

READING MOHAMMED TALBI AND
ABUL KALAM AZAD IN A PLURAL WORLD

Joseph Victor Edwin

ABSTRACT

I will discuss the views of two Muslim scholars: Mohammed Talbi (Tunisia) and Abul Kalam Azad (India), who both lived in plural contexts. I will show that their political and intellectual views invited people to live as co-citizens and co-humans in the modern world. Both scholars upheld pluralism as the design of God for this world. Talbi maintains that pluralism and dialogue are two sides of the corner stone that holds a plural society together. Pluralism demands respect for all parties and for the views of others in the context of intellectual and religious freedom. Mutual respect is the basis for true dialogue and the corner stone of religious and intellectual freedom. Interreligious dialogue is essential for pluralism to become vibrant. Kalam Azad maintains that truth is the essence of all religions as it is founded on the oneness of God. Every human person can intuitively apprehend the truth. Faith and good works are universal values. These universal values call upon people to recognize one another's 'co-humanity' and live together as citizens in a plural world.

Keywords: Pluralism, co-citizens, interpretation, intentional reading

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the views of two Muslim thinkers: the Tunisian Mohamed Talbi and the Indian Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on the theme of the co-existence of Muslims with people of other faiths and cultural traditions. They both present a case for Muslims to live as co-citizens and co-human beings along with people of diverse traditions from diverse

contexts. Both find a firm foundation for their views in the teachings of the Qur'an.

The views of these two Muslim scholars are particularly significant in the present context. Especially since 9/11, many people seem to question whether Muslims can coexist with people of other faiths and persuasions as well as people from different cultural traditions. Are Muslims really comfortable in a democratic setup? Are they happy to be co-citizens and co-humans among many 'others' in multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic contexts? Besides, many people have the impression that Islam is intrinsically intolerant towards people who think, live and worship differently. Al Qaeda, Taliban Boko Haram, ISIS further strengthen such impressions. The media often appears to be biased against Muslims.

In such a context it is necessary to highlight the convictions and affirmations of Muslim scholars who assert their commitment to plural societies, drawing from the Qur'an. This essay is essentially written for Christian readers. When he presented this paper at the conference on Religious Pluralism and World Peace in Lahore, Pakistan, the present writer knew that most of his listeners probably would be Muslims. However, I now write in the hope that at least some Christian readers who read this article will begin to explore the faith and life of Muslims and develop friendly relations with Muslims by going beyond prejudices and stereotypes. In the first section of this essay, I present the views of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and in the second section, the views of Mohamed Talbi.

ABDUL KALAM AZAD: RELIGION AND NATION

Azad (d. 1958) was named Firoz Bakht. He was born in Mecca and brought up in Calcutta. His father, Maulana Khairuddin, had migrated to

Mecca during the uprising of 1857 and returned to India in 1890.¹ Azad completed his traditional education at the age of 16.

Reared in an Islamic milieu that emphasized strict codes in the form of 'dos and don'ts', Azad began to rebel against such a way of life by rejecting *taqlid* (imitation). He questioned everything as he passed through a difficult time of spiritual crisis. He briefly abandoned religion and even the mandatory prayers. Although he was listless spiritually, he never neglected his search for meaning. Eventually, his crisis led him to the conviction that faith is part and parcel of human existence and realized that the religions were a source of morality for human beings. Reflecting on his spiritual crisis at a later date, he wrote:

From the beginning I have refused to be content with the legacy bequeathed to me through family, society, and education. The bonds of *taqlid* [blind following of classical legal and theological leanings] have never fettered me and the thirst for knowledge has never forsaken me ... Never have I been possessed with an assurance of heart which the thorns of doubt would not have pricked nor with a confidence of spirit which all denial's temptations would not have penetrated. I have drunk the drop of poison also from every cup. When thirsty, my thirst was not the thirst of others. When my thirst was satisfied, it derived its satisfaction from one common source.²

As a young journalist and activist, Azad was very impressed by the work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Following Sir Syed, he emphasized the importance of modern education.³ However, he chose to move away from

1. Azad, A. K. (1959), *India Wins Freedom*, Bombay: Orient Longmans, pp. 1-2.

2. Azad A. K. (1964), *Tarjuman al-Quran*, vol. 1, New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, pp. 51-53.

3. Ashraf, M. (1990), "Maulana Azad's Vision of a United India," *Islam and Modern Age*, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 119.

Sir Syed, who was pro-British and insisted that Muslims should focus on education and leave politics alone.

Azad considered that the Muslims of India could not afford to neglect their responsibility towards India's freedom struggle. It was his firm conviction that the cause of Muslim education must coexist with the movement for India's freedom from British rule. In 1912, he started a journal called *Al-Hilal* to encourage Muslims to collaborate with Hindus in a joint struggle for the freedom of the country from the British. He joined forces with the *Khilafat* Movement, which had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. Through *Al-Hilal* and his political activism with the *Khilafat* Movement, Azad exerted a great influence on India's Muslims. The British did not take kindly to this as his political and literary activities went against them. *Al-Hilal* was confiscated in 1915, but Azad was resilient and started *Al-Balagh*, another journal with the same objectives. He was arrested and sent to Ranchi and was kept in confinement till the end of 1918.

Azad knew that he was called to play a leading role in summoning Muslims to active participation together with their co-citizens from other communities in the struggle for freedom from British rule and for the building of a modern, culturally-pluralistic India. He was convinced the pristine message that the Quran had proclaimed for centuries summoned believers to live with other co-citizens in harmony.

STRIVING FOR FREEDOM TOGETHER

On the 1 January 1920, on his release from incarceration, Azad met Mahatma Gandhi.⁴ Azad drafted a resolution in favor of the Non-Cooperation Movement inspired by Gandhi.⁵ At this juncture, Azad clearly affirmed the concept of nationalism on secular foundations and eloquently argued that Muslims should join the Congress and work with

⁴ Azad, A. K. (1959), *India Wins Freedom*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵ Rajput, A. B. (1946), *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad*, Lahore, pp. 68-69.

Hindus for India's independence.⁶ He further stated that, for Muslims, striving for India's independence from the British was not only an act of patriotism but was also considered necessary because Islam required Muslims to break fetters, fight tyranny and establish a system of governance based on justice.⁷ Azad had discovered the harmony between his faith and his commitment to India, his nation. In his own words:

I am a Muslim, and this thought fills me with pride. The traditions of Islam during its career of thirteen centuries go to form my heritage. I am not willing to give up an iota of this portion. Islamic education, Islamic history, Islamic art, Islamic sciences, and Islamic culture constitute the elements of my wealth; and as a Muslim it is my duty to preserve it. Being a Muslim, I have a special position in cultural and religious circles, and I cannot bear that any one should interfere in this inner sanctum of my soul. But, in addition to these feelings, I am also the possessor of another feeling, which has been created by the stark realities of my external life. The soul of Islam is not a barrier to this belief; in fact, it guides me in this path. I am proud to be an Indian. I am an integral part of this unified and indivisible nation. The glory of this nation is incomplete without this valuable component. I am an essential factor in its composition and I shall never give up this claim ... We brought with us a great treasure and this land was also over laden with its own untold wealth. We entrusted our wealth to this country; and India opened the floodgates of its treasures to us. We gave this country the most precious of our possessions and one which was

⁶ *ibid*, pp. 34-35.

⁷ Ashraf, M., "Maulana Azad's Vision of a United India," *Islam and Modern Age*, p. 122.

greatly needed by it. We gave it the message of democracy and equality.⁸

HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY

One of the important features of Indian secular nationalism is Hindu-Muslim unity. Azad desired that the multi-cultural mosaic of India should remain intact. He maintained that Hindu-Muslim unity was more important than freedom itself. To emphasize the unity of Hindus and Muslims he referred to Prophet Mohammad's Medina Manifesto, where the inhabitants of Mecca, both Jews and Muslims, agreed to live together peacefully, protecting the interests of all the inhabitants of Medina. It is important to notice that Azad drew on Islamic sources for his secular national politics, which included the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Hindus.

CONFIDENT PARTNERSHIP WITH ALL

Partition was a critical moment for Muslims in the sub-continent. When large numbers from among the Muslim elite left India for Pakistan, Muslims lost their prominence within Indian society. The Islamic religious leadership that emerged at this point of history was largely inward-looking and was unable to give a clear direction to deal with the urgent issues that required attention. In these circumstances, Azad recognised the importance and centrality of citizenship in a multi-religious and multi-cultural secular country. On the religious level, Indian Muslims were called upon to reconcile their faith with modernity in a multi-religious and multi-cultural India. The deepest issue at stake was about the way they were to correlate the new challenges of modernity with the revelation contained in the Qur'an.

⁸. *Speeches of Maulana Azad, 1947-1955*, Delhi: 1956, p. 182.

Azad recognised that it was an unrealistic dream for Muslims to seek to re-establish their own political order on Indian soil. He held that once political independence was obtained, Indian Muslims would have to live as equal citizens within a non-Muslim majority. In other words, they would not be able to enjoy complete autonomy nor the possibility of implementing a comprehensive political, social, cultural and religious Islamic order. On the basis of his reading of the Qur'an, Azad came to the conviction that Islam did not, in fact, necessarily demand expression in such a comprehensive and autonomous way. Azad's theological opinions were rooted in the Qur'an and he challenged the attitude of Islamists about cultural and religious diversity.

QUR'AN INTERPRETATION

It was noted in the last section that Azad was a political activist who affirmed political democracy based on secular foundations. His political views were in tandem with his theological views based on the Qur'an. The oneness of God and the unanimity of all religions are two central values for him and formed the basis for his vision of harmonious relations between Muslims and other communities living together in India as co-citizens.

Azad believed that *deen* or the divinely-ordained way of human life was one and that it was common to all religions. *Deen* is fundamental and unchangeable. Central to *deen* is faith in the One God and the living of a righteous life. Azad was of the view that the way of expressing *deen* could differ according to context and cultural conditions. He believed that the search for unanimity among the religions would bring mutual confrontations to an end.⁹ These two important truths, namely, the oneness of God and the unanimity of all religions were the keys to Azad's interpretation of the Qur'an in the pluralist context of India.

⁹. Ashraf, M., "Maulana Azad's Vision of a United India", *Islam and Modern Age*, p. 123.

INTERPRETING REVELATION

Azad emphasized that the profound ideas of the Qur'an were revealed in utmost simplicity. He invited readers to discover the reality of the Qur'an by reading it themselves. He emphasized that the focus of the Qur'an was the ethical and religious summoning of those who were willing to listen. He placed great importance on the state of *wajdan*, which is an intuitive apprehension of truth. Truth is based on mystical assurance.¹⁰ Azad recognized the human potential of every person and was convinced that truth existed in the heart of every human being.

Azad wanted to remove the cobweb of past philosophical and mystical understandings of the Qur'an. He maintained that a thick veil of interpretation prevented the Qur'an's central message from being heard. He suggested the path of contemplative reading of the Qur'an. According to Azad, the core message of the Qur'an was a truth that existed in an essential way in all religions. In other words, the essence of all religions was one and the same. Oneness of God is the basis of all religion and human beings are called to obey the one God and worship God alone.

For Azad, a most significant text of the Qur'an text was the following:

Virtue does not consist in whether you face towards the East or the West; virtue means believing in God, the Last Day, the angels, the book and the prophets; the virtuous are those who, despite their love for it, give away their wealth to their relatives and to orphans and the very poor, and to travelers and those who ask [for charity], and to set slaves free, and who attend to their prayers and pay the alms, and who keep their pledges when they make them, and show patience in hardship and adversity, and in times of distress. Such are the true believers; and such are the God-fearing. (Qur'an 2:177)

¹⁰ Troll, C. W., "Islam in a Pluralistic Society: The Case of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad," *Salaam*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 1988), p. 8.

For Azad, the proper human response to God's revelation is the righteousness and the piety that the aforementioned verse presents. Although faith and good works are universal values that are to be found in all religions, Azad had to account for the differences between religions. In this regard, he opined:

For every age and country God has ordained a special form (of worship) which suitably conformed to man's situation and need ... Had God willed, he would have made a unified nation and community of all mankind, and no variation of thought or practice would have appeared; but we know that God did not so wish. His wisdom demanded that various states of thought and practice be created.¹¹

Azad maintained that variations among the religions do not affect the essentials of these religions since the truth underpins all religions and the same spirit pervades all religions. The basis of *deen* is the oneness of God, which calls for the worship of the one God. The Qur'an enjoins tolerance towards the followers of other faiths. All religious followers can sustain the true spirit of their religion by their firm faith and righteous deeds. Since God is one, the Qur'an invites all men and women to be united as the one family of God. Azad affirmed that in this unity, humans could discover the corrective for their divisiveness and their true source of salvation. This was the theological foundation for Azad to build solidarity among all Indians and for Muslims to live as co-citizens along with others, respecting their differences and at the same being united with others as citizens of one country.

¹¹. Quoted in Hahn E. (1965), "Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Concept of Religion and Religions According to His Tarjuman al-Qur'an: A Critique," MTh thesis, McGill University, Montreal, p. 19.

MOHAMMED TALBI

Mohamed Talbi (d. 2017) was a Tunisian historian and an intellectual. His book *Universalite du Coran* ('The Universality of the Qur'an') is a lucid analysis of the Qur'an. In this book, Talbi called for a re-reading of the Qur'an and stressed that the Qur'an affirms the equality of men and women as well as their rights and dignity. Moreover, the Qur'an guarantees that all men and women are free to follow different paths and destinies. This is an important affirmation of the freedom of religion: the freedom to choose and follow a religion of one's own choice according to one's conscience.

In another book of his entitled *Afin que mon coeur se rassure* ('To Put My Heart at Ease'), Talbi describes himself as a seeker of truth and proclaims that his loyalty to the Muslim faith is compatible with a belief in democracy and freedom. In his view, faith is first and foremost a freedom and an obligation. For this reason, to describe Islam as an institution dependent on a history, a place, and a culture constitutes a blameworthy act of diminishing the sacredness of the Qur'an and of Islam.¹² Talbi drew a clear line between recognizing the Qur'an as a litmus test of faith and asserting that Sharia was relative and time-bound.

SUSTAINING PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Talbi categorically rejected any political expressions of Islam that involved coercion in religion because coercion goes against the fundamental principles of pluralism and has no place in a democratic society. He insisted that Islam had no intrinsic political principle or organization. He maintained that all Islamic political claims made on behalf of certain ideologies were wrong and misguided. He stressed that

¹² *Dictionary of African Biography*, s.v. "Mohamed Talbi," accessed June 15, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.001.0001/acref-9780195382075>.

Islam was a revealed system of piety and worship, not a polity. Thus, Muslims could not make claims for an Islamic form of government. Talbi was of the view that Muslims were called to accept, together with others in society, a form of government that served the common good.

Talbi had to answer the question: As a revealed religion, does Islam not distinguish between better and worse forms of government? Talbi maintained that in the light of Islam's liberal values and practices such as freedom, love, tolerance, and pluralism, Islam preferred a form of government that exemplified the aforementioned values. In the period in which he lived, Talbi stated that the democratic form of government was the form that allowed for the best expression of Islamic values.

Talbi maintained that pluralism was a central feature of Islam and an integral part of the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition. Pluralism implied respect for the views of others in the context of intellectual and religious freedom. Talbi maintained that mutual respect (*ihitiram mutabadal*) provided the basis for true dialogue (*hiwar*), which was the cornerstone of religious (and intellectual) pluralism. Dialogue made pluralism real. Freedom was an inherent and inalienable right of an individual in society. Freedom was the absence of coercive force. Coercion by religious or governmental authorities was a major threat to freedom. Was Talbi trying to impose his modern and liberal ideas on the Muslim way of life? Yet he was convinced that he had derived these values from within the Islamic traditions and from the Qur'an.

The effort to identify these values in the Islamic tradition and in the Qur'an involved a substantial review of historical sources and religious thought. In the process, Talbi identified and highlighted the essential features and truths of Islam that were universal in nature and which provided a sound foundation for multi-religious and multi-cultural societies. These values were both Islamic as well as universal because they shared a common ground with modern values that had developed in

different cultural and religious contexts. For Talbi, these common values were truly universal because they were anchored deep within human *fitra* or nature.

TALBI'S INTENTIONAL METHOD

It is important to give attention to the way in which Talbi read the holy Book that lays the foundation for his religious convictions. Talbi proposed the "intentional reading" (IR) of the Qur'an as the method for eliciting the "intention of the Lawgiver" This 'intentional reading' considered the 'context of revelation' as the key for approaching the texts. Although IR went beyond analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), it received its intellectual confirmation from *qiyas*. However, Talbi noted that *qiyas* was unable to solve all modern problems because it was devoid of the dynamic dimension needed to engage with the present. It was past-oriented and sought to make the present conform to archaic models. *Qiyas* neither encouraged a new vision for progress nor facilitated fruitful interaction with modernity.

Talbi argued that God was living and eternal and that, as God, His word provided guidance for humanity (*hudan lil nas*) for all time. God's word remained relevant for all time as it constantly engaged with the present. Talbi emphasized that since the word of God was alive here and now, hearers of the word should heed to it but they first had to recognize that they could only find out what God wanted to tell them at this moment and in these circumstances by situating the question in the historical context of the revelation of God's word.

Talbi affirmed the importance of 'occasions of revelation' (*asbab al nuzul*), which described the historical context in which a verse from the Qur'an was revealed. The interpreter of the Qur'an needed this information to ascertain whether a particular teaching of the Qur'an was a prescription for all circumstances or whether it was meant only for certain specific

circumstances. Historical and human reading of the text was necessary in order to ascertain the dynamics of the message because such historical reading placed passages from the Qur'an in their historical context. IR incorporated the findings of this historical and human reading and brought a scholar closer to the goal of ascertaining the intention of the Law-giver.

Talbi drew an example from the custom of slavery, which was once prevalent throughout much of the world. The Qur'an and Hadith greatly improved the lot of slaves by giving them broad rights and guarantees. The Qur'an did not stop here but encouraged the freeing of slaves. As a consequence, Muslims no longer discuss the rights of slaves because slavery is gone and the context has changed. Today Muslims need to work towards freeing all men and women from modern forms of slavery. Talbi held that the intention of God was to reject all forms of modern slavery and suggested that IR could help Muslims to recognize this inner dynamism of the Qur'an.

In other words, IR is based primarily on an analysis of the orientation of the text. For instance, the orientation of the Qur'an with regard to slavery is the freeing of slaves. Thus, the complete abolition of slavery may not be specifically mentioned in the text but it is in agreement with its orientation to free slaves. The orientation of the text indicates the intentions of the divine Author. Talbi believed that IR would impact decisively on the development of Islamic thought. It was inappropriate to take literal meanings out of context and apply them to all circumstances. This could even contradict the true intention of God.

IR makes sense because we all recognize that sacred texts have within themselves the potential to create new meaning in different contexts. Texts can speak powerfully across geographical, cultural and linguistic frontiers. Reading is not simply about capturing a ready-made meaning but reading discovers the meaning in which the text of the author and the

pre-understanding of the reader have come together to express a new reality.¹³ While emphasizing the intention of the Author of the Qur'an, Talbi recognized the context in which it was read. By means of IR, Talbi pointed to the harmony that could exist between the intention of the divine Author and the diversity of contexts. Setting a clear agenda for Muslims to be grounded in the values of the Qur'an, Talbi was also aware of Muslims living among non-Muslims.¹⁴

COMMUNITY OF COMMUNITIES

In a community of communities there is a common thread that binds people together despite different modes of belonging and different loyalties. This common thread will be strong and binding if different communities within the larger community interact and intermingle with mutual respect for one another. Talbi described two important values that generate mutual respect: openness and commitment. The key sentence in Talbi's approach to pluralism is the following:

There can be no harmony if we are unable to reconcile openness and commitment: openness, which makes us accessible and available to others, commitment which roots us in the milieu from which we draw the sap of life.

Talbi remarked that, in the past, faith communities were exclusive and had defined boundaries. New communities interacted with the host communities and slowly learned to adjust and to live together in harmony. However, today this luxury was no longer available for many societies since religions as separate empires with rigid boundaries have ceased to exist. Today people of different religious beliefs mingle and

¹³. Gispert-Sauch, G., "Devotion to the Light of the *Bhakti Sutra*," *Jeevadhara* 33 (2003), pp. 208-205 and 209.

¹⁴. Nettler R. L. (2010), "Mohamed Talbi: On Understanding the Quran," *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, SuhaTaji-Farouki (ed.), London: Oxford University Press, pp. 225-240.

interact with other faith groups in a way that no one could have imagined a few decades ago. Talbi suggested that this celebration of diversity was a part of God's plan and believed that the time had come for religions to leave the comfort-zones that have given them security and to prepare for the changes that beckon on the horizon. Religions have to rethink their role and mission in the new emerging world order.

In the past, the Muslim *ummah* was geographically situated. What was thought of as *Dar al-Islam*, 'the 'Abode of Islam', was a clearly recognizable area. In 1923, when the caliphate was abolished, Islam lost an important feature of the reality that was known as *Dar al-Islam*. On account of colonialism and the migration of peoples for various geo-political reasons, the earthly frontiers of the *ummah* have become less clear. As Talbi writes:

These frontiers are hazier still because a process of disintegration is going on within Islam. "Islam-culture" - the street anchor of authenticity - remains strong and retains a wide allegiance. But "Islam-conviction" - a living faith, a commitment, including the dimension of metaphysical certitude as well as that of cultic observance, is going through a crisis. The edifice is crumbling, either on account of ignorance, at the lower levels, or through indifference or open revolt in the higher levels, ranks. Yet, everyone takes pleasure, (by every possible means), in confusing "Islam-culture" with "Islam-conviction". Now, though "Islam-conviction" supposes "Islam-culture", the opposite is by no means true ... the term *ummah* is, moreover, taking a new meaning (in modern parlance) without losing completely its ancient spiritual connotations, it is coming more and more to mean 'nation', and sometimes 'people' ... In other words, the content of the idea of *ummah* has changed considerably ... One thing

is certain today, and there can be no going back on it: the frontiers of the *ummah* are not marked out in the world ... From now on they are to be found only in the hearts of those who pray, whether those hearts be in Sweden or in China, in Cairo or elsewhere. A German or Malay may belong, while a Tunisian or an Egyptian is excluded by his own free choice.¹⁵

These comments of Talbi made some 35 years ago are very relevant today. Islam as culture in terms of public posturing on different issues that affect Muslim life under the guidance of the *ulama* continues to be strong while Islam as a faith conviction in terms of a faith response to God's revelation in the Qur'an here and now might be on the wane. In other words, the *ummah* as a political community continues to remain strong whereas the *ummah* as a spiritual entity and as a faith conviction has been weakened with time. Conversations about faith convictions tend to border on jurisprudence and on the 'dos and don'ts' of the Muslim way of life. The key to Talbi's understanding of the *ummah* is religious freedom. The *ummah* is marked on the hearts of men and women who worship God in the way of the Qur'an according to the guidance of the Prophet Mohammad.

For Talbi, a Muslim in Germany and India both could be part of the *ummah* and share the same faith conviction while a Muslim born and brought up in a Muslim family could be excluded from the Islamic faith tradition. No one is to be forced in or out of a particular tradition. There is no compulsion in religion. Talbi's position becomes clear in the light of his comments on *Dar al-Islam*.

¹⁵ Talbi, M., "A Community of Communities: The Right to be Different and the Paths to Harmony," *Encounter*, No. 77 (Aug-Sept. 1981), p. 3.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Islam was born in an environment of multiple religions and thus plurality is not something new to it. The history of Muslims' engagements with adherents of other faiths such as Judaism and Christianity was, however, often marked by confrontational approaches that produced polemics and apologetics. However, this history also showed some glimpses of an informed understanding of one another. The 21st century has brought people of different cultural backgrounds and religious traditions very close to one another. Several million Muslims from West Asia have had to flee their homes due to wars and conflicts and they find themselves as refugees in different Western countries.

The question as to how these Muslims can express their faith in Western democracies remains to be seen. Meanwhile, in South Asia, especially in the subcontinent, the rise of Hindu nationalism has unsettled Muslim minorities. While Muslim communities are facing such challenges, theological tendencies such as *Salafism* and *Wahhabism* shrink the secular space that Muslims had developed over the centuries.

In these circumstances, Kalam Azad and Talbi have taken a basic idea from the Qur'an, namely, the idea of plurality as a positive value. They asserted that acceptance of religious pluralism was necessary for relations between Muslims and people of other faith traditions in democratic societies. The heritage of Islam and the dynamism that is found in the Qur'an can enable Muslims to engage with diverse traditions and religions in the struggle for peace, justice and harmony. ■