

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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THE TWELFTH 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.

The Twelfth Contentions

1. The saint is he whose presence makes you love the Prayer.
2. In the Madeleine
Where the sun don't shine,
Ancient Rome prevails
Though the gods are more benign.
3. Chauvinism is not a *bal*, it is a halitosis.
4. Nothing is more pessimistic than a naïve belief in progress.
5. Spouses are traditional in order to be saved by gratitude. Spouses are modern in order to be saved by themselves.
6. *Kufr*: to see the sun setting, and to do *nothing about it*.
7. Is the Beast of Divorce coming? Husbands: respect her wants. Wives: respect his dignity.
8. The beginner feels gratitude for the *rukhsa* in his mind. The advanced seeker feels gratitude for the *rukhsa* in his heart. The saint never takes the *rukhsa* at all.
9. Are women ambiguous? It is the *muhkamat* which are the Mother of the Book.
10. 'Greed has been severely underestimated and denigrated, unfairly so, in my opinion.' (Conrad Black)
11. Modernity, at best, is a nostalgia for desire.
12. Liberal Christianity: first goes faith, then goes hope, until charity alone remains.
13. Real *fiqh* is always a vernacular Islam.
14. The delight of each worldly pleasure does not last long.
15. The longer you wait to claim or forgo your rights, the longer you will wait for friendship.
16. It is only the hungry and unfortunate who may know whether they are good.
17. The believer has faith as his companion, and hope in his destination. The ignorant man has neither, yet he still seeks joy.

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18. Self-control makes you a fortress; self-indulgence makes you an animal, either a riding-beast or a target.
19. Your *nafs* will never receive exactly what it wants.
20. Pain is nine-tenths of desire.
21. If your Islam does not attract pure hearts, it is not Islam.
22. Man is *'ibara*; woman is *ishara*.
23. *Dunya*: a little Gentleness, and much Rigour. The *fitra*: a little Rigour and much Gentleness.
24. Be patient with literalists; but absolutely impatient with their extremists.
25. Lustrate, and you will be illustrious. (*Ghurur* is only in the *ghurra*.)
26. Climate change: 'And We coin similitudes for mankind, that perhaps they may reflect.'
27. A busy life makes the Prayer harder; but the Prayer makes a busy life easier.
28. The *nafs* is anxiety and agitation. The Spirit is the breath of peace. ('So give good news to My servants!')
29. Two names unpronounceable in Edom: Hagar and Muhammad.
30. We need not remain in the dark without *dark al-idrak*.
31. '*Islab*' can never mean more than 'amelioration'.
32. The medievals, seeing the colour of our clothes, would call us all atheists.
33. The preacher should neither lower the price of his goods, nor price Islam out of the market.
34. *Kufr*: impermanence is a problem. *Iman*: our anxiety about impermanence is a problem.
35. Science is the revelation of order. Faith is the revelation of liberation.
36. The false Salafi is enraged because Sufism has been taken away from him.

37. Betjeman: summoned by belles.
38. We are divided from the other world by the thinnest of membranes, which we hang with mirrors.
39. Great art is God looking at you. Mediocre art is you looking at God. Demonic art is you looking at yourself alone.
40. Suicide bombing: *al-fana' fi'l-shaytan*.
41. Deism is dualism. Occasionalism is the only alternative.
42. Modernity has only footnotes; faith has text as well.
43. Belief in God begins when we cease to believe in ourselves.
44. What are you but a lightly-clothed skeleton?
45. Your bumper sticker is a fish eating a fish; for your Shari'a fate in the West is *to eat fish*.
46. The saint is the one whose love reminds you of your most recent sin.
47. An ayah is a wetnurse. When born we suckle, when we die we are weaned.
48. Islam: the real Jesus was unitarian. Christianity: the real Moses was trinitarian.
49. The foundation of Action is Theology. The foundation of Theology is Faith. The foundation of Faith is Action.
50. The foundation of Knowledge is the Body; the foundation of the Body is not Knowledge.
51. Ash'arism: the turn to the Sunna is a turn towards reason, for the Sunna neglects nothing that is from God.
52. *Khawarij* are full of *hawa*.
53. Tasting is always of the Near. Do not, therefore, be veiled from the Transcendent.
54. If you put down your *tasbih* you will not pick up a rifle safely.

55. Haste is usually the consequence of sloth, not of diligence.
56. Edom produced the modern world of distraction, because it neglected *eros* and *polis*.
57. To be proud of luxury is a sin, but to be proud of disdaining it is worse by far.
58. ‘Moderate Islam’? Do not be an extreme Muslim; be extremely Muslim.
59. *Dbiker* and electricity are deadly rivals.
60. The wife’s vulnerability is not the husband’s strength.
61. You do not rise to Him. He does not descend to you. Rather, what you see, He may unveil as His alone.
62. Your reach towards Him is tiny. His reach towards you has no limit.
63. Love learning, since learning leads to action.
64. *Fiqh* is the joyful focussing on the moment.
65. Rejoice most highly when the Teacher’s command is hard.
66. Zion is the abuse of Maimonidean Mu‘tazilism.
67. To conform to the Sunna is to ‘conform to God’. Do not think that there is freedom anywhere else.
68. Our finitude is our distance from Him. His infinitude is His closeness to us.
69. The false Salafism: *extra Arabia nulla salus*.
70. Theology is *sharb*; Religious Studies is *tasbrih*.
71. No modesty, no sensuality. No sensuality, no knowledge of God.
72. Only the Evil I takes mankind from the minbar to the minibar.
73. The identity-merchant says ‘Un-Islamic’; the Godfearing says: ‘*Makruh*’ or ‘*Haram*.’

74. Arius says: Follow the *mubkamat!*
75. The saint's belief that he is bound for hell is his halo.
76. Do not use your beard to open people's ears.
77. Happiness is more important than conforming to the Monoculture.
78. Westernisation? *Maqam Rast* is ours already.
79. *Hû* and cry: only by *talwin* can we endure this age.
80. The false Salafism: it is better to lose angrily than to win calmly.
81. The cross and the *décolletage*: *in hoc signo vinces*.
82. He did not say: 'Guide us to the gay path.'
83. A politician deals with symptoms, a leader deals with causes.
84. Expect only a little. If you impose everything on everyone, you will drive everyone away from everything.
85. We see the world, and think it to be still. But it is coming down fast, all the time, from Heaven. (*You see the mountains, and think them to be still.*)
86. Rigour of Moses, Ahmad's mercy,
Beauty of Jesus, heralds all.
In Adam's heirs no controversy,
Call for change, don't change the call!
87. In the restaurant of life, the false Salafi can do no more than eat the menu.
88. *Da'wa* should start at the point of harmony, not the point of dissonance.
89. Do not trust the Arab who prefers nylon to cotton.
90. The Prayer is *rus in urbe*.
91. The world survives because one may fall out of love with hatred, but one may never fall out of love with love.
92. Who is a *shaykh*? One who recognises that his life will soon be over.

93. *Ibada*: remember God to re-member yourself.
94. If you are threatened by a materialist civilisation, make yourself economically indispensable.
95. A real aristocrat is a healing for the world.
96. Islam: there is a basis for cumulation. The West: there is only cumulation.
97. 'Down to Gehenna, or up to the Throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.' (Kipling)
98. Practice of the Sunna is at its most pure and uncompromising where it supports cultural diversity.
99. Rafidism: the first Muslim conspiracy theory.
100. You cannot arrive by making an effort, but you cannot arrive without making an effort.