

Western Muslims and the Future of Islam

Tariq Ramadan

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2004

7

SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

With the questions of social commitment and political participation, we embark in this chapter on some thinking that is central for at least two reasons. The first is that the treatment of these subjects in the West is beset by a number of recurrent confusions that result in a false representation as much of Islam as of the motivations of Western Muslims. The second is that the Islamic scriptural sources contain an extremely vigorous and demanding social message that inspires believers wherever they are on earth. It is therefore important to build our study on concrete realities, without forgetting the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna concerning these two areas of social commitment and political participation. However, presenting things in this way runs the risk of confirming in the minds of some observers and enquirers that Muslims, even in the West, merge the categories of the religious and the political, private and public, and that, in the last analysis, they have not understood and cannot adapt to the principle of separation between Church and State, which is the foundation of the constitutional framework of secularized societies. It is therefore necessary to begin by clarifying the terms of the argument before putting forward concrete suggestions.

Leaving Confusion Behind

The theoretical elements presented in part I will be a great help in clarifying our position regarding the idea that Islam maintains a confusion of categories when it comes to the religious, social, and political aspects of life. Two of the principles we have considered should be recalled here: (a) There is a difference in nature between the Islamic principles related to

religious ritual and those that concern the affairs of the world and society: the first are very detailed and precise, while the second are, with very rare exceptions, general and give guidance in a certain direction, rather than fixing a restricting framework; (b) The methodologies in these two areas are the complete opposites of each other: only the text is to be relied on for deciding what is allowed in terms of ritual practice, while the scope for reason and creativity is very wide when it comes to social affairs, which are limited only by the prohibitions found in the scriptural sources, and these are in fact not numerous. Having differentiated the principles and the methodologies, we may take a step toward clarification by stating that although, on the level of ritual, the Islamic message provides a clear, fixed, and, so to speak, unchangeable framework, it is not at all the same on the social and political level, where principles and an awareness of the prohibitions *inspire* the type of commitment that individuals make in these two areas. They must decide what this should be individually and independently, using their reason, their freedom, and, more broadly, their imagination. There is in fact no confusion between the restraining authority of the religious and the civic independence of the individual, between the realm of dogma and that of reason, between the private and the public. Contrary to the widely held idea, Muslims have no particular problem with the principle of distinguishing the various orders of things, even within their sources, because they find these distinctions articulated in the first works of categorization of orders carried out by the ulama as early as the eighth to ninth centuries. In the history of Christianity, arriving at this "distinction of orders" led to the necessary establishment of a clear "separation" between the two spheres of authority (Church and State). This structuring, and the use of space that it assumes, is very accessible to Muslims because it is close to their way of conceiving of the nature of their relationship with God and the modalities of their acting in the world.

What appears to differ, however, is that for Muslims the source of reference remains the same, even if it speaks differently to the heart and mind. With regard to the first, it recalls the dimension of one's dependence on God; with regard to the second, it sketches the paths to independence and freedom in relation to human beings. The original and natural principle of *distinction* in Islam has not had to go as far as separation, even divorce, as in the Christian era, in order to provide humankind with rational autonomy and the ability to confront the temporal evolution of societies. So Muslims continue to find in their scriptural sources principles that inspire their social and political commitment without ever imposing a definitive model, a timeless code, or, more broadly, a dogma for action. In fact, these principles form the body of an ethic that their constantly active reason must seek to respect as much as possible. On thinking about it, we realize that this approach, apparently particular to Muslims, is in

fact not so: many Christians, Jews, Buddhists, agnostics, and atheists are inspired in their social and political commitments by their religious, humanist, and ethical convictions and try to act in a coherent manner. They may quote their sources less often, or less directly, than Muslims, but they are perhaps inspired by them just as much.

The difficulties Muslims encounter in social debates in the West arise most with people who confuse "separation" and "conflict" or "mutual rejection" and project onto the secular space a militant ideology opposed to any form of religious expression. There really is a great difference between the normative constitutional order of laicity, or secularism, and the very tendentious and ideologically oriented reading of it that certain radicals, even extremists, would like to impose.¹ To them, in order to be completely "integrated," people should not express their faith at all and should become religiously invisible: any reference to Islam should completely disappear from the public arena, "Islamic" associations should not be so called,² and essentially the exercise of one's citizenship should never be inspired by religious convictions. Those who hold these extreme views justify them on the basis of fear of creating religious ghettos, sectarianism, and the possible return of religious conflicts to the West. These fears are understandable, but we have the right to question the proposed remedies: Western societies have so changed and become so unhomogeneous that wiping out all allegiances in the name of national unity is a measure that maintains only a pretense or hangs on an illusion. Moreover, the feeling of belonging to a community of faith, for example, is not necessarily a withdrawal or an intellectual and/or ethnic isolation and, on the contrary, depending on how it is conceived, may produce extra spiritual energy available to the society as a whole. This is what we will try to demonstrate in what follows. It should provide some answers for those who maintain and nourish distrust of the real intentions of Muslims, which they think are hidden behind deceitful double talk.³

The second confusion that must be removed is directly connected with this discussion. It exists as much among Muslims as among their fellow-citizens and concerns the understanding of what Muslims mean by "the community of faith." The overall consideration we gave in part I to the principle of loyalty is needed here to distinguish among the various kinds of belonging and the way in which they are structured. Without repeating the whole idea, let us remember that the community of faith imprints the heart of believers with the collective dimension of their belonging with regard to spirituality, practice, and solidarity; it does not justify taking up a passionate, chauvinistic, or blind stance. Higher ethical principles should inspire the behavior of individuals, sometimes even against their own co-religionists if they are untruthful, treacherous, unjust, or oppressive. Spiritual community is an allegiance to a body of principles and a morality,

not to a community united by blood or self-interest. One gets involved in politics not in the name of "my people" but before God and in conscience, in the name of inalienable principles. As a result, the community of faith is essentially opposed to any form of communitarianism.

Something must also be said about a confusion that is in its nature clearly sociological but that often arises in discussion about Islam and causes a disturbance in the debate concerning Muslims in the West. This debate often focuses on a mixture of vague considerations related to the problems of immigration, marginalization, violence, and drugs. First of all, the question of Islam has nothing to do with immigration as such, and many Muslims are now American or European citizens: Islam is a Western religion in the full sense of the word. If these social problems do touch many Muslims, this is obviously not intrinsically because of their religious allegiance. It is a matter of urgency to establish a clear distinction between the nature of the problems, their causes, and their consequences in order not to fuel the simplistic equations: Muslim = immigrant = violence. What should be called into question are the immigration policies of Western countries and their social and urban policies, which have catastrophic effects, spreading very negative images of the Other and giving rise to vexatious, discriminatory, and unjust administrative measures.

These are complex problems, and there are many areas of overlap. They should therefore be dealt with as clearly as possible, and we should work toward reform not as "Muslims" but as citizens, inspired of course by a message and a morality, but above all aware of our responsibilities and determined that the right of every person to be treated justly and fairly (as the common law guarantees) should prevail. Partners are needed in this venture and should become more and more numerous. After all, this will be the best proof that the caricatures lie and that Muslim citizens are today among the men and women who are working against social breakdown and violence. As for those among them who are victims, like all other victims, they suffer the consequences of deficient social policies that become increasingly tight and restrictive the more they refuse to act against the causes of injustice.

The Social Message of Islam

Before thinking further about Muslim social commitment, we should set out the three great principles from which they may draw the inspiration to live in accordance with their convictions. I think the meaning of this "inspiration" is clear enough: it shows the way, but says nothing about the choices, strategies, and priorities to be applied to social action in a given society. It is for the citizens, in the midst of their own realities, to

make their choices, work out the stages, and propose realistic and reasonable reforms in each of the societies in which they live.

If there is one area where a basic respect for the universal principles of Islam requires vigilance at every moment, it is the social sphere. At every level, that of religious ritual (*al-ibadat*) and also the broader plane of daily life, Islam is the bearer of a teaching entirely directed toward the collective and social dimension, to the extent that one could say that there is no true religious practice without a personal investment in the human community; the serenity of our solitude before the Creator can exist only if it is nourished daily by our relations with our fellows. So we understand that if each individual bears a responsibility before God, there is, by extension, a vital requirement addressed to the group, or rather to society, at the heart of which the destiny of each person's destiny is decided. It is therefore necessary that people be offered the conditions that will best allow them to respond to their spiritual, moral, and human aspirations. In part I we recalled that humans are above all *responsible* beings—before God, but also before human beings and among their fellows. All human beings must seek to live and to nourish and give meaning to what constitutes their humanity: to acquire knowledge in order to draw closer to the truth; to express their values forcefully in order to achieve good; to listen and participate in order better to respect themselves and to be respected. The Prophet's call to seek for knowledge ("The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman"); the Qur'anic requirement to work for good both for oneself and for society ("You command good and forbid evil"); and finally the numerous commandments to observe moderation in all aspects of life, and gentleness, that are found in the Qur'an and the Sunna ("Speak to them in the best way," "Do not forget to observe generosity, kindness, and gentleness toward each other") all point clearly in this direction. So it is impossible to think about a society without beginning with individuals, who must take upon themselves the effort to reform their being. This is the meaning of the much-repeated verse "God does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change that which is in their inner selves."⁴

The transition from the singular "people" to the plural "individuals" who constitute the people happens without any hesitation in the sense of the injunction. The social dimension finds direction at the spring of the consciousness of each individual who is alone yet strengthened through the effort of the collective. For those who have faith, this understanding is brought about through a constant concern for balance: "Seek instead, by means of what God has granted thee, [the good of] the life to come, without forgetting, withal, thine own [rightful] share in this world, and do good [unto others] as God has done good unto thee; and seek not to spread

corruption on earth: for, verily, God does not love the spreaders of corruption!"⁵

So society should allow all persons not to neglect their "rightful portion in the life of this world." Human needs echo the words: society must think of itself as a function of individuals and should provide for them the opportunity to meet fully the needs of their humanity. For their part, as we have said, individuals should know and accept their responsibilities. At the heart of the message of Islam, there is no part of Muslim ritual, from prayer to the pilgrimage to Mecca, that does not emphasize—even prioritize—the collective dimension. To practice one's religion is to participate in the social endeavor, and so there can be no religious consciousness without a social ethic. The first inspires and directs the second. This concept certainly shapes the mind of Muslims in the West. Being responsible before God for one's own person and to respect creation as a whole, one should offer to all people on the social level the means to fulfill their responsibilities and to protect their rights. So the social message of Islam is born in all people's consciousness of their obligations to make it possible on the collective level to organize structurally the protection of the rights of all. Without going into an exhaustive analysis of each of these rights, we may here point to seven for which respect is essential:

1. *The right to life and the minimum necessary to sustain it.* In part I, we have referred to five principles around which all the Islamic injunctions revolve, and it is clear that the first condition needed for them to be applied is respect for life. Every being must have the right, in any society, to the minimum amount of food necessary to live. And we are speaking of *living*, not *surviving*. All the Islamic sources call human beings in general and Muslims in particular to *live* like human beings, in dignity and respect for themselves and for others. A social organization that does not provide its members with this minimum undermines their integrity as created beings who have to give account of themselves before the Creator. To be by nature responsible means that one should have the means by which to carry out the responsibility one bears; otherwise, the innocent become "guilty" and we are blaming the victim. The situation of those from the Fourth World (the poor) in Western societies, following the example of the millions of Americans and Europeans who live below the poverty line, are like permanent tribunals condemning systems guilty of sacrificing lives and human consciences.
2. *The right to family.* Each person has the right to enjoy a family life, and so society, through responsible policies, should make it possible for all people to live with their families in a healthy environment that includes: (1) psychological preparation to assume the responsibility

- (e.g., opportunities to meet a suitable spouse, premarital counseling, a support system, role models), (2) caring for children (their physical/mental well-being), and (3) ways to preserve the family during turmoil. The right to family is inseparable from the right to housing, the right to work, and the right to education. We complain about parents who do not know how to bring up their children, who, as we say, "give up on it," when they have not been given the means to live and simply be recognized as a mother or father.
3. *The right to housing.* This right follows directly from the one before. Housing is the first prerequisite for family life, and Islam insists heavily on the sanctity of private space. A society should provide each of its members with a roof; it is a prime responsibility. It is essential to think of adequate local structures: living five or eight to a room is not establishing a household—it is constructing a prison, arranging a suffocation, creating future ruptures and tomorrows full of isolation and marginalization. The state in which suburbs, cities, and inner cities are kept or rather abandoned is truly unacceptable. A man without a home is not a citizen; he is an outcast and a victim. Speeches change nothing. To deprive people of the conditions necessary for their humanity and then make them pay for their vagrancy is doubly unjust. To be before God requires that one be *in oneself, at home*, literally as well as figuratively.
 4. *The right to education.* Strong emphasis must be laid on this point, particularly in our time. To be able to read and write, and to find through education the ways to identity and human dignity, is essential. To be Muslim is clearly "to know" and then right away, almost naturally, to make one's way toward greater knowledge. The Qur'an could not be more explicit about this: to know is to gain access to the reading of the signs and to a greater knowledge of the Creator, as we have said in part I. This is what the Prophet continually affirmed: "The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman." This means all fields of knowledge, and so it goes without saying that education and basic instruction are imperative. The first verse of the Qur'an to be revealed is "Read, in the name of your Lord who created." This is what is specific to humankind to the extent that it gives people preeminence over the angels in the roll call of creation. A society that does not meet this right has lost its sense of priorities; to put it more clearly, a society that produces illiteracy, whether absolute or functional, scorns the dignity of its members and is fundamentally *inhuman*. A Muslim in the West cannot help being conscious of the dysfunctionality of an education system that, while being increasingly selective, produces throughout the West more and more functionally illiterate people.
 5. *The right to work.* People must be able to provide for their needs. For this reason, work, like education, is one of the inalienable rights of a social being, and all people should be able to find their place in the

society in which they live. According to Islam, humans are by virtue of their action and work. It is clear, then, that a society that prevents people from working is one that does not respond to the elementary social contract. We know the saying of the Prophet: "It is better for one of you to take his ropes, go to the mountain and carry a bundle of fire wood on his back and then sell it, than to beg of people, who will either give him or deny him charity!"⁶ Work is a sacred command that goes beyond cultural custom; but it appears to be a burdensome duty. The struggle against all kinds of unemployment should be a political priority. It is imperative; it is humane.

6. *The right to justice.* Justice is the foundation of life in society after being, in Islam, the strongest determinant for courses of action: "Certainly, God commands justice,"⁷ we read in the Qur'an. This principle of justice applies to all—rich and poor, presidents and populace, Muslims and non-Muslims. Eight verses of *Surat al-Nisa* (Women) were revealed to exonerate a Jew and cast the responsibility for the event on a Muslim. The verse that associates bearing witness to the faith with doing justice makes the idea explicit: "O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned is rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desire, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort [the truth], behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do!"⁸ It is essential that the social structure guarantee respect for the rights of each person, and this must be expressed in two ways: obviously, judicial power must apply the laws fairly to every member of society, but it is equally important that society stretch itself to meet all the organizational requirements necessary for the provision of the rights we have already mentioned. Thinking of social justice means deciding on a project, setting priorities, and building a dynamic that will guide social, political, and economic action on the basis of fundamental principles. A poor man in the West does not benefit from the same justice as a rich man; a black man in the United States is found guilty much more quickly than a white man—and this is not acceptable.
7. *The right to solidarity.* One cannot have a sense of the Islamic *religious* world without directly encountering a concept that makes the duty of solidarity central to a living expression of the faith. To be before God is to be in solidarity. The third pillar of Islam, the purifying social tax (*zakat*), is situated at the center of the vertical and horizontal axes of religious and social practice: one's *duty* before God is to respond to the *right* of human beings. The Qur'an is clear in referring to sincere believers: "And [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] or such as might suffer privation."⁹ The Qur'anic injunction resounds forcefully: "You will not

attain piety until you expend of what you love."¹⁰ It is the responsibility of each person to participate actively in the life of society. The obligation to give *zakat* is only one aspect of a much wider conception of social solidarity. Commitment on the personal and family level, which seems to be self-generating, should be accompanied by attention to one's neighbors, the life of the community, and national and international concerns. Of course, Islam has thought of an institutionalized way to fight poverty (through *zakat*), but it is apparent that the solution is not to be found primarily in structures: it is a matter of awareness and morality. The strength of this awareness of human fraternity and solidarity is the living source of the struggle against social injustice, poverty, and misery. Whoever is a bearer of faith bears the duty to undertake this commitment; whoever is a bearer of faith knows the right to claim it.

The various rights referred to do not cover all the factors involved in the individual and social arenas, but they give a clear enough idea of the basic directions that social action should take. At the source and heart of our reflection, we find, with the knowledge of the creator God, some ultimate considerations all of which center on the notion of justice. The "way of faithfulness" on the social level is a path that should take us daily a little closer to the ideal of justice, which is essential and foremost, and the whole of human activity, in all its parts, must hold to it steadfastly. To achieve this, it is best to analyze situations one by one and not to apply absolute rules; for the context can make the most legitimate or the most logical law unjust or feeble so that it betrays in fact what it meant in spirit to defend.

The Sense of a Presence

The general presentation in part I, together with the social message of Islam, provides the framework and direction that should inspire the commitment of Muslim citizens in the West. Here we shall put forward five points that should take priority in our consideration so that the way can be opened up for relevant and coherent thinking and action on the social level: the idea of moral responsibility, defense of rights, solidarity, partnerships, and, finally, common projects.

Moral Responsibility

Muslims who want to remain faithful to their Islamic terms of reference and who, as members of Western societies, are set completely apart, are called to develop civic awareness founded on their sense of moral responsibility. The "way of faithfulness," in the sense we have given to the concept

of *Sharia*, clearly establishes ideals that must be aimed at and that are universal, as we have just seen in the presentation of the social message of Islam. Social commitment is a moral commandment, and reform is an obligation of conscience that, in the mind of the Muslim citizen, determines a "moral responsibility." It is important to state here that, when we refer to the "social" we begin not by formulating a list of rights but by describing a state of mind formed by a *sense of responsibility*. As we have said, the whole of Islamic teaching is based on this order of priorities: an awareness of responsibility by each person is the only way to protect the rights of all.

So, the first stone in the edifice of social action is laid at the individual level. The way one lives, consumes, spends, treats one's neighbors, votes or not, and serves one's fellows is within the order of social action. Many citizens are surprised to see the energy put into Islamic associations by their members, and their concern to commit themselves, to serve, to "promote what is good" and "reform what is bad" and to labor for justice and solidarity. They are particularly surprised to see them encouraging their coreligionists to vote because it is a "duty," which is something that has appeared in print in leaflets and brochures produced by Muslim associations in Britain, France, and the United States. Some see this as a disguised form of proselytism, others as an unfortunate confusion between religion and politics, and yet others as the promotion of an ethnic approach to politics. Even if some association, or some of its members, may actually show signs of these dangerous attitudes, the reasons for this movement should be perceived differently and at a deeper level: Muslim morality is entirely based on awareness of one's responsibility before the Creator and among humankind. To be with the One is to serve one's fellows. In the Muslim mind, this is the root of the idea that Muslims have a mission of social reform to accomplish, wherever they are, in their society, with their fellow-citizens. There is a great difference between social mission and missionary activity that seeks to make converts: the first is a human obligation, but the second (converting people) is the province of God, who alone holds the key to people's hearts.¹¹

Rights

This intellectual position, beginning with oneself and one's responsibilities, should immediately commit the Muslim citizen to promoting respect for the rights of every person in Western societies. If we count the dysfunctions occurring in our societies in terms of unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, violence, racism, and xenophobia, we might well wonder how a conscience informed by a sense of moral responsibility can remain passive. This is a matter of claiming rights in the name of Right: many

Muslims passively submit to harassment, racist remarks, and discrimination that are unacceptable. All people, as citizens, are responsible for claiming their rights and gaining respect. Society does not hand out rights as one offers privileges: they are a matter of law, respect, even compulsion. Standing between the bureaucracy that does not do its work, officials who allow themselves to make unwarranted insinuations, police officers who are rough and impolite, and those who suffer this treatment, there is the law, and it is sometimes right to fight for it to be respected. In all circumstances it is right to resist the victim mentality by refusing to sink into emotional complaining that brings isolation or a blind rebellion that brings exclusion.

This must be done for oneself, as well as for others. Associations such as CAIR (the Council of American Islamic Relations) in the United States and Canada and FAIR (Forum against Islamophobia and Racism) in Britain have emerged that defend the rights of Muslim citizens (by fighting against all kinds of discrimination) because they are often silent if not consenting victims and many of them do not know what action to take. These are important developments: the Anglo-Saxon system naturally supports this kind of community defense, but it is still necessary to resist the temptation to shut oneself away in a minority enclave that may give the sense that "one's community" is against the system. It is for this reason that it is urgent to create partnerships with other organizations that work more widely in the same areas so that a plural front can be established against injustice, discrimination, and xenophobia in the name of all citizens without differentiation. We shall return to this later.

On a broader scale, commitment to the rights of the most disadvantaged social classes and the social spaces that have been left out of the economic prosperity in Western societies must also not be neglected. Within the community, this will be a good way of re-establishing links between affluent Muslims and those who have been left out of the general prosperity. This refers not to a merely "charitable" solidarity (we shall come to this in the next section) but rather to the development of a dynamic of resistance so that legitimate social and economic rights can be claimed. Although associations of this type have been created in the United States and in France, we are clearly taking only the first, faltering steps toward this essential commitment. The social commitment of Muslims should not be restricted to a patronizing and good-natured solidarity. If Western societies are our societies—and they are—and if glaring injustices are visible and sometimes institutionalized, then we must say so and reject them and fight, with all the others who are fighting, to demand our rights, and not simply hope for kindness or say compassion.

Solidarity

This does not mean that all activities expressing solidarity should come to an end. On the contrary. Our thought is that they are insufficient, not that they are useless. Over the past two decades, acts of solidarity have multiplied in Western Muslim communities. After being at first expressions of solidarity only with Muslims, they have little by little extended to all groups in society. The "couscous de l'amitié" in France and the food provided on university campuses during Ramadan (in the United States and some European countries) to vulnerable people (e.g., the unemployed, the homeless) are examples of this. These actions have not always been welcomed as they should be by local political authorities and the media, who are often suspicious that there may be hidden motives (proselytism, fundamentalism), but they have nevertheless developed in the Muslim consciousness a sense of being at home in the West and of serving society. They have also given an opportunity for some citizens to come into contact with Muslims in a different way and to become aware of some of the social values of their religion.

From a more long-term perspective, we must point out the work carried out by some Muslim groups in deprived areas and in prisons. Although generally directed toward the Muslim community, these activities have sometimes touched non-Muslim citizens, too. It is a matter of improving the quality of life, fighting against drugs, violence, marginalization, and illiteracy. The work carried out by Afro-Americans in this area is exemplary: the struggle against violence, drugs, and illiteracy has been effective in many parts of the country, and the commitment of the imam Siraj Wahhaj in the area around his Al-Taqwa Mosque in Brooklyn has been well known for years. This initiative from within has become more visible as more and more Muslim citizens have chosen to become social activists and to get involved in working alongside young people in deprived areas. But separation between the affluent and the poor is, nevertheless, the rule, and the social commitment of the former is starkly inadequate compared with the needs of the latter. On a broader front, a commitment to solidarity toward the whole of society, with non-Muslim partners, remains an exception in the United States and Europe, for two reasons: such activities are often, as we have said, misinterpreted, and the possibility of working openly with non-Muslims remains something of which only a minority are aware.

Partnerships

If we are to try to be faithful to the message and act in harmony with the direction it gives, we must take the process of putting down roots to its

conclusion in order to serve "all humankind" and to know better those with whom we are living. If the nations and tribes were first constituted, as the Qur'an says, in order that people should seek to know one another better, it seems evident that the people who make up one society should acquire an even deeper mutual knowledge. Moreover, if the message of Islam is really universal, many of the values it promotes should inevitably be accessible to and shared by human beings of other traditions who live with other convictions. On the level of values, of morality, of the demand for social justice and resistance to discrimination of all kinds, Muslim citizens find a great number of potential partners in all Western societies. After all, their values are shared by the vast *majority* of the population, even if committed Muslims find themselves engaged on the ground with only the small, actively resistant *minority*. It is because of this, and because of the clearly understood sense of the universality of the values to which they subscribe, that Muslims should, as we have said, avoid the trap of the minority temptation. Establishing partnerships at the local level is the best way of allowing this transformation of their state of mind to take place.

These actions must be considered at several levels: the promotion of an ethic of responsibility can take place with partners of other religions, ecological groups (as in France, Belgium, and Switzerland), alternative movements, and so on. Commitment to respect for human rights is already expressed through innumerable bodies with which Muslim citizens in all the Western countries are too little in contact. Fear, and sometimes mutual suspicion, has long prevented the formation of links with bodies such as the League of Human Rights, ATTAC, Globalize Resistance, and the alternative banks, but things evolve, and Muslim associations are increasingly establishing connections beyond "the community." Groups of associations, such as "Divers-Cité" in the Lyon region (and other towns in France, such as Maintes-la-Jolie and Roubaix) and local partnerships in some cities in the United States (such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles) and in Canada (Toronto, Ottawa) show that the process is slowly moving forward and that new and essential perspectives are opening up with regard to the settlement of Muslims in their society. The creation of multi-dimensional partnerships is one of the keys to the future: not only will it confirm to Muslims that their values are shared, but it will make it possible for their fellow-citizens better to gauge how and why the presence of Muslims in the West, with the vitality of their organizations and their convictions regarding social mission, is a source of enrichment for the society they share in common.

The World of Associations

In the course of their settlement in the West, Muslims have passed through several stages in the creation of associations. In the first period, it was a question of gathering together either on the basis of a common origin (by creating organizations for people coming from the same country) or, more often, with the aim of carrying out a project such as the establishment of a mosque. These were the two axes that most attracted new arrivals. Slowly, new kinds of structures came into being, more oriented toward education, social work, and more specialized activities (e.g., for young people, students, women) or toward Muslim representation at local and national levels. It is organizations of this type that characterize the general landscape of Muslim communities today both in Europe and in the United States. They are all the fruit of the initiatives of Muslims who wanted to become involved in one field or another, and all refer in their titles to the "Islamic" character of their approach. They have become part of the national picture of voluntary associations in practically all Western countries, even those where the Muslim presence is a recent phenomenon and even if there is sometimes no structure of representation at the national level. The number of such Muslim associations has multiplied exponentially in the past few years.

These organizations are essential, and they must remain present and active in Western countries because they help to normalize the presence of Muslims in the West. However, it is important, at least in those countries where the Muslim presence is the most long-standing, to consider embarking on a new phase in the type of organizations invented and founded by Western Muslims. This *third stage* of associational structures for Muslims should make it possible for them to create new organizations that, while complementing what is already being done in the field, will be set up around shared values, social projects, and causes and will not be based simply on the Muslim identity of its founders. These will not be partnerships with other associations but, taking one step further, will represent shared commitments within one association. If necessary, new structures could be created, or they could quite simply be integrated into existing organizations (as numerous Muslims have already done in the United States and Europe): the important thing is to establish places of real encounter, dialogue, and commitment "together" in the name of values held in common by virtue of sharing a citizenship lived in an egalitarian fashion. This type of involvement is more complex on the ethical level because, in a situation where we are not "among our own," we must sometimes face situations or behavior that are not in harmony with our values or codes of conduct. By making time for dialogue and explanation, by defining clearly the boundaries of commitment, it is possible to find areas of agree-

ment. It takes time: creating an atmosphere of trust and respect requires that we talk to each other, listen to each other, and do not refuse to respond to any question, provided it is asked with respect and with the intention of seeking understanding. This is what is lacking these days between Muslims and their fellow-citizens—joint meetings; frank, deep, and sincere discussion; and partnerships that alone can build the mutual trust that is so wanting. This third age of associational structures should make it possible for Muslims to achieve part of this objective, which, beyond its practical results, reminds us that we have numerous values in common that invite us to enter into commitments side by side.

Many Muslims, still unsure of their identity and of what people think of them, are afraid of going too far in this direction. And we are still far from reaching this point in many European countries, but in the end this is the direction in which the Islamic association landscape in the West is bound to evolve—Muslim citizens distributed among cultural networks, working in specialized “Islamic associations,” and ultimately participating in bodies that unite those with pluralistic beliefs and common values. In the end, this is the universal dimension of Islam, integrating pluralism and human diversity and inviting everyone in the sense suggested by the saying: *Know who you are and commit yourself with the Other for dignity, justice, and peace, for the Other as well as for yourself.*

The Basics of Political Involvement

There have been numerous and lively debates among the ulama and among Muslims more generally on the question of whether it is possible for them to participate in the political life of their countries in Europe or the United States. On the basis of both general principles declared by the Islamic sources and the works of the classical scholars, some have replied in the negative and others in the positive. Most of the thinking of the ulama throughout history has been about situations in which Muslims were in the majority, with a legal system inspired more or less by their own sources. The minority position is not new (e.g., in India and Africa), and many scholars have given attention to the question, but what is new is the nature of the societies that are receiving Muslims today (democratic, secularized societies based on law) and that give them a status as citizens, which entails extensive prerogatives and requires a serious reflection on the implications of that status in the light of the Islamic sources.

Some ulama and thinkers from the traditionalist and literalist schools of thought¹² refuse any kind of contextualized approach on the basis that the Islamic principles are not open to interpretation and can be summa-

rized in five main points: (1) There are no "elections" in Islam (it is not a Qur'anic term, and the relation between the individual and the political leader is a contract of allegiance [*baya*]); (2) One may not desire [political] office, on the basis of the Prophetic tradition (among others) "We do not give (political) authority to those who ask for it or ardently desire it"; (3) A Muslim can give allegiance only to a Muslim and must otherwise abstain from all political involvement; (4) A Muslim must respect the political authority exercised by a Muslim, even if it is not ideal, on the basis of the Qur'anic verse that commands Muslims to obey God, his Prophet, and "those who exercise (political) authority"; (5) The democratic system (not a Qur'anic concept) does not respect Islamic criteria (the criteria of *shura*¹³), and a Muslim in the United States or Europe, outside his natural home (*dar al-islam*), must distance himself from any support for a system opposed to Islamic values.

We can see how completely restrictive and out of context this approach is. Trends of thought present in the West and strongly supported by the petromonarchies (particularly Saudi Arabia) sustain these theses and pressure young people to cut themselves off from all relations with their social and political environment in order to observe a ritualistic and very literalist practice. Other scholars have considered the question from the point of view of exceptional situation (*hala istithnaiyya*), necessity (*darura*), or need (*haja*): in their view, the basic rules are known but need to be reconsidered in light of the actual situation (*al-waqi*). This means engaging in *ijtihad* to make it possible to draw a broad outline for Muslim involvement in Western societies, and, if necessary, issuing circumstantial *fatwas*. All the responses put forward by reformist scholars are aimed at encouraging Muslims to participate in the political life of their countries, but with a greater or lesser degree of reservation with regard to the way the Islamic frame of reference should be defined. As far as almost all the ulama are concerned, reading between the lines of their constant reference to "necessity" or "need," one feels that they have not completely come to terms with and assimilated the idea that Muslims are at home and must live with this reality and find responses that are not responses to *exceptional* circumstances.

It must be noted here that there is today in the practice of *fiqh* (law and jurisprudence) and among the most reformist scholars a tendency to make constant, and in my view abusive, use of the concepts of *exception*, *need*, and *necessity*. If, in the first instance, this approach allows for the declaration of new *fatawa* (plural of *fatwa*) that offer Muslims the possibility of living better tuned in to their time, it is appropriate to study the logic that underpins this development and the consequences that may ensue. In practice, scholars observe the situation in societies in light of an ideal Islamic order (and principles related to it) and pronounce legal opinions

that allow the closest possible adherence to these principles in given situations or the choice of the least evil option. To perpetuate and encourage without reservation this kind of approach, which is necessary at first, nevertheless produces two unfortunate and serious consequences: far from the ideal, law and jurisprudence are thought of in terms of temporal or partial adaptations to a global system to which one feels in permanent subjection; by approaching Western societies through concepts of exception or constraint, individuals are given the means to survive in the global system and thereby affirm it but not to participate in its reform. By avoiding the contradictions of daily life in this way, this development fuels another difficulty that is clearly more fundamental, which lies in the feeling that this work of adaptation (this *ijtihad*) ends up by giving in to a world political and economic order that our conscience is actually calling us to transform. In this way, the sense that we are constantly in a sort of legal patchwork because we are in situations of necessity (*darura*) or need (*haja*) has the perverse effect of teaching us to learn to protect ourselves without giving us the means to work out a global strategy for resistance and alternative solutions. Here Muslims seem to be stalled: their concern to veer as little as possible from the "path to the spring" seems to deprive them of the means of building a global vision of that "way to justice" that rejects injustice and is not content simply to compromise with reality. So, even though this work of adaptation is necessary, it is appropriate to think of the forms it should take. To think and to assess the reality on the scale of a supposed "ideal of society" may provide points of reference in the elaboration of legal opinions, but, as we have said, this is in fact paralyzing. It would be better, in my view, in the political and economic fields,¹⁴ to go back to the universal and global principles of the message of Islam (rather than to the ideal models that have developed from them¹⁵) in order to be able to consider both the normality of one's "life here" and the ways in which one might make a global commitment for the sake of justice and goodness. The liberating dimension of Islam insistently demands, on the basis of the universal principles, that reality be challenged in order that it be reformed, not that its deficiencies be added up in the hope that we may at best adapt to them or at worst successfully protect ourselves from them. It is a question of going much further than simply changing our way of approaching *ijtihad* or juridical adaptation. It is about getting out of the logic of *exception* and *necessity* and thinking of our presence in terms of *faithfulness to principles in the strict sense*. In practice, it is a question of acquiring means of adaptation that will enliven people's minds and give them the tools with which to resist and reform rather than those that make it possible to survive, protect oneself, and ultimately act politically only in the name of the interests of "the Muslim minority community." If badly handled, reformist religious thought may produce a dangerously re-

actionary and conservative intellectual and political attitude: the evidence already gives reason to fear the worst among Western Muslims.

This reflection, which has taken us a little away from the question without completely straying from the subject, finds its place here because it influences the way we tackle the political issue, and also, in the next chapter, the economic issue. The paradigm on the basis of which links are made between Islamic principles and reality (particularly the Western reality) has, as we shall see, important consequences for Muslim involvement. As we have said, we are here very clearly facing a contextual situation vastly different from that which inspired classical Islamic thought up to the twentieth century, that it requires a rereading of the Texts and the relativization of the works of the scholars. Let us try, using the general principles discussed in part I and the tools supplied by the work of the jurists, to fix a framework of reference for political involvement and the criteria for its application.

The Framework of Reference

We have seen that the universal message of Islam directed human intelligence toward the quest for justice and provided the faithful with an ethical teaching so that they could follow the "way of faithfulness" (*al-Sharia*). In new situations, not envisaged by the sources, the establishment of a political strategy has been defined by some ulama in the course of history as arising from *al-siyasa al-shariyya* or from *fiqh al-muwazanat*; the first concept refers to the elaboration of political reflection faithful to the general requirements of Islam, while the second relies on studying and weighing the options on the basis of their faithfulness to the sources, their adaptability to the situation, and so on. If we look at them more closely, we can see that both approaches are directly linked to the study of the common good (*al-maslaha*), which we have already considered. When the sources are silent on a specific issue (*maslaha mursala*), it is for the experts to study the details of the situation in order to make a statement of legal opinions that must both respect the objective of the message (and of justice) and be faithful to its ethical content (to achieve the common good—*tahqiq al-masalih*—and resist all that may oppose it (*daf al-madar*). All the revealed Islamic teachings have been understood as possessing this double quality, and there is a well-known scholarly formula: "*Maqasid al-ahkam masali al-anam*" (the objective of the Islamic legal rulings is the well-being—the common interest—of human beings). So this is the spirit in which our thinking should be pursued.

Scholars of the fundamental principles of law and jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) have added a second fundamental recommendation: in real situations, as opposed to the ideal model, one must strive when making choices

to give preference to the better of two goods, or, in difficult circumstances, to the lesser of two evils. The measure of which is the better of two goods or the lesser of two evils is established on the basis of the moral teaching of Islam, which should inspire scholars in the formulation of directives as it inspires citizens or politicians in the framework of their actions. And, beyond this, the causes and conditions that could bring moral improvement or degeneration to concrete situations should be considered. We find in the works of specialists in the foundations of law and jurisprudence a series of rules that stress not the character of the action itself but the objective conditions that lead to it or encourage it and that therefore themselves take on the same positive or negative moral quality (*al-dharai*).

Finally, it must be added that a specific legal injunction may also be utilized to preserve the general public interest, and one must be careful not to rush to judgment, as some literalists do, if the injunction or action appears at first glance to contradict an explicit text. In the area of social affairs in the broad sense, as in virtually all matters of religious ritual, faithfulness to the principles is measured not by equating the literal meaning of a text with the apparent meaning of a given action, but, more subtly, on the basis of its intention (*qasd*) and the means it employs (*wasail*), keeping the comprehensive message in mind. So, taking into account the ultimate objective of an action in light of the general message requires that we go beyond a restrictive interpretation based on literal faithfulness to a text with no consideration to the context and with no sense of priorities. It is incontestable that we should refer to ethics, but that makes sense only if we also apply an active intelligence well versed in the affairs of the world and capable of understanding the situation, judging the extent to which the action is to be measured on the scale of moral faithfulness, setting priorities, and establishing the objectives of the action according to the ultimate aims of the message. All these considerations are implicit in the scholastic formula "*al-umur bi-maqasidiha*" (matters are to be judged by their final objectives), which informs us that we must be aware of our responsibility to know the objectives of the message to which we are committed in order to set the direction for our lives and, in light of moral teaching, choose actions and methods that are in harmony with our conscience.

Western Muslims can profit from these overall theoretical and specialized considerations. Bearing in mind the general message and its ethic, which directs their conscience, wherever they are, to defend justice, promote the good, and reform their society, Muslims have a duty to make an appropriate study of their society in order to determine the features of the common good (*al-maslaha*), the main achievements to be preserved, the injustices to be fought as a priority, and the means at their disposal and, at the same time, to identify the actors and the key points in the social

and political dynamics of their society. It is then a matter of applying concretely the body of directions put forward by scholars: to work for justice and against every form of injustice, to choose the best possible of the good things available and the least evil, and never to forget ethics when evaluating the causes, consequences, and means of carrying out an action and in all circumstances to evaluate the ultimate purpose of one's deeds.

Even if the legal instruments we have used to present this frame of reference are the same as those used by the Muslim jurists in ancient or recent times, the way things are presented here is quite different: we want to read the reality of the world from the starting point of the requirements of the universal message of Islam, with the idea not that, in case of difficulty, under domination or in minority, we have to compromise (though it goes without saying that this is sometimes necessary) but that it is necessary in all circumstances to understand, master, choose, and reform. This is not simply a difference of style.

This critical effort to understand the scriptural sources and the world, this *ijtihad*, cannot be the work only of the ulama and of specialists in law and jurisprudence. The world has become too complex, in every area, for us to be satisfied with theoretical studies "outside real life." It is time to promote councils that would bring together on an equal footing ulama and experts from various fields (the human sciences as well as the natural sciences) to make it possible to formulate legal positions in step with our time. On the level of political involvement, on the basis of the general [Islamic] principles, it is for the Muslim communities in each country to open up an internal debate bringing together ulama, intellectuals, associational bodies, and [ordinary] citizens in order better to study their political environment, taking their Islamic frame of reference as the starting point and then, as appropriate, deciding on one or more general and/or specific strategies that make it possible to be faithful to both the essential principles and ethics. We are here in the realm of social and political action, and each organization, even each individual, can, while respecting the common Islamic frame of reference (if one feels connected with it), freely determine its priorities and civic and political choices. It is not for the community of faith to come up with a uniform communal political commitment.¹⁶

Conditions

Most contemporary reformist scholars hold the view that political involvement is legitimate, and even a duty, for Muslims in the West. In addition to the fact that they all refer to the exceptional situation (of Muslims being outside a Muslim majority society), their conclusions all point in the same direction: it is necessary to be socially and politically active in the West by trying to bear witness to one's spirituality and, essentially, by adapting

one's presence to one's ethics. Of course, the first general principle (*al-asi*) is not to become involved in a system that is not totally in accord with the demands of Islamic spirituality, values, and morals, but in fact Muslims still have to respond to an ethical requirement: to limit injustice and evil as much as possible,¹⁷ to be committed in all circumstances to choosing the least evil option,¹⁸ to find solutions that will ease people's lives,¹⁹ and to work in stages.²⁰ And people often point to the Qur'anic story of Joseph (Yusuf), who asked the governor of Egypt, who was a polytheist, to make him responsible for what might today be called the national treasury and who therefore had a political responsibility under a non-Muslim political authority, which he carried out with dignity, morality, and faithfulness.²¹

This is far from the literalist interpretation described earlier; here the field is open to thoughtful, contextualized participation on an individual and collective level. However, it would still be good to consider some conditions that, if one wishes to be consistent with the ethical message of Islam, must, in my understanding, be respected: "the way of faithfulness" is a way that leads toward more justice, and civic and political involvement in a society of whatever kind must move in the same direction. So, individuals should in their own hearts and consciences, according to their own understanding of the world and their own opinions, weigh their involvement according to this criterion and note the scope for maneuver that their society allows them. This first condition assumes two others that are fundamental: one is to refuse absolutely to serve or collaborate with a dictatorial government that imposes a society that lacks rights. In this situation, when it comes to citizenship and political involvement, a stance of determined resistance is required, not of caution in the face of a dictatorial system. The last condition is to avoid being used and to treat with caution interests that are not always expressed. This may be true in an autocratic system, but it is also a risk in a democratic system. We see politicians, at election time, playing on the community solidarity of "immigrants" and "Blacks," for which read "Muslims," by putting on their list the name of a very "representative" candidate or putting forward projects calculated to gain support (such as mosques and cemeteries). We have then not only to be awake but also to have a conscience and principles: the aim is to promote a more dignified society, not to accept indignity under the pretext that this will protect one's interests. The "electoral communitarianism" of some candidates is in itself unacceptable. In the end, it must be clear, whatever the nature of our civic or political involvement, that one is not compelled to follow all the chosen views of a party, an elected representative, or even the population at large. Involvement in a free society should guarantee the right to act on one's conscientious objections, to have moral reservations, and to be able to express them when appropriate. This requires the development of a critical observation of oneself and the na-

ture of one's political involvement, as much as of the society in general: this is the price to be paid for effective political involvement.

An Ethic of Citizenship

The concept of citizenship is fashionable. People want to vindicate it, defend it, promote it, and extend it. It is the banner of the progressives and the badge of "integrated" people. To be honest, the concept of "citizens" is used to speak of everything and nothing with the understanding that, in the end, there must come into being a European/American-born Muslim citizen. Nevertheless, if we look more closely, we find on the level of civic awareness and political participation that the picture, as far as Muslims are concerned, is very variable. For nearly ten years, increasing numbers of Muslim associations, especially in Britain, France, and the United States, have constantly called on their coreligionists to vote and to take part in the political life of their country. More and more young activists and students have certainly understood the importance of the political game, but in the poorest areas the level of participation in elections remains much lower than expected. Like all citizens who experience the same objective living conditions, Western Muslims vote rarely, if at all. It must also be said that although the "call to vote" may be simple and clear in itself, the messages that go with it are not always so accessible: some call on people to vote to "take on their responsibilities as citizens," others in order to show the growing weight of the "community," still others mainly to "defend the interests" of the community. An observer can no longer tell what it is that minds and hearts are being mobilized for: principles? which principles? an identity? which identity? interests? what are they? Most Islamic organizations legitimize their appeals by the accepted reference to Islamic principles but sometimes seem to forget in fact the requirements of the body of reference to which they call themselves to be faithful (and which we have just presented in the previous section): so, in practice, they end up by forming the idea of a "community," whose members should think about political participation in the sense that they should get involved above all in order to protect the specific needs and interests of the community. One hears many voices in the United States, Britain, Germany, and France legitimizing this position by insisting on the fact that Muslims are "a minority," "in a weak (political and financial) position," "without great means" of influence on the society at large. The universal message of Islam that should move Muslims' civic conscience to promote justice, right, and goodness everywhere is reduced to this: "since we are a feeble minority"—a defensive, self-pitying discourse, narrowly concerned with the protection of self and "the community."

On a broader plane, these repeated and almost incantational calls for civic and political participation by Muslims seem to just float in the breeze. There seems to be no awareness of the conditions for bringing people together to make participation possible, unless it be a show or a pageant. There can be no authentic civic involvement if a solid program of citizenship education has not been developed and proposed in advance. Calls and slogans and singing the praises of "the good fortune of being a citizen" will change nothing: understanding one's society, its history, and its institutions, developing one's intelligence, and building an independent spirit—these are the things that will teach us, and everyone should be given the means to undergo this training. Without these prerequisites, and others, it is actually impossible to escape from this defensive and self-pitying attitude that in fact prevents us from acquiring a true citizenship ethic that not only proposes protection but also makes a commitment to the way of resistance and reform.

The Prerequisites

Here we must insist on the absolute necessity of making available to Muslims in each of the Western countries a deep knowledge of their environment. We have already referred to this in the chapter on education, but it is even more important when it comes to access to citizenship. We must profit fully from what is provided by the public (state) school system in these areas—knowledge of history, geography, language, culture, and traditions. All these elements make it possible to comprehend, from within, the frame of reference of the society on the regional, national, and even continental levels. And we must add to all these disciplines a subject on which there is much variation in public education in the different countries—civic education. It is important to reconnect with the tradition in which this training was given, because young people know less and less about the functioning of the institutions and the whole political system of their countries and show a growing disinterest in voting and participation. All citizens need this civic education/citizenship training, which today is full of gaps, and Muslim citizens have to understand it as an integral part of their personal and collective development if they want to remain faithful to their principles and also become actors in their societies.

The world has become complex, and political implications are sometimes not explicit. In order to form an independent and serious opinion requires, beyond a proper civic education/citizenship training, the capacity to listen, understand, express oneself, and engage in dialogue with others. It is of prime importance to cultivate a genuine culture of debate among citizens. To go beyond the very shallow consensus of fashionable ideas and

to keep a critical distance from the unhealthy and incessant administration of "opinion polls" and make one's choices freely requires taking time to admit the complexity of things, to exchange ideas, discuss theories, and meet the other—one's fellow citizen. This culture of authentic, searching, honest, and guileless debate is a real school for citizenship. Some parents manage to achieve this in the home, and some teachers bring it to life in their courses. It is for all Islamic organizations, both within their own groups and vis-à-vis the world around them, to develop this attitude and love of exchange and debate, this intelligence that learns to listen and this critical mind that knows how to ask questions.

The third prerequisite is learning through concrete participation in the life of the city. Citizens must gain, or regain, a taste for public issues. Nothing is more formative than close involvement, in one's own area or town, in public service projects, social politics, or, more broadly, human solidarity. A civic awareness begins when we have the feeling that our human and social environment concerns us and that we are active participants in our own lives and our own society, and not the objects of other people's decisions. Perpetual criticism of political authority or of the police is futile and meaningless when, alongside it, we as citizens do nothing to change things. Posing always as victims is a kind of cowardice. To be up in arms at every police blunder when we have become passive observers of the breakdown of the social fabric and watch silently (without showing any inclination toward concrete involvement) when young people display unspeakable violence and steal and assault and insult adults in their communities (particularly the police) does not make much sense and is, above all, unworthy. Obviously, there are police failures, but they increase in number as public resignation increases. Close involvement is a school for prevention and development: we do not perceive key features of national life in the same way when we find out how people who are really excluded from the system live with us and alongside us. A citizenry whose discourse and commitment forgets these people is a contradiction in terms: it should speak of justice and equal rights but actually promote social and economic oppression.

It may appear that calling on people to vote is a positive thing and a sign of open and progressive thinking, but to do it without providing for the concrete prerequisites for civic commitment is dangerous. Without education, a culture of debate, and practical involvement, any individual, particularly the young, may be drawn into "fashionable" movements or groups that lobby for or defend special interests rather than putting forward a social policy. Muslim citizens, inspired by their spiritual and ethical message, have a major responsibility to take these prerequisites into account: to be true to their conscience in the Western environment absolutely

requires it. This is the way that will lead to the growth of a responsible, active, and intelligent citizenship—three qualities that are already part of their spirituality.

Civic Ethics

It is no good to become citizens by any means and at any price. This is where the Islamic principles of human actions and the constitutional principles of civic commitment connect in their universality: they all rest on the dignity of the human being, and they all require an ethical basis. That is why we speak here of promoting a true "civic ethics." In practice, in addition to a watchful respect for the prerequisites mentioned earlier, we have to find a particular way of becoming committed and acting politically. We have noted that, to our way of thinking, *normalizing our presence without trivializing it* means insisting, for Muslims, not on sustaining a sense of Otherness but rather on an awareness of their belonging and commitment to society in general. The universal principles of Islam concerning the brotherhood of mankind, the necessity for justice and equality before the law, the need for involvement, and, last, service to others requires that attention be given constantly in society to the evaluation of the moral quality of actions, the motivations and abilities of the significant actors, and the ultimate nature of the dynamics that are set in motion. Quite apart from competence in the use of the tools of citizenship, when these principles feed the individual's conscience, they lead to a certain way of being, deciding, and acting, whether alone or collectively.

Promoting an ethic to be applied to the citizenry demands first of all that one feel entrusted with a mission that consists in reminding one's fellow citizens of the demanding responsibility they have, on both the individual and collective levels, to respect their fellows and the creation as a whole: this also means commitment to enforcing the elementary principles of respect for the rights of human persons—their integrity, freedom (of conscience and worship), right to equality, and so on²²—for all people in all circumstances. It is true that these rights sometimes have to be defended on behalf of a particular community that is facing discrimination, but, as we have said, that does not mean perverting one's civic action by reducing it to a mere defense of "my religion," "my culture," or "my ethnic group." The principles that undergird the "community of faith" require that we act against communitarianism and the thinking of the ghetto and sectarianism. The natural isolation that Muslims have endured during the first years of their presence in the West must today give way to a commitment that, if it is inspired and fed by the principles and ethical message of Islam, must be put at the service of all, for the good of all.

Some suggest that Muslims should follow the example of the Jews in the United States. As an extremely well-organized lobby, very active and extremely influential in the corridors of power in Washington, they are characterized by continuous activity, with the aim either of protecting the interests of the Jewish community or of supporting the state of Israel. This should be, some argue, the model of communal political commitment by Muslims in the West: to form a sort of lobby and defend "their" interests. Even if the lobbying tradition is different on the different sides of the Atlantic, it is still true that each national political culture has determined, for the various community, economic, and religious groupings, a particular way in which it can bring pressure to bear and influence the political life of the country. The practices of lobbying and exerting pressure, while they go on in the full light of day in the United States and cause no shock, are employed differently, or simply more discreetly, in European countries. New Muslim citizens should go with the flow and follow suit.

Perhaps we should begin by comparing like with like. Muslims do not have the same history or experience as Jews living in the United States and Europe, and the great majority of Muslims do not know the territory or the political culture and do not have at their disposal the means available to the Jewish community in the West. The idea of acting in the same way or even moving in the same direction is ill considered and has little chance of success. More fundamentally, quite apart from the possibility or impossibility of such a strategy, the crucial question is whether Muslim communities in Europe and the United States should organize themselves into pressure groups or get into lobbying on the political level. Is this the way they should see their role? The whole of our analysis leads to the conclusion that this question must be answered in the negative. The role of Muslim communities in the West is to defend principles, not interests, and if it transpires that it is in their interest to have their universal principles respected, it should be clear that their fight for these principles serves society as a whole. Raising high the standard of right, justice, and ethics cannot stop at the boundaries of the community of faith: the universality of the principles calls us back to the meaning of the brotherhood of mankind, which consists in serving the whole community and all human beings. The "way of faithfulness" compels us not only to respect plurality but also to step outside the ghettos, know each other better and act together for the common good if we are to reach the end of the "way." If, on the basis of their own specificity, which is well understood, Muslim communities could allow political action to become once again a more noble, worthy, and transparent activity to serve the people rather than to serve itself, their presence would have some use and would have carried out part of their witness among their fellow citizens.

This is the understanding that must rise from now on in the political consciousness of Western Muslims. It would benefit the whole of society to restore a little morality to political activity. Politicians in contact with Muslims at a local or national level should be able to "feel the difference": they should notice that the concern of Muslim citizens is to respect certain principles; that their satisfaction lies in justice being applied to everyone, black and white, "native" citizens and immigrants, and that if they are engaged in a forceful relationship with local authorities, it is with the aim of fighting corruption, discrimination, and violence, or, more fundamentally, social policies that protect the rich and their privileges. They cannot be bought because they refuse to be sold!

At election time, candidates should receive a clear message without political contortions. Some of these elected representatives, or prospective elected representatives, promise the "Muslim communities" a mosque, or a center, or a hall, or a cemetery, or even a place for ritual slaughter or some other privilege in order to get their support and their votes,²³ and unfortunately they find Muslim citizens ready to play their game. These same politicians do not hesitate to criticize ghettos, social separation, and communitarianism, even when they have themselves fueled a perverted communitarianism for electoral purposes. Muslim citizens then get only what they deserve: they have to realize that those who are capable of buying them before the elections have no scruples about selling them afterward. Small compromises follow their own rules and their own logic: that has to be accepted.

Voting is too important an action to be negotiated for so mean a price. The ethics of citizenship here comes into its full meaning: it is not about voting for a candidate capable of protecting our interests or of voting only for a Muslim; it is clearly a question of establishing objective criteria for making choices on the basis of conscience. The best candidate, at whatever political level, is the one who brings together the three most essential qualities when it comes to seeking a political mandate (which essentially consists in serving the community): integrity, ability, and willingness to serve. Do such candidates do what they say? Do they have the abilities necessary for the post in question? Are they present on the ground and engaged with and on behalf of their constituents? These are the questions that Western Muslim citizens should ask, and they should make their choices as responsible and independent citizens. It is for them to evaluate, consider, and finally decide, case by case, in favor of the best, or sometimes the "least bad," candidate. A citizenship that never wants to betray an ethic of life is demanding and depends on a permanently and deliberately critical mind that, on the political level, is the condition for wisdom.

As we have said, we should not necessarily choose a candidate who is a member of "the community": one can be a Muslim and dishonest, po-

litically incompetent, and more concerned with titles than with serving people. To choose such a person, for example (and such do exist), would be a betrayal of principles. Did not the Prophet say: "Anyone who appoints to a position an individual from a community when there is someone else more competent betrays God, his Prophet, and all Muslims"?²⁴ The choice should be based on the balance between the three qualities referred to earlier and not on the religion or community membership of the person.²⁵ In the two situations, the act of electing and the hope of being elected, a civic ethic operates in the same way and makes the same demands: it calls upon responsible and independent individuals to know their principles, ethics, and environment, to decide on the ultimate aim of their commitment, and, in all circumstances, to be responsible for their actions. If politics has a meaning and political action has any worth, they should be found somewhere at the heart of these dilemmas, at the precise moment when each person's conscience is looking for the point of balance that marks the intersection between means and ends, ethics and effectiveness.

The Voice of the Voiceless and Popular Action

Western Muslims, who are still for the most part of immigrant origin, must not forget where they come from and the road that has led them to Northern societies, in the name of their principles and their history. They must indeed be concerned with the affairs of their society, as we have said—with justice, law, unemployment, violence, and so on—but, at the heart of industrialized societies, they must also remain the *conscience of the South*. Dictatorships, the state of total decay of societies and economies, endemic poverty, illiteracy, and the daily death of millions of human beings as a result of a world order that sows terror are the realities that bear evidence against the way the planet is currently managed. We have to be the friends and partners of anyone in the West who denounces the horror, and we must call for the world to be changed.

It is said that it is necessary to develop a critical mind capable of taking account of things. The West is neither monolithic nor demonic, and its phenomenal achievements in terms of rights, knowledge, culture, and civilization are realities that it would be unreasonable to minimize or reject. At the same time, we must think clearly and know how to be critical of economic or strategic policies imposed by the North that are suffocating whole societies, compromising with heartless torturers, and promoting the veritable cultural colonization of underdeveloped countries with the help of the demeaning products of modern Western culture. To be a Western Muslim and speak these truths is to run the risk, almost systematically, of

being considered not completely "integrated," giving rise to suspicions about one's true loyalty: it's as if Muslims have to buy "integration" with their silence. This kind of intellectual cant must be rejected. To be a free citizen in Northern societies means having the means and the right to make critical choices, assessments, and evaluations from within the heart of the Western frame of reference. It means recognizing and fighting for the achievements of democracy, and challenging one's own government (be it American, French, British, or any other) by making it understood that it is not acceptable to betray our principles through complicity with dictatorships. It means congratulating ourselves on the level of development and material well-being that we enjoy *here*, while fighting with all our might against the economic policies of the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, which, by means of international agreements and structural changes, support terrible and chronic suffering *there*. And how many other battles, too!

To be *the voice of the voiceless* today is a moral imperative. Defending all the forgotten people of the continent of Africa, the Palestinian resistance, the rights of the Chechens and the Tibetans and all the oppressed peoples of the world is the most explicit expression of our fidelity to our principles and our ethic. In our time we must also reject the establishment of a kind of frontier of law between the North and South that would operate unilaterally against the victims of economic injustice; policies proposed to combat immigration are dreadful and assume that the clandestine immigrant is a liar, a thief, even a bandit. With their inability to call their economic policies into question, Northern governments, our governments, apply repressive policies against the victims of their own regulations. All political thinking and planning that do not take migration into account impose a double sanction on the victims—by imposing on them a shameful way of life in their own countries and by imprisoning them there or expelling them "in the name of law" when they have the dignity and courage to refuse inhuman treatment.

New security policies are all moving in the same direction: in the name of the war against terrorism, anything, or almost anything, goes. Hundreds of Muslims are imprisoned without trial in the United States, antiglobalization activists are under surveillance, cross-border travel is restricted, civil liberties are curtailed, and, on the international level, the repressive policies of Sharon and Putin are met with silence and eyes are closed to the behavior of our Saudi and Pakistani allies. This is all said to be to protect us from "those who do not like our civilization and our freedom." Muslims of conscience living within the West must have the courage to say that this is not true and that if terrorism really is unacceptable, war must be declared on all forms of terrorism, particularly state terrorism, and priority must be given to dealing with its causes. Condemning without a moment's

hesitation the atrocities of 11 September 2001, for example, cannot mean that we have to accept all and any reprisals and policies because we might be in danger. This kind of diversion has serious consequences: by putting citizens in a state of siege and feeding their fear, the government prevents them from thinking and critiquing the world order and its injustices. Citizens who are afraid do not go out to change the world; first of all they protect themselves and what belongs to them. They become dangerously distracted as a natural reflex.

Here again, it is not a question of being interested only in international situations in which Muslims are implicated, as it may appear today. We have seen that all situations are interconnected and that international politics have an immediate impact on domestic realities. So we now need to build a global vision of problems, and it is more important than ever to decide who our partners are in this struggle. The international popular movement that has recently developed across the world (which must not be confused with the violent tendency of some groups and individuals) expresses critical theses and demands reforms that for the most part are completely in accord with the Muslim ethic. Organizations that call for the establishment of fairer trade (of the type proposed by Max Havelaar or development cooperatives); those that want to promote more responsible management of the economy and the financial markets (in the manner of the ATTAC movement or, more locally, of institutions committed to ethical investment); the Peasant Confederation and the supporters of a Christian theology of liberation and resistance (now found throughout the world) must become in time, with many other resisters on the local level, the objective allies of this plural front for which we long. It is the responsibility of Muslims to commit themselves to this way, to decide what kinds of alliances are possible, taking into account their limits as well as their demands. The globalization with which we are presented and that is imposed upon us today sanctions above all the absolute primacy of the logic of economics over every other consideration, and the efficiency of communication networks and highways seems to draw us more and more into becoming better consumers. The picture would be very dark were it not for a widespread movement of resistance: when faced with neoliberal economics, the message of Islam offers no way out but resistance. In the West, as in the East, we are summoned to use our minds, our imaginations, and our creative abilities to think of an alternative—using our sources in partnership with all those who resist and mobilize for “alternative ways.”