. 13–14).

The dichotomy mentioned earlier between "Islam" and the "West" (both are presented as undifferentiated) surfaces here again: the West dichotomizes while Islam harmonizes; the West, the argument runs, compartmentalizes disciplines, while Islam situates learning within its proper point of

reference, which is revelation (*Wahi*). Islam, also, purports to synthesize the various disciplines together neatly into a unified whole (*tawhīd*).

Again, it must be stressed that the above description of an Islamic philosophy of education captures an oversimplified, decontextualized "essence" as expounded by particular Muslim scholars, mainly from predominantly Muslim cultures, and not the diversity of the Muslim *ummāh* or the variety of practices that individual Islamic schools evince in the West. Most Islamic educators in the West are very keen to develop an Islamic philosophy of education that does not eschew liberal democratic values but incorporates them into an Islamic framework. While the details of this symbiotic relationship have yet to be worked out, it can be said of progressive Muslim educators that they wish to:

> Advocate a modern educational system, which is inclusive [of] a clearly defined religious curriculum, that enhances the child's development as a Muslim, in addition to his/her development as an intellectual capability. [This] approach to religious education as a foundation of an Islamic moral code, behaviorism and way of life is essential within [this] understanding of a comprehensive body of education. (Saadallah, 2004, p. 48)

Therefore, for most Muslim educators in the West, Islam is not so much guided by the abstract theology of intellectuals from the Muslim world but from the on-the-ground needs of Muslims struggling to retain their identity in an environment indifferent, and in some cases hostile, to Islam.

ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Modern epistemology, many Islamic pedagogues insist, minimizes the knowledge one derives from revelation (*Wahi*) and thus reduces knowledge to a material realm wholly dependent on reason. In other words, they continue, Western thought assumes a secular starting point (al-Attas, 1979, 1991; Barazangi, 1990, 1991; Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Nasr, 1987; Sarwar, 1996). Knowledge (*ilm*) from an Islamic point of view must take all of life into account; learning cannot be separated from belief in God. "Seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim," reads a famous *hadīth*. Indeed, belief in God is the key to true knowledge and understanding, for all knowledge comes from God. Knowledge must guide the Muslim "towards a high ultimate destiny in the Hereafter" (al-Attas, 1979, p. 157). The combination of knowledge with the spiritual discernment that recognizes and distinguishes truth from falsehood is called *'aql* and it can be used synonymously with "heart" (*qalb*). Real knowledge, however, is the balance between knowledge (*ilm*) and practice (*'amal*), and its purpose is the cultivation of goodness.

The Qur'ān, as the final authority on Truth (*haqq*), provides the basis for all knowledge claims. These knowledge claims then provide the basis for proper action (*lim*), spirituality (*iman, nur* and *huda*), ethics (*ulama*), and wisdom (*hikma*) (Hilgendorf 2003, p. 65). The point of an Islamic education is to grow and mature according to the wisdom of the tradition. Possessing true wisdom means being able to "effect correct judgments as to the proper place of things" (al-Attas, 1979, p. 20). Islam considers all intellectual and scientific learning and achievements to be an expression of wisdom derived from one's Creator. All inquiry and creativity are means to a greater end, that is, to reflect upon the greatness of Allah or to gain deeper insight into the meaning of the Qur'ān, and not as ends in themselves (Surty, 1989). While Islamic epistemology recognizes all levels of learning and perception, all are subordinate to the edicts of the Qur'ān, believed to reflect God's will. This is the idea behind *Tarbiya,* the goal-orientedness of an education, the nourishing of the whole person, in which no aspect of the individual is left untouched by faith (*īmān*). As an act of worship (*ibadāh*), Islamic education is preeminently concerned with cultivating and sustaining faith.

Whereas Western epistemology acknowledges both sensory and intellectual perception, Islam posits that yet another level of perception—namely, the spiritual—realizes the highest level of discernment and it is only through spiritual insight that all learning assumes a meaningful composite. Manzoor Ahmed explains:

> The aim of acquisition of knowledge in the Islamic system is not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity but to train rational and righteous individuals for the moral and physical good of their families, their people and for the entire mankind [*sic*]. The Islamic system of education strikes a balance between the need for individual excellence and the requirements of the society. (1990, p. 6)

There are differences of opinion concerning the degree to which one may blend imitation (*taqlīd*) of tradition with independent knowledge based on reason (*ijtihād*)[7] in areas where the Qur'ān and the *hadīth* are silent.[8] Additional knowledge can be gained, for example, from experimentation and observation of the material world, but all knowledge must be carefully integrated into an Islamic frame of reference (Yusuf, 1992). In a word, all learning must be *Islamicized,* that is, brought into conformity with the foundation, theory, and principles set forth in the Qur'ān.

A popular turn of phrase with earlier theorists such as Ismail al-Faruqi (1982), the "Islamization of knowledge" entails an interpretation of school subject matter that coincides with an acceptable orthodox understanding. The urgent task of Islamizing knowledge, for many Muslim educators, will "immunize" Muslim pupils from inevitable moral decline as they are con-

fronted by secularist ideologies and practices. Take, for example, the following quote from Allama Kazi:

> Islamic education [means] instruction to lead a life at the period of evolution initiated by the Quran. Anything that is detrimental to this progress at this stage is un-Islamic. Anything that defeats the purpose that the Quran has introduced to be achieved by humanity is bad education, wrong education, un-Islamic education—education that leads man [sic] from light to darkness. (1989, p. 84)

A correct understanding of the Qur'ān is believed to provide the Muslim with the tools to make sense of the modern world. Definitive answers are accessible to those who apply the "science" of revelation to all modes of inquiry. Those who wish to establish their interpretations as authentic and "orthodox" may avail themselves of the views of other Muslims who are in agreement (Stenberg, 2000).

Islamic education recognizes two types of knowledge, those acquired (tahsīlī) and those revealed (Wahi). Those acquired include the human sciences, the natural sciences, the applied sciences, and the technological sciences. In addition to these, one might add the following: comparative religion, Western culture and civilization, linguistic sciences, and Islamic history. Muslim educational scholars encourage the "Islamization" of each discipline. This entails "the elaboration of a prior constituted Islamic conceptual framework to convincingly meet the challenges of modern society" (Mohamed, 1991, p. 18). The former takes priority over the latter and becomes the criteria by which all learning is judged. Yasien Mohamed further differentiates the two types of knowledge: "The revealed sciences [Qur'ān, Sunna, hadīth] provide human beings with permanent objective truths which are important for their guidance, the acquired sciences provide the knowledge of sensible data necessary for daily practical use" (Mohamed, 1991, p. 19). To the extent that the acquired sciences usurp the place of revelation, the Muslim, it is said, will be alienated from the tradition and its eternal truths.

WHAT ISLAMIC SCHOOLS PROVIDE

Islamic schools may organize around Sunni or Shi'a understandings, but they are united in the five pillars or duties of the faith. These duties begin with the profession of faith (Shahāda), espousing that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger. To sincerely pronounce these truths in front of two witnesses is to become a Muslim. Other pillars of the Islamic faith include obligatory prayer (salāh) five times a day, zakāh or almsgiving,[9] sawm or fasting during Ramadan, and the hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. To these pillars the following may be added: a belief in the oneness of God,[10] a belief in angels (except for Shi'a), a belief in the prophets,[11] a belief in the day of judgment (Yaum al-Dīn), and a belief in God's sovereignty over all things. Many also add jihād, or spiritual struggle against darker impulses.[12]

Despite the many different types of Islamic schools, including varying degrees of orthodoxy, strictness, and ethnic affiliation, many overlapping similarities unite them. To begin with, Islamic schools promise to unite the spiritual with the material in the children's' education. An awareness of Allah in all that children do and learn is central to Islamic education. One cannot visit an Islamic school without hearing repeated references to God: Al-Hamdilullah (thanks be to God) or insha'Allah (if God wills) infuse the speech of teachers and staff throughout the day. The God-consciousness (taqwa) promoted by all of the Muslim staff is thought to foster student development that maintains a balance between the spiritual and the material, but this God-consciousness is also believed to lead to justice ('adl) and the witnessing to the truth of Islam (da'wa). The Muslim who spreads the true faith must first be mindful of God in all that he or she does; put another way, he or she must maintain equilibrium between the physical and spiritual realms. Taqwa, then, is best understood as a "conscious balance between the individual, the society, and the limits set by Allah or God as the source of value and knowledge" (Barazangi, 2000, p. 30).

Prayer times in Islamic schools are routine—though each school varies slightly in the time it sets apart for prayer—and space is provided for students to carry out ablutions (wudu) either in an adjoining mosque (masjid) or in the school itself. Gender separation is a common practice in most Islamic schools, at least prior to the onset of puberty. Only in smaller classes, as a practical necessity, does one find blending of boys and girls, and even then self-segregation tends to happen. Physical education, assuming it is provided, is usually segregated according to sex, except in the most liberal Islamic schools. Because Islam compels modesty, dress codes are usually strict. Beyond a certain age (most schools begin in the third or fourth grade), it is characteristic for girls to wear a headscarf (typically hijāb), as a show of inward as well as outward modesty, and a loose-fitting robe (jilbab). Makeup is strictly forbidden. Boys also wear uniforms, usually navy blue pants and white shirts. Hair is kept neat and trimmed. Art classes are sometimes available, provided there is funding and staff, but depictions of persons and animals are strictly forbidden because of the sanctions against idolatry. Music classes are only available in a few schools, but many (particularly stringed and wind) instruments are forbidden. Drums (tabla), however, are often part of Arabic culture, as are certain kinds of cultural dance (dabka). All Islamic schools celebrate the two important feasts in the calendar: the Festival of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) and the Festival of the

g to the Past (*Ua awrar*). Many schools also take a day off for the birthday of the Prophet.

As it concerns the curriculum, one finds important differences to other religious schools. Certainly there is Qur'ānic instruction (with recitation), including studies of the life of the Prophet (*sira*) and the period of the first four Caliphs. The moral example of the Prophet Muhammad, whose deeds are collected in the *Sunna*, and whose attributed sayings are collected in the *hadīth*, provides a reliable moral guide. For older students, there is also study of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), including consideration of Islamic law (*shari'āh*). From these are derived judgments concerning that which is either approved (*ma'ruf*) or morally intolerable (*munkar*). Islamic history is taught, as are various cultural studies that reflect the different ethnic compositions of schools. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that issues of faith can be broached in the classroom, openly and unabashedly. Examples include discussions in literature, social studies, and even science. Children and teachers often use their personal experiences as Muslims for instructive examples in classroom discussion. Many Islamic school staff members have considerable teaching experience in other public and private schools, some for many years. Their ability to contrast previous teaching experience is an advantage in their facility to assess Islamic schooling, though some have only the worst public school experiences to compare with. These messages are sometimes passed along to students in Islamic schools (i.e., that public schools are *ipso facto* unsafe, academically undemanding, promiscuous, materialistic places to be).

Several Islamic schools actively participate in interfaith exercises with the high school students, though the interaction is usually rather tame.[13] Students explain their faith while the others respectfully listen; each group—Jewish, Lutheran, Catholic, etc.—takes turns. While participants are exposed to different beliefs, challenges to one's faith are not likely to occur at these exchanges. Other teachers try to involve their students in academic competitions with a range of public and private schools, though some claim that other children have not always been kind.

Many schools are host to children whose parents and families are known to the entire school staff. (This is not always the case, of course, because many families drive long distances to reach the school.) Thus accountability is high, and respect toward adults is expected. Moreover, owing to the stronger formal relations that usually exist between school board members and teaching and administrative staff, there is usually a stake in the performance of the school, as well as the well-being of the students. In a number of Islamic schools, school board members are also part of the teaching staff. Accordingly, Islamic schools strive to provide an atmosphere conducive to higher student achievement.

Critical to the purpose of Islamic schools is their aim to maintain a school culture that operates according to particular values and norms. Often these values and norms are believed to be opposed to the norms of other schools, including the larger society. This value coherence is extended to the general climate in Islamic schools and not just to the dress code, prayer times, and a religiously sanctioned diet. Especially from curriculum developers and school principals one hears that Islam offers a structural advantage over Western forms of education, owing to its integration in all aspects of living. There is, generally, very little "clericalism" among those running Islamic schools; school administrators encourage their students to read and interpret the Qur'ān within certain reasonable limits, and critical discussion for the most part is encouraged.

ASSESSMENT

In attempting to assess Islamic education I have two items in mind: (1) The relationship (if any) between Islamic philosophy of education, the aspirations and goals of school administrators, and the actual practices of Islamic schools; and (2) the precise meaning of an Islamic education. Taking the first item, Muslim philosophers of education doubtless hope their objectives will filter down into practice. Reality, however, can offer up less agreeable testimony. Although there is inevitably some degree of confluence, it may appear to the observer that there is an unclear relationship between the ideals of Islamic education, the aspirations of school administrators, and the manner in which Islamic schools operate in practice. Concerning the second item, Islamic school educators are challenged to defend what is essentially Islamic about the education they promote. Generally, attempts to describe what an Islamic education is remain imprecise. On both counts, I base my assessment on a small empirical literature (mainly from self-reporting articles in Islamic magazines) and the testimony of both Islamic school teachers (not all of whom are Muslim) and former students.

Philosophy of Education

Muslim philosophers of education, most of whom write from contexts outside of the West, aim to provide Islamic school educators in the West with a vision of Islamic education. I have already proffered a condensed version of this pedagogical vision above. Entailed in this vision is Divine Revelation, the dual nature of human beings, the spiritual realm that permeates all that Muslims say and do (and, pertinently, *learn*), the submission of all knowledge to the authority of the Qur'ān, and the Islamization of

unfolds within a community of believers and is witnessed to by the *shahāda*. This disposition is concretized in specific acts of worship and moral duty, including fasting, prayer, and charity. The meaning of Islamic education, if a precise meaning can be properly distilled, is to remember (*dhikr*) and worship (*ibadāh*) God in all that one does. It is to be mindful of the Last Day and to treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve. To bring all elements of one's life within the jurisdiction of the Divine is both to submit to God and to realize one's true self.

Muslim philosophers of education continue, with few exceptions, to stress how an Islamic education differs *fundamentally* from education offered by other—ostensibly conflicting—philosophical bases. I elaborated in the first part of this chapter how the Islamic vision of education is believed to be at odds with the values and norms of Western culture. However, it must be stressed again that this vision remains idealistic and decontextualized; moreover, these lofty aims, inasmuch as they take little account of the actual practice of educators in schools on the ground, approach something akin to a stereotype.

School Mission

Islamic schools and their managers aspire to the best education possible for their students. Their goals in many ways match those of Muslim philosophers of education, though the level of specificity often differs because of the incredible diversity among Muslims themselves but also because of the variety of concrete practices different Islamic schools adopt. Nevertheless, an impressive uniformity exists, as school mission statements from across North America make abundantly clear. Thus from the American upper Midwest we learn of one Islamic school where the mission is to have their students understand *tawhīd*, to develop a strong moral character, develop a strong sense of responsibility, interact with the community and global issues with an Islamic frame of mind, and recognize Islam as the only viable solution to life's problems and challenges. Another school in western Canada states that it seeks to provide a superior standard of education, to foster academic achievement, and to cultivate an Islamic spirit in each student. Its leaders also expect a high standard of academic achievement, commitment, and integrity, combined with respect, self-discipline, and a code of conduct based on Islamic teachings. On the East Coast, an Islamic school announces its intention to "help Muslim children excel in learning and compete with their counterparts in passing the Standards of Learning as mandated by the Department of Education." Finally, from another school in New England, the goals of an Islamic education are expressed as follows:

The academy guides the children to lead decent contemporary lives, enrich their families, serve their community, tolerate differences, think critically, promote collaboration and respect others. School activities help the children develop individual talent, self-esteem and leadership characteristics and offer an outlet for demonstrating creativity. The entire school community provides high learning and practice standards preparing the students to live in a complex, technological and multi-cultural society as proud practicing Muslims. (http://www.iane.org/)

Those who manage Islamic schools, unlike most Muslim philosophers of education, recognize the importance of training children to simultaneously identify both as Muslims and as citizens of the West. Much of the language that Islamic schools adopt to convey their mission is therefore unsurprisingly Western in origin. This includes using the best academic resources (i.e., texts, pedagogical tools and teaching methods). It extends further. One school includes in its mission the aim to "interact effectively with people who follow other faiths, to tolerate differences of opinion within [one's] own community, and to keep [the students'] minds receptive to knowledge from all sources." Yet what remains unclear is the degree to which Muslim students are encouraged to interact with the belief systems of others in that world in which it is hoped they will succeed.

While all Islamic schools seek to cultivate Islamic virtues and character, many Islamic schools also endeavor to equip their students to succeed in a relentlessly competitive world, including being appropriately trained in the technological sciences. Earlier I pointed out that Islamic schools provide opportunities for their students to interact with others outside the school; the mission of each school is to train students for success in the marketplace. There are real tensions here. Perhaps as a direct consequence, school principals and administrators are frequently placed in the position of mediator between the values—many of them cultural—and expectations of parents and the realities facing children growing up in a society manifestly different from their parents' homeland.

School Practice[14]

Just as one might find in other small religious schools, it is impossible to miss the zeal and commitment among Islamic school staff and teachers. Little can deter those who have put aside other priorities and focused on the education of the youth according to a specific rule of faith. Islamic school staff work tirelessly to provide the highest levels of instruction while attending to the personal and developmental needs of children. Islamic school educators clearly recognize the advantages Islamic schools provide, including the feeling of security, acceptance and affirmation of one's faith,

far to hear stories of students whose Muslim identities grow stronger as a result of Islamic schooling. For these students, this translates into a stronger sense of self and a surer set of beliefs when it becomes necessary to confront non-Islamic customs and values.[15]

Nevertheless, teachers learn very quickly that Islamic schools promise many things that they cannot deliver (cf. Amri, 2000).[16] Some consider the idea of an "Islamic curriculum" unhelpful. This is hardly surprising when one considers that the majority of Islamic schools continue to borrow heavily from public and other private school curricula and textbooks. Most would rather talk about ways to help develop character. Many Islamic school teachers attest to Islamic schools not developing that special character, let alone managing to nourish a strong Muslim identity. To the contrary, many describe their school as very much like a typical public school, only with Islamic elements added on. Aside from the staff and resource shortages, few are unaware that their schools use the same textbooks as their public and private school counterparts. Moreover, the goal of becoming accredited in American schools means that Islamic schools aim to be as much like other state-approved schools as they can. In several European countries, curricular requirements (and hence degree of conformity) are even stricter still. Furthermore, many Islamic schools find it difficult to recruit Muslim teachers, calling into question the possibility of fostering an 'Islamic ethos' in the school.

PROBLEMATIZING ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

While Islamic schools encourage an Islamic approach to knowledge, many object to the suggestion that knowledge can be divorced from specific interpretations or constructions of it. Most readily agree that interpretation cannot be a *neutral* endeavor, for it involves incorporating specific attitudes that arise out of particular social rules and historical conditions (Waghid, 1996). Yet, directives pointing to Islamic history or the Islamic tradition pose myriad difficulties for students if they are not invited to join a conversation that questions the habit of imposing a monolithic structure from a previous age onto a new set of experiences (e.g., biotechnology) not faced by previous generations (Dahlén, 2002; Kazmi, 2003; Khan, 2004).

The reader may remember that the *Islamization of knowledge* concerns making all acquired knowledge conformable to an acceptable understanding of Islam. Yet not only is an *acceptable* view not disclosed, but the claim casts the meaning of Islamic education in rather stark contrasts: truth versus falsehood, orthodoxy versus heterodoxy. The truth as revealed in the Qur'ān, according to this view, is presented as unambiguously obvious in its

message. This somewhat static view of knowledge as propounded by numerous Muslim scholars has managed to drown out more progressive voices (Safi, 2003). These voices beckon Muslims to see knowledge as dynamic and unfolding. Syed Sajjad Husain (1996), for example, warns:

> [Muslims] stand more or less where the Christian world in Europe stood at the end of the mediaeval period when any interpretation of dogma which deviated from the teaching of the Church Fathers was condemned as heretical.... Human knowledge is a constantly changing process in the humanities as well as the sciences; nothing the source of which is man [sic] can ever stand still.... Every new generation of Muslims must be prepared to re-examine knowledge in the light of their understanding to keep pace with advances outside the community. Torpor and stagnation will confront us with the same dilemma in every age. (p. 50)

Unless new situations and intellectual challenges give rise to new interpretations (*ijtihād*), critics worry that the idealized, "pristine" projection of Islam will only alienate those who strive to adapt the norms of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* to modern life. Without this creative and critical approach to the Islamic tradition, several unfortunate consequences are likely to occur. At a minimum, students will feel overly constrained to address contemporary issues with an outmoded and useless vocabulary on the mistaken hunch that the interpretations and rulings (*fatāwā*) issued by Islamic scholars in particular times and places will be adequate to the task in all other circumstances. Today, Muslim youth are looking for interpretations and adaptations of Islam that are relevant to their lives.

Many Muslim teachers and former students also express frustration with the lack of discussion within Islamic schools *vis-à-vis* cultural issues (e.g., the manner in which males and females relate to one another) that have taken on a prominent religious significance. This means that even when students are hearing many different opinions about specific issues, they are often uncertain about the way one ought to believe or think about them chiefly because many are reluctant to question the "follow the rules" custom. Yet again this is unsurprising when one considers that it is common-place for adolescents generally to vacillate in this manner. Furthermore, Muslim scholars stress submission (*aslama, islam*) of one's volition to the doing of justice (*'adl*) and that which is good and beautiful (*ihsan*) as modeled by the prophets and revealed in the holy Qur'ān. To fail in this endeavor (i.e., to mistreat others or to stray from the right course) is to wrong one's own soul and to "deviate from what is right and to repudiate the truth and suffer loss" (al-Attas, 1979, p. 27). The devout Muslim will do only that which he or she believes is permitted by God; well-being depends on divine favor.

limitation of one's desires and passions. It is an ascetic freedom. This freedom does not seek to fulfill one's own aspirations and needs apart from the needs of one's family or one's community. The ordering of one's life according to divine law (*shari'āh*) is the ideal to which devout Muslims aspire. True spiritual growth is suitably guided by the *shari'āh*.[17] Yet freedom will bring inner peace and happiness only by pursuing that which brings one into harmony with one's essential nature and his or her Creator. This kind of freedom, grounded in a life of prayer, aims to liberate the believer. Given these spiritually directed inhibitions, coupled with the range of opinions within each Islamic school—that is, a variety of Islamic traditions and no central authority—not a few students (again, like adolescents elsewhere) complete their schooling unsure about what to think beyond a few core Islamic beliefs. This seems as much an asset as a liability. On the one hand, this uncertainty might lead to greater awareness of diversity and an appreciation for a more complex epistemology. On the other hand, this might lead other students to feel that no right answers are to be found on certain topics, thus undermining one of the core purposes of Islamic schools.

Islamic schools promise to provide an *Islamic orientation* or perspective throughout one's schooling, and this is certainly the case as it concerns a few core beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, few schools, including well-staffed Islamic schools, find it desirable (or possible) to provide a uniformity of beliefs.[18] Instead, Islamic schools will usually follow either a specific traditional interpretation, or the opinion of the local imam concerning various controversial issues, for example, the place of music or art in the school curriculum, whether women ought to be allowed to pray publicly at the mosque, or perhaps even the regard one should have for the local community as opposed to Islamic causes (e.g., Middle East conflict) abroad. However, each of these issues is handled differently from place to place,[19] and increasingly young Muslims resort to chat rooms and other informal channels to arrive at opinions concerning challenges they face (Schmidt, 2004).

LOOKING AHEAD

Islamic schools are one manifestation of the multicultural age. Indeed, they are providing the means whereby Muslim children are being nurtured into a highly specific cultural and religious way of life. Yet points of tension remain. Norma Tarazi (2001), for instance, writes: "Muslims have their own philosophy of education, a middle road" between Christians, Jews, and secular variants. This claim is consistent with the highly idealized, decontextualized understanding of Islamic education I reviewed earlier—one untouched by the diverse reality of particular Islamic schools and the broader Muslim *ummāh*. Notwithstanding this caricatured depiction, there is no discernibly single Islamic pedagogy; nor is there a single approach to governing Islamic schools. A comprehensive guide to Islamic education in the West has yet to be written. It is precisely here that Islamic schools in the West, driven by educational entrepreneurs (Susan Douglass is a fine example), are pregnant with promise. Little wonder, then, that there has been a sharp rise in the number of Islamic schools in several Western countries during the past 15 years, notably in the United Kingdom and throughout North America.

Aware of the different conditions facing their students, the safety and academic and religious freedoms to pursue knowledge for both girls and boys,[20] Islamic schools are uniquely positioned to forge an identity well suited to speak to the needs of Muslim youth living in Western societies. However, one may still question, given the motivations of many Muslim parents and the general orientation of Islamic philosophy of education, whether Islamic schools can succeed in promoting authentic critical inquiry without delimiting the inspirational sources to non-Western ones. But if Muslim educators are to meet one of their desired aims, which is to promote a strong Muslim identity in tandem with an active citizenship in the West, they will look for ways to promote uninhibited inquiry and reform fully consonant with one's fundamental commitments within the Islamic tradition(s). Western-born Muslims, Mustafa Malik says, "are challenged daily to find Islamic answers to existential questions that underscore the urgency of Islamic reforms" (2004, p. 80).

Islamic school teachers are often eager to discuss the role citizenship education plays in the curriculum. "I'm always trying to encourage my students to think outside of their immediate surroundings," one teacher explains. Citizenship, another teacher elucidates, "has to do with respecting others; it concerns getting along with others, working in cooperation." Even where there is clear evidence of sheltering—particularly as it concerns issues involving strong moral opinions—students are reportedly well disposed to handle the crisis. Furthermore, Islamic school administrators are usually aware of the criticisms detractors make against Islamic schools. It is not, after all, only liberals who worry about the sheltering of children; many Muslims do as well. It is therefore not surprising to learn that a significant number of Islamic schools are seeking to prepare their students to live in a society in which they are a distinct minority. Education of this kind, as A. S. Abdullah explains,

> is concerned with developing the unique characteristics of the human being so that he will be able to *adapt* [to] the standards of the society that shares

But pedagogy is only one dimension of Islamic schooling, for the internal diversity within the Muslim community also means that the social and political aims of Islamic education remain unclear. Thus, it remains a challenge for Islamic schools to "work together to define a unified social, religious, [and] political role for themselves" (GhaneaBassiri 1997, p. 184). This challenge is not, however, cause for dismay. After all, there is—as I've stressed throughout this chapter—incredible diversity among Muslims. Whether or not it is an explicit objective, Islamic schools participate in as well as contribute to a variety of projects, and seek to have an impact on public life. For some the local community is a priority. Here, the aim is to sew "Islamic values" in the midst of a secular society through either public service or *da'wa*. Others prioritize promoting awareness of Muslims in other countries (Chechnya, Bosnia) where their plight goes unnoticed by the rest of the world. The majority appears to foster tight local networks contained by familiar family ties. Perhaps Islamic schools can accommodate each of these. Nevertheless, defining what "true" Islam is continues to challenge any and all notions of what an Islamic education must look like.

Islamic philosophy of education in particular continues to be problematic to the extent that its aims are largely defined by scholars living outside of the West. In particular, the anti-Western flavor of much Islamic philosophy of education continues to create obstacles for Islamic schools eager to depart from secular models of education. To admit to the need to become more self-critical of one's core commitments, including adopting different attitudes and perspectives, is seen by some as an abrogation of an Islamic identity. But this seems more a *betrayal* of Islam.

Muslim educators may think that in teaching a more open approach to matters involving Muslim identity they will be inviting division and disunity, a particularly uninviting prospect to face when so much vilification against Islam already thrives in the West. But it is crucial to the health and survival of Islam as a religion that it be able to confront challenges facing the next generation in ways that are open-minded and transparent. The community of believers (*ummāh*) instantiated in the Islamic school (inasmuch as it is true to the revelation witnessed to by the Prophet) will need to do justice to the day-to-day experiences of its members. Doing so only fosters trust and respect. Having a group of believers divided over a particular issue seems preferable to having a body of conservative clerics insisting that there will be no discussion at all. There is, Tamara Albertini (2003) reminds us, a long tradition within Islam that celebrates the *adab al-ikhtilāf*, or *ethics of disagreement* concerning different schools of interpretation.

The issues facing Islamic schools in the West confront *all* religious groups but they are arguably more pronounced for the Islamic community in the West because of the negative press they routinely receive (Abu-Laban, 1983; Noakes, 1998; Pitts, 2004). Issues like domestic violence[21] and clinical depression are only beginning to be openly discussed in some Muslim communities, while cultural divisions,[22] the acceptability of fine arts, arranged marriages, and the relationship of Muslims to public education remain largely undecided topics desperately in need of further discussion. The West is providing the space and the freedom to organize and develop strategies to respond to the needs of the Muslim community, in many ways better than other so-called Islamic countries do (Abdul-Rauf, 1983; Malik, 2001, 2004; Ramadan, 1999). Nevertheless, the resolution of Muslim educators to grapple with issues such as these will determine the health and sustainability of Islamic schools in the generations to come. If predetermined principles win out over continued reflection and interpretation, if open discussion about controversial issues is met with denunciations of "*bid'a!*" or "*haram!*" (i.e., unlawful), one can expect a certain measure of cynicism among many Muslim youth, who consider the Islamic schools to have nothing to say to their lived experience.

Yet whatever the failings of Islamic schools, they are not lacking able and eloquent defenders. So to the question, "What makes an Islamic school unique?" one is likely to hear that the students feel at peace, that the Islamic school fosters better character, and aligns the actions of students with God's will. School staff continues to provide abidingly strong support, even when the precise mission of the school is unclear and dire shortages in resources and faculty persist in those countries where direct government funding is unavailable.

What is more, there are rewards. So, for instance, one may hear how much better behaved Islamic schoolchildren are compared to other schools. This the staff attribute to a school philosophy built on *tarbiyah*,[23] a life guided by prayer, morality, and God-consciousness (*taqwa*). Academic excellence, too, is a feature every Islamic school wants to promote, especially to parents eager to see their child(ren) succeed in an intensely competitive environment. It is also not uncommon to hear from teachers and former Islamic school pupils (some of whom return to teach at their alma mater) that a feeling of unity prevails among the student body. This is the case especially as it concerns the dress code, prayer times, eating *halal* food, and celebrating Islamic holidays. Other items include a higher degree of adult supervision and concern, fewer cliques, and more self-confidence among the student body. In short, well-being is enhanced.

In this chapter, I have elucidated the main themes in Islamic philosophy of education and in particular I have drawn attention to the fact that the individual, seen against the backdrop of an epistemology of faith, possesses a dual nature. In Islam, education does not merely serve the purposes of intellectual growth; rather, learning is part of what it is to be a created subject toward a larger cosmic purpose. Contrary to the Western custom of reasoning by way of doubt and uncertainty, Muslims—while encouraged to be critically minded—are called to an education built on the premise of faith in a divine order. Freedom to exercise one's intellect, on this understanding, must be restrained by an awareness of one's finitude. Furthermore, knowledge claims can only be predicated on the understanding that acquired knowledge is not likely to conflict with revealed knowledge as given in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. The curriculum in Islamic schools affirms the identity of the students in a way that the state and private schools systematically do not. Whether it is the role of Arabic scholarship in transmitting and enhancing valuable Greek education to the West or the different perspectives that attend social studies lessons, one's cultural identity and contribution is not degraded or ignored in Islamic schools; rather, it is affirmed, elaborated, and celebrated (at least for the majority ethnic group in a particular school).[24] This is not a multicultural education so much as it is an education for cultural coherence.

Though there are exceptions, in most cases Islamic schools follow the standard educational practices found in public and other private schools. They also insist upon a very high moral ethos. Teachers are expected to live up to the values that they teach, and accountability is highly regarded. At the same time, Muslim parents, like most parents, desire that their children attain high academic and vocational achievement. It remains an open question whether material competitiveness *an sich* is at loggerheads with the spiritual aims of Islamic education.[25]

The aims of Islamic education continue to be a challenge to Islamic educators in Western societies; to wit, locating the precise meaning of an Islamic curriculum and ascertaining how to integrate one's faith into a way of life that largely excludes Islam from the public sphere. Whether Islamic schools can successfully navigate this route, cultivating strong Muslim identities while at the same time aiding students in the integration process so essential to their identity as citizens of a liberal democracy, is still being assessed. Many Muslims claim that living in an environment in which they must interact daily with others who are unfamiliar with Islam or, more likely, have serious misconceptions about it, strengthens their faith.

This is as much an argument against Islamic schools as one for them. For those who opt for Islamic schools, the challenge of interpreting the Islamic tradition remains. Muslims in the West are arguably better placed than anywhere in the world to give attention to interpretive polyvalence, to the benefits of democratic pluralism, and to the relevance of human experience to a living faith. Still, many teachers recognize that literal readings of the Qur'ān and the *sharī'ah* remain a problem.

Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that Muslim educators are seeking to have a fruitful parley between Western and Islamic norms. Yet this relationship to Western educational norms continues to divide most Muslim educators into two camps. The first camp plays host to those who are keen to locate commonalities with Western discourse and believe that many Islamic norms are in fact culturally based and must be jettisoned in deference to context-specific reinterpretation. Those in this camp will also see the *ummāh* as broader than the Islamic world, namely, to include the immediate space in which one dwells. As one *hadīth* says, "Loving one's country is a portion of one's faith." Those in this camp will also strongly oppose the blending of Islam with state building and instead liken the diaspora of Muslims in Western countries to Muhammad's own *hijra* or migration from Mecca to Medina. Yet many in this camp would also not send their own children to an Islamic school because they believe that it is only in "the world" that one comes to understand the meaning of living out one's faith.

Conversely, the second camp includes those who would seek to dissociate themselves from the corruption of Western ideas, inhabiting the *abode of apostasy* (*dar al-kufr*) and replacing them with normative Islamic ones. For the time being, the second camp is winning on the level of rhetoric and theory. But it is the first group that is prevailing in practice. The significance of this disjuncture augurs continued struggle for Islamic school educators.

Despite an overlying philosophical unity concerning the purposes of Islamic education, a great deal of diversity manifests itself in the practical realm. Indeed, Islam is every bit as much an internally conflicted religious community (Bilgrami, 1992) as any other. Therefore, inasmuch as Islamic schools seek to promote and emulate behaviors and beliefs that reflect a *true Islam*, it is necessary to distill its meaning and specifically to examine instances where conflicting notions of what it means to be a Muslim—of the sort I discussed above—can be found. A self-critical approach to Islamic education will allow Muslim students to openly question prohibitions on beliefs and practices even when it is widely believed that the Qur'ān has spoken definitively on the matter. Notwithstanding the tremendous assets one is likely to find in Islamic schools, there continue to be enormous challenges associated with the meaning of Islamic education. Further discussion, including a continued appeal to jurisprudence (*fiqh*),[26] both appropriate to Western contexts and sensitive to contextual considerations, must be sought after if Islamic schools are to have the efficacy and

relevance needed to build strong Muslim character capable of tackling new challenges. This will entail moving beyond binary oppositions of *dar al-Islam* versus *dar al-harb* and will necessitate taking into account the freedoms, protections, and opportunities of Muslims to participate in society to a degree almost not found in the Islamic countries themselves. This attitude will avert a defensive posture against Western societies, naively believed by so many to be devoid of moral principles. Moreover, it will also facilitate a much-needed discussion among ordinary Muslims concerning different ways of appropriating the religious sources.

How Islamic schools in the West will address these challenges remains to be seen. Yet the fact remains that many Muslims are calling out for fresh reexaminations of their conceptual models and terminology. The formidable influences of popular culture, purveyed through various media and the hidden curriculum[27] (including children taken out of the state school system and placed in comprehensive religious schools), will exert considerable influence on a child's thinking. Simplistic moralizing and Islamic prohibitions, to which many immigrant Muslim children are exposed in after-school and weekend Qur'ānic classes, will not suffice to counter these influences, nor will they be likely to appeal to the Muslim child without more culturally sensitive lessons that take account of non-Muslim societies.[28] There is no better time than the present for Islamic schools to begin tackling the challenges Muslim youth face with frankness and honesty. The alternative is waiting another generation when the controversy will be passé and acceptance, minus the standard vestigial resistance, will have become mainstream. Is it only the most reactionary Muslim voices that will have a say in this matter? Has all truth been settled once and for all in Islam? If Islamic education entails the cultivation of wisdom (*hikma*) (and possessing true wisdom, according to al-Attas, is being able to effect correct judgments as to the proper place of things), surely it is the Islamic school in the West that is best equipped to take up the charge of having this conversation.

NOTES

1. All italicized non-English words are in Arabic unless otherwise specified. Thanks to Safaa Zarzour for his careful checking of Arabic transliterations. Thanks also go to Jeffrey A. Milligan and Adam Nelson for reading and commenting on a previous draft.

2. It is necessary to distinguish between those who attempt to practice Islam and those, mainly in the West, who only see themselves as Muslim by virtue of their ethnic or national origin. Devout Muslims would likely assert that those I have just described are not really Muslims; however, many from either grouping do not see their Muslim identities as incompatible with Western values. Secularism among Muslims can take two forms. (1) Islam is nothing more than the cultural forms (including music, dance, dress, and manners) that comprise one's identity, or (2) Islam is to be confined to the private sphere and not to be mixed with politics. Secularists, as well as many progressive believing Muslims, are also willing to recognize man-made laws, democratic institutions, and embrace education in its modern and secular forms. See S. Saadallah (2004) for a more elaborate discussion.

3. Increasingly there are voices, notably Tariq Ramadan, who have incisively argued for the abrogation of this paradigm. Ramadan argues that this binary model fails to take account of different political arrangements today that make the practice of the Islamic faith, for instance, more possible in Western contexts than is to be found in many Islamic countries, where the governments are often hostile to all religious freedom. See T. Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (1999).

4. The *Sunna*, a collection of the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, serves as the model *par excellence* of morality for Muslims.

5. This alleged scientific hostility to religion is a very narrow reading of the history of scientific inquiry. Many scientists then (Galileo, Faraday, Newton, etc.) as now (Polkinghorn, Einstein, Hawking) were interested to address questions having to do with human purpose and meaning.

6. Here is an example of an ideal aim that is not reflected in reality. Most Islamic schools appear to track their students into different academic levels. This becomes more obvious in Islamic high schools, where one finds regular, accelerated, and advanced placement classes. These graded levels of difficulty in Islamic school classrooms would seem to facilitate—rather than downplay—inequalities among students.

7. *Ijtihād* is the third arm of Islamic jurisprudence (the other two being the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*), though it is usually thought that only the jurist (*mujtahid*) or legal expert (*mufti*) is qualified among the leaders (*ulemā*) to make decisions according to *shari'āh* where the other sources are silent. The difficulty remains, however, because there are several traditional schools of law (*madhāhib*), including Shāfi'ī, Hanbalī, Mālikī and Hanafī. One's position with respect to *Ijtihād* will determine a great deal about one's position as an Islamic traditionalist, modernist, fundamentalist, etc. Traditionalists and fundamentalists (not to be confused with Radicalists) will incline toward the view that all truth for Muslims was canonized prior to the 13th century and thus no *ijtihād* is acceptable. All authority lies, therefore, in the period of the four major schools of interpretation and application of these canonized truths are limited to the *ulema* or clergy.

8. Even when there is silence in the Qur'ān, there may be varying degrees of agreement.

9. Sometimes *zakah* is translated as "poor tax."

10. The Muslim God is an undifferentiated monad, with whom there can be no "associators." The notion of *šurik* or associating anything or anyone with God has its origins in the repudiation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Many of the debates between Christians and Muslims ca. 700–950 CE focused on this doctrine.

11. The prophets, of whom Muhammad is the last and final seal, are said by some to number 125,000. The Qur'ān mentions: Adam (the first Muslim), Ibrahīm (Abraham), Nûh (Noah), Musa (Moses), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qûb (Jacob), Dawûd (David), Yusuf (Joseph), Sulayman (Solomon), Idris, Ayyûb

(Job), Dhu l-Kifl, Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, Yûnus (Jonah), Zakariiyya (Zechariah), Yahya (John the Baptist), and Isa (Jesus). Jews and Christians will recognize most of these.

12. Of course, *jihād* carries a secondary meaning (one appropriated by militants) of "holy war" (i.e., armed struggle).

13. Many parents also continue to object. The events of 9/11 have removed much of this opposition, as more and more Western Muslims see the absolute necessity of conveying a positive image to a society that consumes only stereotypes concerning Islam.

14. I base many of the following comments on interviews I conducted during 2003–2004.

15. But this is not the case for everyone, and many children succumb to the same peer pressures that ordinary children do.

16. For these individuals, an encounter with the world outside of the Islamic school had not occurred to a significant degree before attending high school, and for those who attended an Islamic high school, this "awakening" often did not occur until university, where many students struggle to interact in coed situations, or to accept the lifestyle options of others. Some former Islamic school students confess that they believe public schools do a better job helping young people adjust to the "real world," and even many of the most eager proponents of Islamic education lament the absence of music in the curriculum, the social awkwardness of adolescent youths with the opposite sex, and the gendered nature of certain school activities. Many Muslim teachers acknowledge the shock that their graduates experience as freshmen in university. Open discussion about abortion, same-sex marriage and child adoption, euthanasia, depression, etc., catches many students unaware. Rejoinders to media reports from the Middle East can sometimes elicit impassioned knee-jerk reactions. Still, one former student explains, "After I recovered from my shock to hear certain topics being discussed so openly, and I paused to listen to what others had to say, I found that I was well equipped to handle it." Now she declares herself friends with many people with whose lifestyles and opinions she does not agree. Many former students admit that they wished they had been better prepared to anticipate challenges facing them in society, but most do not give the impression that they feel cheated by their Islamic education and typically speak highly of it (i.e., with considerable pride).

17. Free will (*qadariyyah*) exists, otherwise there would be no responsibility and human destiny would be predetermined (*taqdīr*).

18. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri writes, "The fact that Muslims do not have the same understanding of Islam prevents them from being able to unite behind [various] issues. What kind of Islam [will] be taught at school? Whose definition of Islam will be presented to non-Muslim Americans?" (1997, p. 185). Following the events of 9/11, a considerable amount of internal division among Western Muslims abated. This was likely the case in order that Muslims might combat Islamic stereotypes and profiling as well as to communicate their faith in a positive light to other Westerners.

19. To take one example, the issue of music and art in the curriculum of Islamic schools continues to be extremely contentious. There are those who would argue that music and depictions of animal or human faces in drawing or painting are strictly forbidden. Others take a more lenient view. Some Islamic schools, for example, allow paintings of persons as long as the facial features are—in a kind of "impressionist" way—blurred. Perhaps a majority of Western Muslims considers music acceptable if one's intentions do not stray from basic Islamic principles, though one is likely to find many Muslims espousing a position publicly opposed to instruments in school while privately seeing to it that their own children receive lessons in the home. Consequently, with the exception of *a cappella* choirs, very few schools will venture to include instruments or musical appreciation into their curriculum. The same can be said for most cinema, photography, sculpture, and drawing. The various proscriptions are based on literal readings of the Qur'ān concerning verses that speak to those who craft objects "in competition with God." Moderate interpreters maintain that these references regard idol worship. (Much of Islamic aesthetics, accordingly, has been limited to architecture and calligraphy.) These issues are even more intractable to the extent that Islamic schools remain embroiled within *masjid* politics. If structural and administrative independence is established in relation to the mosque authorities, Islamic schools stand a much better chance of exercising the sort of critical role I have called for in this chapter.

20. In many so-called Islamic countries the illiteracy rates can reach 70% and even higher for girls. In many of these countries, for a variety of reasons, education is not a national priority.

21. Of particular concern is the Qur'ānic verse (4:34) that gives husbands permission to "beat" their wives if they fail to measure up to conjugal expectations. A great deal of debate surrounds the interpretation of this verse, but its very presence in the Qur'ān remains a formidable obstacle.

22. Cultural and denominational divisions can run so deep that many Muslims would rather their children marry a Christian or Jew than a Muslim of a different cultural or denominational background.

23. Tarbiyah, according to the Sufis, is concerned primarily with an individual's inner excellence.

24. This continues to be a problem within individual Islamic schools. Schools with, say, a majority of Palestianian or Pakistani students will in all likelihood cater to the cultural and political concerns of those respective groups (though they are seldom evenly divided; one is likely to find a school with a clear majority). Consequently, the cultural and political concerns of, say, the Bosnian or the African American are often ignored or neglected.

25. Certainly material prosperity within religious traditions has many precedents. Within Protestantism, the Calvinist work ethic gave credence to the idea that material gain was a sign of God's blessing. Examples can also be found in the Jewish scriptures and high-caste Hinduism and various schools of Buddhism (e.g., Sokka Gakkai).

26. This practice, *usūl al-fiqh*, continues to be a contested domain. Most Muslims believe that only those with a sophisticated knowledge of the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and the Arabic language can qualify as a *mujtahid* (i.e., an individual capable of rendering prudent interpretations of the sources in order to issue sound advice or rulings [*fatāwā*]). While this opinion has the most defenders and is wise, considering the spurious claims to authority in issuing *fatāwā* (witness Khomeini's *fatwā* against Rushdie or bin Laden's *fatāwā* against American civilians, both of which were denounced by Muslim jurists), *usūl al-fiqh* remains problematic inasmuch as others, wishing to challenge traditional readings of the sources, are dismissed as amateurs and unable to understand the sources in their "true intent." The same line of argument was

used by the Catholic hierarchy against the laity for centuries. Only in the mid-20th century were Catholic biblical scholars allowed to openly contest traditional readings of the Christian sources (patristic, liturgical, and biblical), though many did so at great risk to their careers in the Church. Even so, few could question their knowledge of the Greek and Latin sources. Slowly, the same debate is beginning to unfold among Muslims.

27. The hidden curriculum, for my purposes here, will refer to the *implicit* messages conveyed to schoolchildren through the attitudes and actions of school staff, one's peers, and materials used in classrooms.

28. In a comparison with Irish Catholics and Ashkenazi Jews, Mustafa Malik argues that secularization in both groups was inevitable, owing to (1) interaction with coworkers and neighbors, thus eroding their sense of religious certainty; and (2) the rise of industrialization and technology, thus permitting them to rationalize the outcome of human actions (2004, p. 75).

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CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN WESTERN CANADIAN EDUCATION

Presumptions, Provisions, Practices, and Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines how Canada's provisions for education have dealt with religion and religious issues within a multicultural, multireligious context. It examines current legal and political provisions for religious diversity in Canadian schooling, with an emphasis on the situation in Canada's westernmost provinces. Nine school administrators, teachers, and parents of various religious backgrounds respond to questions about their experiences with religious diversity in government public schools. The chapter teases out some common themes in their reflections. It then concludes by probing possibilities for providing a school system where stakeholders can express and uphold their religious identity without fear of reprisal, while at the same time