

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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# THE FIRST CONTENTIONS

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The 'Contentions' are little sparks, some luminous, others merely hot, which fly from the point where Islam's sword is resharpened by its encounter with the anvil of modernity. They are not credal articles, or mystical aphorisms; they avoid dull linearity or affiliation to a system. Instead they test the power of speech to point out the paradoxes of our world, and to suggest the transcendence to which those paradoxes point. Like Traherne's *Centuries of Meditation*, they are arranged in hundreds, each of which may very loosely centre on a theme.

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1. Activism will only succeed when it remembers that history is in good hands.
2. We must not overestimate the calamities of our age. A misplaced rigorism is less dangerous than an improper liberalism.
3. This sin of the Muslim world: *menefregismo*.
4. In senescence, religions have two possibilities: Alzheimers (the amnesiac option of the secular elites) and manic-depressive (the false Salafism).
5. Aid for 'moderate' Middle Eastern regimes is meals on wheels, because it does not expect to rejuvenate.
6. Postmodernism is *Jabiliyya*. Each tribe has its own story.
7. The modern West shows that without a Shari'a there can only be scattered *hunaifa*'.
8. 'There is no God at all, and Atatürk is His prophet.'
9. The Umma without its Law is like a man without his Prayer.
10. The East is content without form; the West is form without content.
11. It is as fallacious to assert that Islam is unsuited to the age as it is to believe that the age is suited to Islam.
12. Modern India: we are called to put the *rahma* back into Brahman.
13. Which came first: intolerant preaching or its subject-matter?
14. Whether God can forgive Europe is perhaps the greatest problem of theodicy.
15. Islamic modernism: a *danse macabre* flirting with the spiritual death of the Enlightenment.
16. Have we become like the Incredible Hulk, ineffectual until provoked?
17. The radicals are announcing only one thing: 'Attention! This vehicle is reversing!'
18. Wahhabism: the war on polychromy. (Vermeer: the perfect Protestant.)
19. Followers of Antichrist see with only one eye, whose name is *Zahir* or *Batin*.

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20. St Cuthbert never defeated the Green Man, who has now returned with a Law.
21. The Crusaders served us at least once: they let al-Khidr loose in Sherwood.
22. British Buddhism: who can abide this *chinoiserie*?
23. Converts: we must jump the gap without losing our clothes.
24. Blake's Job shows that repentance can never be paid for.
25. William Law plus the social gospel: is anything left before Islam?
26. Versailles is Augustinian; Hidcote is Pelagian.
27. 'The English lack nothing to make them sound Mussulmans, and need only stretch out a finger to become one with the Turks in outward appearance, in religious observance and in their whole character.' (*The Fugger Letters*.)
28. British religious painting: why this indifference to the Passion?
29. Closet converts are the *malamatiyya*: they know, but are not known.
30. The Abrahamic wandering, for us, but not for Levinas, is to polis, to *umm al-Qura*. It was Islam, not Judaism, which united Abraham and Odysseus.
31. Hagar, that 'root out of a dry ground', the most fertile woman in history.
32. Hagar is the matriarch of liberation because, unlike Sarah, she feeds for herself.
33. 'Judaism is dead; but we are going to give it a magnificent funeral'. (Rabbi Zunz, fount of liberal Judaism.) Is Islam the reverse? And if so, what are the grounds for dialogue?
34. Judaism and Islam have resisted Christianity through *eros* and *thanatos*. Hence the magnitude of their victory.
35. Liberal Protestantism: God is no longer the Father, but an occasional and indulgent Grandfather.
36. The 'universal' religion is not merely the religion that claims to be for all; it is the religion that claims that God has always been for all. There can be no Muslim 'scandal of particularity'.

37. Some religions *out-narrate* others.
38. Annunciation vs. enunciation: the word is best made word.
39. Christianity was providential as *preparatio evangelica*.
40. The Paraclete was indeed the Comforter. We were in a state of ascetical *panic* about ourselves.
41. The liberal theory of religion is homeopathic. (The more you water it down, the stronger it will become.)
42. Juda-yi Ism: the absolutizing of a people.  
Edom: the absolutizing of a person.  
Islam: the absolutizing of God.
43. Our God is too generous to require an ‘economy of salvation’.
44. Have Christianity and Islam exchanged views of each other?
45. *Salat* is the *zakat* of time.
46. In the measure that we accept the Prayer it is accepted by God.
47. The dietary laws are an opportunity to fast.
48. Text without context is pretext. ‘He withdraws knowledge by withdrawing the ulema.’
49. Literalism is the laziness that masquerades as courage.
50. The recipe for chaos: the *qat’i* grows until the *zanni* is almost abolished.
51. The false scholar: a muezzin whose fingers are stuck.
52. God’s *ada* shows that we are made in His image. He functions according to *sunan* and is not diminished by them. ‘Acquire the character traits of God!’
53. Deed is creed. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*.
54. Praxis is the content of belief.

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55. The lottery: a way of exploiting the weak-willed in order to reward the undeserving.
56. The lottery: a tax on stupidity.
57. The Law: all freedom is difficult.
58. The *Tawaf* is about Abraham, the *Sa'y* is about Hagar. Only in Islam is a woman the initiator of a form of worship.
59. The femininity of the crescent, the masculinity of the cross. (Max Ernst, *Men shall know nothing of this.*)
60. Layla: the chador of God on earth.
61. Islam is the religion of women because Madina had no place for Oedipus.
62. Women are native to Paradise: is this not the most underestimated disclosure of the Book?
63. Our Paradise shows that the Dionysian mysteries were proleptic.
64. Cranial nudity. *Adverte oculos!* The *hijab* is indeed an amulet, which wards off the evil eye.
65. Stay home during the peek season.
66. Veiling the unavailable: *noli me tangere*.
67. Christian women: celibacy. Muslim women: cellulite. Thus have two prophets been forgotten.
68. It is the economy of desire which shows that Law is pure mercy.
69. Exclusivism is less oppressive to the oppressed than to the oppressor.
70. Bacon, like a pious pasha, has blurred our faces. Is this the condition of postmodernity? To be a two-dimensional *cartoon* without a face?
71. Nureyev in *La Bayadère* finally acknowledged the light in his name. Where are we to welcome such penitents?

72. 'Smoking kills. If you're killed, you've lost a very important part of your life'.  
(Brooke Shields)
73. It's called the consumer society because it consumes us.
74. 'The fact that it is so difficult for present-day man to pray and the fact that it is so difficult for him to carry on a genuine talk with his fellow men are elements of a single set of facts.' (Buber)
75. 'Whenever I watch TV and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff.' (Mariah Carey)
76. The *Sunna* is *suluk*, for the Divine Other may only be intuited. 'Perception does not attain Him, but He attains perception.'
77. The proof of God is the form of the proof.
78. Natural theology is the blind man's stick.
79. Imamology is a theodicy because it assumes the categoric novelty of Islam.
80. Shi'ism is a schism, lacking the sea of Mercy.
81. Sunni political theory: the pole star need not be the brightest star.
82. It is in its Ash'arite occasionalism that Islam most radically sacralises the world.
83. Determinism does not exclude providence, it excludes everything else.
84. Free will secularises by authenticating the alterities.
85. The antinomy of autonomy: our freedom is in the Free.
86. Because the body is the single shared cross-cultural common factor (Mary Douglas), Islam, which affirms it, is dialogical in nature.
87. Islam is a hidden treasure longing to be known.
88. *Iman* is derived from 'Immanence'. The centre must be present in the periphery.
89. We should be reluctant to forgive reluctance to forgive. Rigour and mercy circumscribe each other.

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90. If you fail to pelt the pillars you can only pelt the pilgrims.
91. The veils of the world must be walked through. The veils of sin must be walked around. (Imam al-Haddad.)
92. Guilt is a warning.
93. To attribute the *maqam* of *da'wa* to one's self is to be open to the Divine ruse.
94. *Wonder* is the first passion.
95. The Qur'an *shows*, it does not just *explain*.
96. Courtesy and knowledge are like two hands washing each other.
97. Without the inward whom can we worship? The Outwardly Manifest?
98. No-one is uncircumcised, for the *bezm-i alast* was too joyful to be forgotten entirely.
99. Truth is the further shore of love.
100. Only in Unity can suffering find no place.