Conclusion

On Modernity

We cannot fail, after referring so often to the 'modernist' current in which the Iqbalian philosophy is inscribed, to examine the very notion of modernity. Firstly by repeating that Iqbal quite particularly insists on the idea that this cannot be about a particular *content* to imitate. And this refusal as much concerns the imitation of a tradition as an external model. Modernity here is thus not something which it would be a matter of a society conforming to, but, in a manner of speaking, a mirror held out to it.

In a long and important reflection entitled 'Response to questions raised by Pandit J. L. Nehru',[179] Muhammad Iqbal returns to the notion of an appeal to modernity which is the internal movement of a society even if it is also in order to respond to the pressure of modern *ideas*. It is thus that he considers, on the one hand, the personal history of modernist intellectuals in the Islamic world, like Al Afghânî and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, on the other, the transformations in Turkey. Just as, he declares, we cannot say that these intellectuals were Westernized when they were in the first place the outcrop of the old traditional school, we also – and he is responding directly to a statement of Nehru's – cannot say that the modernisation undertaken in Turkey meant that this country had ceased to be Muslim. Whether it is a matter of the necessity of also having a materialist perspective on the world, or other questions such as the use of Turkish language written in Roman characters or the abolition of the caliphate with the separation of Church and State, there is nothing in these, Iqbal says, that cannot be referred, ultimately, to an *internal* principle of movement, to the *ijtihâd* of an Islamic country.[180]

Rather than a particular content that is modern, then, we can refer to an *attitude* of modernity, thus making use of an important and useful distinction employed by Michel Foucault, who specifies: 'by 'attitude', I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at

one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. No doubt, a bit like what the Greeks called an *ethos'*.[181]

An *ethos* that is both belonging and task, such indeed is the principle that is at work in modernist thought and that can be defined using the illustration he finds in Amir Ali's conclusions concerning the status of women in the Islamic world. When the author of the *Spirit of Islam* indicates that, on this issue, Islamic societies must move with the advances of civilisation, it is not an appeal to conform with civilisation or with modernity. It is by knowing how to go back to Islamic history and to the *process of civilisation* that it bears in order to constitute, in the present and for this time, its *sense*, which is to say the direction it indicates.

It is a matter of going against a static, because purely reactionary and defensive, use of History, perfectly captured by the expression *retrospective stubbornness*: the use that consists in devoting all considerations of the status of women in Islam – and thereby by blocking it – to recapitulating the advances, considerable in effect, that the appearance of this religion represented, on every level, for those whose ontological equality with men, once again, had been clearly posited. The whole direction of Amir Ali's approach is to substitute for this rigid use what can be called a 'dynamic constitution of history' which is not satisfied with establishing the observation of what progress the condition of women has known, but to read in this progress an *intention* which then becomes imperative to *pursue*.[182] And already, he observes, as has already been mentioned, the Mu'tazilite school of theology proceeded in this spirit.

We can thus see in the attitude of modernity the imperative for a reading of history that would reconstitute its intention, according to the conditions and demands of the present and with the end of continuing to open the future by always further increasing the freedom of each and all. It is this attitude, expressed with the greatest philosophical clarity in Muhammad Iqbal's work, which is at the foundation of the great constitutive themes of modernist Islamic thought, such as can be read in its different representatives: the necessity of promoting the capacity of judging for oneself by making use of reason, reason as a faculty allowing man to pursue the intention of religion which only in this way can address the whole of humanity, since thanks to reason the temporary can be distinguished from the permanent, the universal from the particular, etc.

In many respects, the Indian sub-continent has been the place of emergence, for the modern era, of this principle. Richard Khuri thus points out that it is after Shah Wali-ullah (1702–1763) that 'Islamic intellectuals learned to make the distinction between the eternal *principles* of the Quran and the specific *injunctions* derived from these, most of these latter being inscribed within the limits of the temporal'.[183]

Modernist thinkers share the observation that Islamic societies have come to stagnate as a result of a state of juridical petrification, a dogmatic rigidity regarding doctrines whose authors had nevertheless always declared that they were simply possible ways of seeing things. Historians thus remind us that the founders of the four main schools of jurisprudence, Hanafism (from the name of its first teacher, Abû Hanifa, died 767), Malikism (from Malik ibn Anas, died 795), Shafi'ism (from Ash-Shâfi, died 820) and Hanbalism (from Ahmad ibn Hanbal, died 855) were extremely careful not to fix the result of their work and research as dogma or sole point of reference. And Ash-Shâfi, when he left Iraq to settle in Egypt, also set about proposing different answers to the questions he had posed.

The point of departure for Iqbal's reflection on the 'principle of movement in Islam' could thus be Amir Ali's remark on the 'current stagnation of Islamic communities, mainly due, according to this author, to the idea that has become fixed in the minds of Muslims as a group, that the exercise of individual judgement stopped with the first legists, that this exercise in modern times is a sin. A Muslim who wants to be considered as an orthodox follower of the path of the prophet should necessarily belong to one or other of the juridical paths established by the Islamic school founders and abandon his whole ability to judge, in an absolute manner, to the interpretation of men who lived in the 9th century and who could in absolutely no way imagine the necessities of the 20th'.[184] Following this observation, Amir Ali mentions, as Iqbal will also, evoking the attitude of the Caliph Umar, that those who think in this way in a spirit of completion and closure of meaning 'have forgotten that the prophet … addressed himself to the whole of humanity' and that he thus 'sanctioned reason as the highest and most noble function of the human intellect', the one 'the school founders and those who follow them servilely have declared that its exercise is a sin and a crime!'[185]

We could think that, even when Islamic faith has reached as far as the Inuit world, the correct procedure to follow is for it still to be expressed using the rules of jurisprudence that have been developed for the conduct of the Iraqis, to use an example given by Amir Ali.[186] And can we not see that to question such a state of affairs is not inspired by a relativistic position but, on the contrary, by the very concern for universality. The principle of modernity, which conjugates fidelity and movement, is precisely what allows us to declare, following Pascal's eloquent formula, that we can affirm the opposite of what the Ancients said, without contradicting them; 'even if we are led to differ from those who preceded us', Iqbal has written in the same spirit.[187]

Everything occurs as if what the 'Fathers' established thereafter stood in all its thickness between the Islamic societies of today and what they should remain faithful to. As if a religion with no Church in principle had in the end taken on

the burden of the heaviest patristics. Hence this idea that the 'religious invention of modernity', that 'major modality in the history of the West',[188] today requires, in order to reconcile fidelity with movement, that the Islamic schools accomplish the Reformation that consists in freeing the spirit of all the accumulated weight from centuries of a strictly literal reading whose principle was above all conformity.

For Muhammad Iqbal as well, the period that Islamic societies are moving through is entirely similar to the one that finally led to the Protestant Revolution in Europe and requires that these societies well understand the lesson of the movement instigated by Luther. It is, in analogous fashion, a matter of shaking off the weight of a scholasticism that has itself gone against the intentions of the school founders in order to 're-interpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of … experience and the altered conditions of modern life'.[189]

It is thus the spirit of the Reformation that Iqbal calls on when he speaks of 'stirring into activity the dormant spirit of life in our legal system', or when at the end of the last of his *Lectures*, he invites his audience to leave behind 'that intellectual laziness which, especially in the period of spiritual decay, turns great thinkers into idols'.[190]

If the task ahead is conceived on the model of the European Reformation, Iqbal is highly aware that one of the consequences of this religious revolution was a plurality of *churches* where it had been a matter of restoring the *Church*. This is another lesson to draw from the Reformation. He goes so far as to say that the national ethical systems that had progressively displaced the universal Christian ethic are those that confronted each other during the Great War that tore Europe apart.[191] This comment of Iqbal's is aligned with the reflections of the theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) concerning the real relationship between Protestantism and progress. He recalls that in effect only the illusion of hindsight can give any credence to the idea that the aim of the Reformation was, in any conscious way, what we call modernity. On the contrary, the Protestant goal of reforming the Church in its totality saw itself deviated toward the constitution of its own churches which only then became 'national', he says, 'simply because Protestantism could only realise its ideal of the Church with the aid of governmental authority, and therefore had to be content not to apply it beyond the national frontiers'.[192]

But, once again, beyond the question of particular contents, remains the *ethos*, the imperative. And at the basis of this imperative, we find the key Iqbalian concepts that are inter-connected within his philosophy of action: the cosmological concept of the incompletion of the world and the ethical concept of human responsibility. Upon reflection then, and even if pluralism and difference represent a test – but life is test – the movement of the Reformation is, or should be, the very spirit of Islam since the Quranic conception of life is one of a process of

continuous creation, of permanent innovation and emergence, which prevent the intention of religion becoming imprisoned within reasonings and legal interpretations claiming a 'final character'. And it is also for this reason that human responsibility is also generational, in other words that it belongs to each generation to rise to its own responsibility of rethinking the legal principles in function of its own problems and thus in always aiming to return Islamic thought to its first movement.