

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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# THE THIRD 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. 'Buying is much more American than thinking.' (A. Warhol)
2. How easy it is to forget how easy it is to forget!
3. False religion finds it easier to make holes than to fill them.
4. 'Lilies that fester smell worse than weeds.'
5. The Buraq exists to indicate the nature of the *asbab*. Nothing is more indicative of God than His conventions.
6. The materialist argument against women: public performance equals fulfilment.
7. The false Salafism should recall that some creatures can only survive in deep water.
8. The veil covers the man's eyes, not the woman's.
9. Ibn Taymiya forgot that any rejection of *jnana* should at least be in favour of *bhakti*.
10. The wine is masculine, the milk is feminine.
11. To be resigned is not to resign.
12. Islam was the sharpest of all medieval Western problems of theodicy. The West is the sharpest of all problems for modern Muslim theodicy.
13. Is alcohol the only self-imposed mental disorder?
14. Opium is the religion of the masses.
15. Islam is the Pentecost.
16. Transcendence is merciful insofar as it is preparatory.
17. Most people would benefit greatly from learning a first language.
18. Muhasaba: you will not move forwards until you look backwards.
19. Pride is the only sin that cannot fear God. 'I, even I, am the Proud!'
20. Venus is subverted less profoundly than Mars.

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21. Woman is in the first glance, not the second.
22. Marriage should be the retrieval of the first glance.
23. The Straight Path is the shortest distance between two points.
24. Only five pillars hold up the sky.
25. Without Law we can make no ablution from our sins; but without Spirit there is no water.
26. *Ijazā* is transfusion.
27. Many of our priests are in the wrong religion.
28. There is no liberation in the world that is not also a liberation from the world.
29. Postmodernity: a galaxy of dogmatisms.
30. We have become too weak even to close our eyes.
31. 'What I stand for is what I stand on' (Wendell Berry). 'No prophet was not a herder of sheep.'
32. Sufism is uncastrated Sunnism.
33. Homo is sapiens when he is the natural locus of the supernatural.
34. Christianity chooses the wine, Islam chooses the milk.
35. It is normal that not everyone deserves the mawlid.
36. Our Odyssey precedes our Iliad.
37. It is impossible to love a woman without loving womankind.
38. Sexual fidelity is not only to one's spouse.
39. It is only bad gardeners who uproot all the weeds.
40. Showing the false to be false does not prove the truth to be true; but not vice-versa.

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41. The theologian proves the second shahada from the first. The saint proves the first shahada from the second.
42. Grant us to deal with others on the basis of our thankfulness to You.
43. ‘Ainsi pense une pensée qui pense plus qu’elle ne pense’. (Levinas)
44. Religion is faith, culture and sensibility, none of which may change alone.
45. Judaism: inscription.  
Christianity: incarnation.  
Islam: inlibration.
46. The *sunna* is an optic.
47. Marvel at mercy only when it comes from those to whom no mercy has been shown.
48. *Man ankara Ankara faqad ankara al-ankara.*
49. An unfortunate pir of Lahore  
Had four different mothers-in-law.  
They talked in rotation  
In English and Asian  
Until he ran out of the door.
50. History for the false Salafis is what the Holocaust is for the Jews.
51. Polytheism is faith in the alterities.
52. We grow through self-diminution.
53. Without the law of Love there is no Law at all.
54. There is no conception of God, for conceptions will pass away.
55. The profane see the windmill, the saints see the wind.
56. Adam is because of ‘*adam*’, ‘*amal*’ is because of ‘*alam*’, *adab* is because of *abad*.
57. Temporality has tied the tresses.

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58. To say that there is nothing after the Sunna is to accuse it of infertility. ‘Truly, your detractor is the one cut off.’
59. If you would be young in eternity, emulate maturity while you are still young.
60. The false Salafism: veiling the Prophet with the Sunna.
61. Islam and the Umma teach us different kinds of humility.
62. Nothing succeeds like circumspection.
63. Why did it take so long for Christendom to turn its view of nature into reality?
64. We have replaced contrition with shame.
65. Literalism is a playpen.
66. If Eve is not of Adam, marriage is mere cohabitation.
67. ‘Back to the Sources!’ Pulling up the bucket is not helped by cutting the rope.
68. Beware the denial of identity that is not a denial of the self.
69. A Messiah is monochrome, but a book is a prism. (‘I am sent to all mankind.’)
70. Pessimism is part of the impiety of the periphery.
71. ‘The hypocrite looks for faults; the believer looks for excuses.’  
(Imam al-Ghazali)
72. There is no better way to limit the Divine mercy than by limiting Islam.
73. Only be proud of your works to the extent that you remember that they are not yours.
74. There is no Divine gift that is perfect in the absence of the fear of hell.
75. Because we are worldly we are worldless.
76. *Tawhid* makes vanity impossible; shirk makes it indispensable.
77. The hardest choices are those between justice and equality.

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78. Mercy has the last Word.
79. The alpha male must not be a wife beta.
80. The body is usually exposed only when the ego has ruined the face.
81. The Hashwiyya: without the well-upholstered there would be no *tanjid*.
82. Nothing is more counter-intuitive than secularity.
83. Religious practice is important only as a means of serving God.
84. *Haqiqa* justifies *tariqa*; *tariqa* justifies *shari'a*.
85. We want to make religion as small as ourselves; just as we have made our homes as ugly as ourselves.
86. The annalist cannot understand kingship; the analyst cannot understand kinship. 'We have ennobled the progeny of Adam.'
87. The world is not intolerant of Islam so much as it is intolerant of stupidity.
88. Nothing is more expensive than being nowhere.
89. *Futuwwa*: the knight must be freed from the daze.
90. The saint only leaves the bridal chamber on his beloved's account. ('I am his hand wherewith he smites.')
91. To prove that it is not men who make religion true we must prove that religion can make men true.
92. Faith cannot yield despair; despair cannot yield martyrdom.
93. Religion is maximising the number of epiphanies we love.
94. 'If somebody scratches where it itches, does that count as progress?' (Wittgenstein)
95. Monarchy: there is no *baraka* from below.
96. Al-Amin is followed only by the amenable.

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97. Those who curse do not transform; those who do not curse transform.
98. New Men without the numen neglect the marital and the martial.
99. *Suluk* is untying the knot; *jadhbb* is cutting it.
100. ‘The conspiracy theory of society comes from abandoning God and then asking: “Who is in his place”?’ (Karl Popper)