

*The New
Millennium
Through Muslim Eyes*



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The New Millennium

Through Muslim Eyes:

The end of the world or a new beginning?

As the 20th century draws to a close and we are approaching a new millennium, there is a great deal of apocalyptic hype: ordinary people are grasped by anxiety, whereas scientists, politicians, economist, religious leaders and the media are busy in anticipating and predicting the future. The repertoire ranges from the doom-and-gloom scenario to euphoria for the brave new world about to begin.

This booklet is not intended to add to the hype and speculation. It is an honest attempt to take stock of the development of human civilisation based on observations carefully compared to the wealth of Islamic source texts. To begin with, it is not our millennium which is coming to an end. Muslims are, as we write, in the year 1420 of their time reckoning, and the year 2000 of the Christian era is no magical number for them. Yet, for us Muslims who live in the West, it is a welcome opportunity to take stock, and for those non-Muslims around us, it might be an opportunity to have somebody hold up the mirror and present a view of our society from a somewhat different angle, as all too often it is difficult to see the wood for all the trees.

An Age of Change

Admittedly, the excitement about the millennium is fuelled by the fact that things have been changing fast during this century, and this change is accelerating beyond the capability of many people to keep up with it. This creates uncertainty, instability and the fear of the unknown. Change has always been an integral factor of human development, particularly from one generation to the other, but in the age of the microchip the ability of a single generation to adapt again and again is becoming exhausted. We have witnessed the birth of the petrol engine, air and space travel, tele- and satellite communications, and the advances of computing into every field of life. We have achieved the large-scale exploitation of natural resources, the exploration of land, sea and sky, and the beginnings of a deeper understanding of our genetic make-up coupled with an attempt at manipulating the determining factors of our own existence. This has gone hand in hand with large-scale social upheaval. This century has seen two major world wars of hitherto unknown destructive power, followed by equally devastating regional conflicts. It has already been termed the bloodiest century since the dawn of humanity. From the ruins cities of previously unknown magnitude have risen with skyscrapers, underground travel, shopping malls, traffic jams and urban wastelands. The structure of our traditional families has been eroded, national borders and identities have been blurred, and a world economy managed by giant multi-national concerns has dwarfed the ability of governments and small-scale enterprise into the role of cogwheels in a huge clockwork. The 20th century has produced feasts of technology, but also the largest debt burden, poverty and deprivation within known human history.

The End of Limitless Growth

We have been led to believe that there is unlimited growth and expansion, and that nothing is constant but change. Yet we know that living organisms are subject to the cycles of birth, life and death, and that we cannot overcome our own, biological limitations. The apocalyptic predictions aired at the turn of the millennium are a culmination of critical voices throughout the century that the pursuance of a cancerous growth strategy will inevitably lead to collapse and destruction in the environment, in our social fabric, within our own human psyche. Coupled with the fear that we have driven the changes too far, has been the call for a return to age-old traditional values as the ones propagated by religion. Yet, whilst the millennium marks 2000 years since the birth of Christ, a markedly Christian tone is noticeably absent from the celebrations, and many people, whilst searching for a spiritual dimension to balance material progress, would admit that Christianity has lost the assertiveness to provide a meaningful moderation of the excesses of civilisational development. Christianity, because it is enshrined in the canons of the long bygone Roman empire, will lose its foundation when trying to adapt to modern times, but will be condemned to be outdated rather than forward-looking when trying to hold on to its traditions.

Islamic Contribution

Islam, though not a new phenomenon, remains a dynamic religion for the simple reason that none of its human interpretations of the law are written in stone, nor does it claim to have a non-erring priesthood elite whose pronouncements may never be questioned by anyone without being branded a heretic. Its revelation, the Qur'an, is preserved in its original authenticity, but demands constant effort (known as *ijtihad*) to find ways and means to apply its everlasting universal principles to the detailed situations unique to each time and place. The Qur'an and the prophetic traditions (known as *Hadith*) are to serve as a guidance, not a straightjacket. In addition, they contain prophecies, or projections of the future, which provide an early warning system designed to enable believers to react appropriately and adequately to the trends of any particular time without falling into the trap of despondent submission to the forces of nature or the train of time which demands that we should passively acquiescence into what is perceived as inevitable. A key concept of Islam is that of the balance of creation which demands from every individual to attempt his or her utmost best to restore the equilibrium which may have been lost through past mistakes. Let us, therefore, look at some of the predictions of the Islamic body of knowledge with a view to enable us to make a value judgement about what we observe around us and then respond adequately.

A Chance to Start Afresh

Allah says in the Qur'an, in verse 41 of the chapter entitled the Romans (Surah 30, ar-Rum) that:

“Mischief has become apparent on land and sea due to peoples own doing, so that He lets them taste some of the consequences of their deeds in order to let them turn back.”

Thus He places the responsibility for the destruction of our natural environment unequivocally with us, the human inhabitants of His earth. The verse indicates the downside of human activity, yet envisages their ability to learn from the results and make amends. This is why prophetic warnings of coming tribulations are for Muslims not a fatalistic vision of the apocalypse but an encouragement to constantly search for opportunities of setting right past wrongs. Muslims only have two choices: action or prayer. They may try to change the world, or they will wait in hope for the change. They cannot ever be content with what is wrong. The prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be with him, is reported to have said:

“Troubles will afflict my people at the end of time from their rulers so severely, that none will escape from it except one who knows the religion of Allah and fights for it with his word, his deeds and his heart and the best will lie ahead of him, and one who knows the religion of Allah and affirms its truth, and one who knows the religion of Allah but keeps quiet, loving those who do good and being displeased at those who do bad, he will escape because he keeps it all.” (al-Baihaqi)

The first is the preferred option, and the Qur’an promises great reward to those who stand up and fight for what is right: Those believers who stay at home, unless they are compelled to do so, cannot be compared with those who fight in the way of Allah with their property and their lives.

“Allah favours those who fight with their property and their lives over those who stay at home, yet He has promised good for all. Allah has chosen for those who fight a great reward over those who stay at home.” (Surah 4, An-Nisa (Women), verse 95)

The reason is given in verse 75 of the same chapter:

“What is the matter with you that you don’t fight in the way of Allah when the weak amongst men, women and children cry out: Our Lord rescue us from this township of oppressors and give us a protector and helper from You!” And immediately after: “The believers fight in the way of Allah, and those who deny the truth fight in the way of evil. So fight the friends of the devil, for the devil’s plan is feeble.” (Surah 4, An-Nisa (Women), verse 75)

A believer must stand up and be counted. Throughout the ages, believers have been attacked for holding to their principles and preferring the revealed order of the beneficent Creator over the tyranny of those amongst His creatures who are hungry for power and people’s submission. Near the end, this confrontation will also take on a global character, as predicted in the following prophetic tradition:

“The nations will soon invite each other against you as someone invites to a meal.” Somebody asked: Is this because of our small number that day? He said: “No, that day there shall be many of you, but you will be like foam on the sea, and Allah will take

away the fear of you from the hearts of your enemies, and will place feebleness into your hearts.” Somebody asked:

O Messenger of Allah, what is this feebleness? He replied: “The love of the world and the dislike of death..” (Abu Daud)

The End of the World

It is the love of the world which is the root of the evil surrounding us, and the remedy prescribed by Islam is charity. The prophet, peace be upon him, advised:

“Hasten good works before a calamity like a dark piece of night will befall you, when a man will get up a believer in the morning and retire in the evening as an unbeliever, or will retire as a believer and get up as an unbeliever: He will sell his religion for the goods of this world.” (Muslim)

He predicted that: “Time will become short, knowledge will decrease, tribulations will appear, stinginess will become common and turmoil will increase.” They asked, “what is the turmoil?” He said: (Indiscriminate) “Killing.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

Further: “By the One Who holds my life in His hand, the world will not come to end until mankind will witness a day where the murderer will not know why he has killed, and the murdered will not know why he was killed.” It was asked, how can that be? He said, (general) “Turmoil, and both the murderer and the murdered will end up in hellfire”. (Muslim)

“The hour shall not come to pass until you kill your leader and strike each other with your swords, and the worst amongst you will inherit your world.” (Tirmidhi)

Further traditions talk about the increase in earthquakes, the abundance of wealth at people’s disposal, until people will scoff at charity, the competition in erecting tall buildings, the wish of people passing by a grave, that they could be in the place of the dead (Bukhari and Muslim). There has certainly been no other human civilisation with such a high rate of suicides, and never before in human history has euthanasia been an acceptable proposal. Bleak times indeed, compounded by cosmic events. The last hour, the end of life on earth, will come suddenly, but before then, its inhabitants will witness the rising of the sun from the West, an event so dramatic that they will all turn to believe, but it will not benefit them anymore. The Qur’an equally describes the coming big crunch when the universe as we know it will be transformed:

“The day when We roll up the heavens like a scroll of writings. As We started creation, We shall bring it back. A promise upon Us which We will carry out.” (Surah 21, Al-Anbiya (the Prophets), verse 104)

or

“And when the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and the moon will be made to collide, on that day man will look for an escape, but there will be no safety.”

(Surah 75, Al-Qiyamah (the Rising), verse 8-11)

An Early-Warning System

However, besides pointing to the general destiny of all creation, there are more precise pointers to the course of events mankind will have to go through before all comes full circle. There have been numerous predictions about events which we now know have come true, like the Muslim conquest of Constantinople, for example, now known as Istanbul. The treachery played on the Muslims by the League of Nations and the destruction of the Islamic Khalifat are also alluded to. As it is always easier to be wise with hindsight, the linking up of prophecies with events which have already come to pass, whilst still fraught with problems of accurate interpretation, is much easier achieved than the mapping out of the future based on those warnings that we know have still been unfulfilled. The purpose of prophetic predictions is not to provide a looking glass into the future, but serves more like a map of reference points to help us make sense of events. Based on this understanding, we appear to have reached the age of the Dajjal, the great liar, the one-eyed king, the anti-Christ, of whom all prophets from the days of Noah (Nuh), peace be with them all, have warned their followers.

The Story of the Antichrist

Many Muslims end up confused with the folkloristic tale of a giant who travels at the speed of the clouds, the distance between his ears being 40 arm spans, the deep sea reaching only up to his ankle, in possession of a mountain of bread and rivers and working the most amazing miracles. Yet this is not a myth, this is an attempt to explain in the words of one-and-a-half millennia ago the wonders of modern technology: the travel at speed, the far-reaching ability to discover the most remote secrets of the land and the sea, the unlimited control over the resources of the whole world. These descriptions of the Dajjal depict the system which he has at his disposal. But there is also the Dajjal, the person, the final leader of the Roman (i.e. Western) One World Empire, a man of Jewish descent (described in the Hadith in the likeness of a Jew by name of Ibn Sayyad), with curly and coarse hair, a beak of a nose and biting teeth. He commands armies and desires total control, but he will not be invincible. The emergence of the Dajjal after fierce battles between the Muslims and the forces of the then ruler, as-Sufyani, a name with connotations of brutish force and destruction, indicates the transformation of the conflict from a political confrontation to a spiritual one. Therefore, whilst the greatly decimated Muslim forces will, under the leadership of the Mahdi, the guided one, eventually prevail against their enemies, it will take Jesus (Isa), the real Christ, peace be with him, to kill the Dajjal, the false Messiah. After his second coming he will establish a just rule for forty years.

A Matter of Faith

The story that unfolds from the various accounts of these confrontations, the Muslim version of Armageddon, fought out in and over Palestine, where the city of Megiddo gave the Christian Armageddon its name, is one of increased polarisation between the forces of belief and

disbelief, the religious and the secular, the Muslims and the post-Christian New Age. They will initially fight over mountains of black gold near the Euphrates, a reference to oil possibly, and a phase we have entered into since the beginnings of the gulf war in 1991. The Muslims will be disunited and weak, their enemies united and powerful. It will be a time when the word will be stronger than the sword, and most of the believers will also fall for the propaganda. The Dajjal will have with him a river and a fire. His river will be hell, his fire will be paradise. It will be more difficult to hold on to one's faith than to hold on to burning coal. But patience will pay off. People will eventually be divided into two camps: a camp of faith in which there will be no hypocrisy, and a camp of hypocrisy in which there will be no faith. (Abu Daud)

Then the small but purified army of believers will gather under a black banner from the East, and contingents from the West will join it. The Jews will draw together from all over the world in Palestine, the land of the Qarqad Tree, the only tree behind which they will find shelter. At the end of the long war with no more than one survivor amongst a hundred, the Muslims will gain victory on the battle field. Yet their time to rebuild will not have come yet, as the Dajjal will have appeared. Here we are given to understand that this is not just a battle between physical forces. It requires divine intervention. It cannot be won without true faith. For the Dajjal, the false Messiah, will lure everybody who listens to him by his magic. He will satisfy people's yearning for spirituality after they have lost their souls in material pursuits. The secular, united world will have a false, man-made religion which both stimulates them and keeps them controlled. There will be people who rebel against it, but they will not be able to extinguish the mass hypnosis of the cult. It will fire people on in their bestial fight against truth and religion until they will be so emboldened that they want to kill God. Whoever does not join the crowd will be excluded from all benefits and not even be allowed to eat. Yet in the face of the truth, confronted with the real Messiah, and only then, will it vanish in line with the verdict of the Qur'an:

“Say, truth has come and falsehood has vanished, for falsehood must vanish.”
(Surah 17, al-Isra (the Night Journey), verse 81).

A Time for Commitment

For Muslims, then, the turn of the millennium is a time to resolve to hold on to their faith whatever the challenges, to sit tight whatever the tribulations, to wait and pray for deliverance, and be steadfast and ready to fight when there is a need for it. It is also a call for unity to reverse the weakness brought upon them through their differences and neglect. For believers of other faiths, it may well be a time to realise that Islam alone has the determination and staying power to stem the tide against a further rise in secularism with its depersonalising greed for total control and inhumane destruction of all it cannot control. For those not fooled by the fake spirituality of new world order, those not engulfed by the empty promises of a new dawn of civilisation, there may remain only one option, difficult as it may seem at the moment: to join the camp of the believers at the risk of being ostracised by their own society. For there can be no real gain if you lose your soul, and only the truth can set us free.

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