The United Nations Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, Egypt, in September 1994, was an extremely important landmark in raising global consciousness with regard to a number of issues that are central to the lives of women. The conference was particularly momentous for Muslim women who participated in record numbers in this conclave, which was held in one of the most important capitals of the Muslim world. The presence in Cairo of Al-Azhar University, the oldest university in the world, whose "fatwas" or religious proclamations carry much weight amongst Muslims, added further significance to the venue of this conference.

In an opening session of the ICPD, three male professors representing Al-Azhar University presented what was labelled "Muslim viewpoints" on the subject of "Religion, Population and Development." Only a small part of their presentations, however, dealt with the topic of Population and Development. After stating that Islam was not against family planning but that it allowed abortion only to save the mother’s life or health, the speakers focused on the status of women in the Islamic tradition. The purpose of this panel presentation by high-powered representatives of the most prestigious Muslim university in the world, was to pre-empt any discussion on the subject of Muslim women by making the "privileged" position of women in Islam clear to both the Western media (which stereotypes Muslim women as "poor and oppressed") and to Muslim women themselves. In interventions from the floor, however, the "Muslim viewpoints" represented by the three male professors was questioned as voices of Muslim women were conspicuous by their absence in the panel of presenters. Muslim women demanded "equal time" and they got that and more in subsequent days when a number of sessions were held at the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Forum in which Muslim women figured.
significantly and in which women-related issues were explicated by women themselves.

Women's identification with body rather than with mind and spirit is a common feature of many religious, cultural and philosophical traditions. However, though women traditionally have been identified with the body, they have not been seen as "owners" of their bodies. The issue of who controls women's bodies—men, the state, the church, the community, or women—was one of the most important underlying issues of the Cairo Conference. The fact that Muslim women forcefully challenged the traditional viewpoint not only with regard to women's identification with body, but also with regard to the control of women's bodies, indicates that Muslim women are no longer nameless, faceless or voiceless, and that they are ready to stand up and be counted.

It now has been accepted globally that issues which may appear to pertain primarily to a woman's body, namely that of contraception and abortion, cannot be looked at in isolation from the larger factor of women's over-all development as human beings. However, as pointed out by a number of persons and agencies, the primary focus of the Cairo Conference was on "population" issues centering on the body, rather than on "development" issues which center on the whole person.

The challenge before women in general, and Muslim women in particular, between the ICPD and the 4th UN Conference on Women at Beijing in September 1995, was to shift from the re-active mindset (in which it was necessary for women to assert their autonomy over their bodies in the face of strong opposition from patriarchal structures and systems of thought and behavior) to a pro-active mindset (in which they finally could begin to speak of themselves as full and autonomous human beings who have not only bodies, but also minds and spirits). The pivotal question which Muslim women needed to ask themselves as they prepared to meet in China was: What do Muslim women, who, along with Muslim men and the rest of humanity have been designated as God's vicegerent on earth by the Qur'an, understand to be the meaning of their lives? Reacting against the Western model of human liberation was no longer sufficient, as a pro-active orientation requires a positive formulation of one's goals and objectives. The critical issue that Muslim women were called upon to reflect, with utmost seriousness, between the Conferences at Cairo and Beijing was what kind of model(s) of self-actualization could be developed within the framework of normative Islam which takes account of Qur'anic ideals as well as the realities of the contemporary Muslim world? However, as long as the vast majority of Muslim women remain unaware of the religious ideas and attitudes that constitute the matrix in which their lives are rooted, it is not possible to usher in a new era and create a new history in which the Qur'anic vision of gender-justice and equity could become a reality.
The Theology of Woman in Islam

I have been engaged since 1974 in developing the discipline of feminist theology in the context of Islam because I have come to believe that a scholarly examination of the theological assumptions which underlie the negative ideas and attitudes regarding women which are widespread in Muslim culture—from a feminist or non-patriarchal perspective—is essential in order to establish genderjustice or woman-man equality, which is a pre-condition for development and peace both in the Muslim world and in the world in general. A few words about how I become involved in a task which became central to my life-journey may be useful as an introduction to my research and the reflections which I would like to share.

Experientially I always have known what it means to be a Muslim woman since I was born female in a Saiyyad\(^1\) Muslim family living in Lahore, an historic Muslim city in Pakistan, a country created in the name of Islam. However, it was not until the fall of 1974 that I began my career as a “feminist” theologian—almost by accident and rather reluctantly. I was, at that time, Faculty Adviser to the Muslim Students’ Association (MSA) chapter at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. This “honor” had been conferred upon me solely by virtue of the fact that each student association was required to have a faculty adviser and I happened to be the only Muslim faculty member on campus that year. The office bearers of the MSA chapter at Stillwater had established the tradition of having an annual seminar at which one of the principal addresses was given by the faculty adviser. In keeping with tradition I was asked—albeit not with overwhelming enthusiasm—if I would read a paper on women in Islam at the seminar which was to be held later that year. I was aware of the fact, in general, faculty advisers were not assigned specific subjects. I was asked to speak about women in Islam at a seminar—in which, incidentally, Muslim women were not allowed to participate or even be in the audience—because in the opinion of most of the chapter members it would have been totally inappropriate to expect a Muslim woman, even one who taught them Islamic Studies, to be competent to speak on any other subject pertaining to Islam. I resented what the assigning of a subject meant. Furthermore, I was not much interested in the subject of women in Islam at that time. Nevertheless, I accepted the invitation for two reasons. First, I knew that being invited to address an all-male, largely Arab Muslim group which prided itself on its parriarchalism was itself a breakthrough. Second, I was tired of hearing Muslim men pontificate on the position or status or role of women in Islam while it was totally inconceivable that any woman could presume to speak about the position or status or role of men in Islam. Considering the fact that there are hundreds of publications—books, articles, brochures, etc.—on the subject of women in

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1. Saiyyad: descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.
Islam, virtually all of them by Muslim men, it is rather strange that there is not a single publication on the subject of the position or status or role of men in Islam. Perhaps this means that men have no position or status or role in Islam! At any rate, I hope, one day, to fill this gap as a return courtesy to Muslim men who have spent so much time and energy defining women's place in Islam.

I do not know exactly at what time my "academic" study of women in Islam became a passionate quest for truth and justice on behalf of Muslim women—perhaps it was when I realized the impact on my own life of the so-called Islamic ideas and attitudes regarding women. What began as a scholarly exercise became simultaneously an Odyssean venture in self-understanding. But "enlightenment" does not always lead to "endless bliss." The more I saw the justice and compassion of God reflected in the Qur'anic teachings regarding women, the more anguished and angry I became seeing the injustice and inhumanity to which Muslim women, in general, are subjected in actual life. I began to feel strongly that it was my duty—as a part of the microscopic minority of educated Muslim women—to do as much consciousness-raising regarding the situation of Muslim women as I could. The journey which began in Stillwater has been a long and arduous one, indeed.

Women such as Khadijah and 'A'ishah (wives of the Prophet Muhammad) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) figure significantly in early Islam. Nonetheless, the Islamic tradition by and large has remained strongly patriarchal till today. This means, amongst other things, that the sources on which the Islamic tradition is based, mainly, the Qur'an (which Muslims believe to be God's Word transmitted through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad), the *sunnah* (the practice of the Prophet Muhammad), the *hadith* (the oral traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) have been interpreted only by Muslim men who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological and eschatological status of Muslim women. It hardly is surprising that until now the majority of Muslim women who have been kept for centuries in physical, mental, and emotional bondage, have accepted this situation passively. Here it needs to be mentioned that while the rate of literacy is low in many Muslim countries, the rate of literacy of Muslim women, especially those in rural areas where most of the population lives, is amongst the lowest in the world.

The Process of “Islamization” in the Contemporary Muslim World

In recent years, largely due to the pressure of anti-women laws that have been promulgated under the cover of “Islamization” in some parts of the Muslim world, women with some degree of education and awareness are beginning to realize that religion is being used as an instrument of oppression rather than as a means of liberation. To understand the powerful impetus to "Islamize" Muslim societies, especially with regard to women-related norms and values, it
is necessary to know that of all the challenges confronting the Muslim world perhaps the greatest is that of modernity. Muslims, in general, tend to think of "modernity" in two ways: (a) as modernization which is associated with science, technology and material progress, and (b) as Westernization which is associated with promiscuity and all kinds of social problems ranging from latch-key kids to drug and alcohol abuse. While "modernization" is considered highly desirable, "Westernization" is considered equally undesirable. What is of importance to note, here, is that an emancipated Muslim woman is seen by many Muslims as a symbol not of "modernization" but of "Westernization" (These days Muslims boys as well as girls go to Western institutions for higher education. When a young man returns from the West he is considered "modernized," but when a young girl returns she is considered "Westernized"). This is so because she appears to be in violation of what traditional societies consider to be a necessary barrier between "private space" where women belong and "public space" which belongs to men. The presence of women in men's space is considered to be highly dangerous for—as a popular "hadith" states—whenever a man and a woman are alone, Satan is bound to be there. In today's Muslim world, due to the pressure of political and socio-economic realities, a significant number of women may be seen in "public space." Caretakers of Muslim traditionalism feel gravely threatened by this phenomenon. They see "emancipated" Muslim women as symbols of "Westernization" which is linked not only with the colonization of Muslim peoples by Western powers in the not-too-distant past, but also by the continuing onslaught on what they perceive to be "the integrity of the Islamic way of life" by Westerners and Westernized Muslims who uphold the West as a model for intellectual and social transformation of Muslim communities. They believe that it is necessary to put women back in their "space"—which also designates their "place"—if "the integrity of the Islamic way of life" is to be preserved.

Although I had begun my study of theological issues pertaining to women in the Islamic tradition in 1974, it was not until 1983-84 when I spent almost two years in Pakistan, that my career as an activist began. The 1979 enactment of the "Hadud Ordinance," according to which women's testimony was declared to be inadmissible in "hadd" crimes, including the crime of rape, was accompanied by a wave of violence toward women and a deluge of anti-women literature which swept across the country. Many women in Pakistan were jolted out of their "dogmatic slumber" by the "Islamization" of the legal system, which, through the promulgation of laws such as the Hadud Ordinance and the Law of Evidence (1984), as well as the threat of other discriminatory legislation (like the Law of Qisas and Diyat or "blood-money"), reduced their status

2. One is reminded here of the classic statement by St. Augustine that women ought not to intrude into public space because "they cause erections even in holy men!"
systematically, virtually mathematically, to less than that of men. It soon became apparent that forces of religious conservatism were determined to cut women down in size to one-half or less of men, and that this attitude stemmed from a deep-rooted desire to keep women in their place, which means subordinate and inferior to men.

Reflecting upon the scene I witnessed with increasing alarm and anxiety, I asked myself how it was possible for manifestly unjust laws to be implemented in a country which professed a passionate commitment to both Islam and modernity. The answer to my question was so obvious that I was startled that it had not struck me before. Pakistani society (or other Muslim societies) could enact or accept laws that specified women were less than men in fundamental ways because Muslims, in general, consider it a self-evident truth that women are not equal to men. Among the "arguments" used to overwhelm any proponent of gender-equality the following are perhaps the most popular: according to the Qur'an, men are "qawwamun" (generally translated as "rulers" or "managers") in relation to women; according to the Qur'an, a man's share in inheritance is twice that of a woman; according to the Qur'an, the witness of one man is equal to that of two women; according to the Prophet, women are deficient both in prayer (due to menstruation) and in intellect (due to their witness counting for less than a man's).

Since, in all probability, I was the only Muslim woman in the country who had been engaged in a systematic study of women's issues from a non-patriarchal, theological perspective, I was approached numerous times by women leaders (including the members of the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, before whom I gave my testimony in May 1984) to state what my findings were and if they could be used to improve the situation of Pakistani women. I was urged by women activists who were mobilizing and leading women's protests in a country under martial law, to help them refute the arguments which were being used against them, on a case-by-case or point-by-point basis. Though I felt eager to help, I was not sure if the best strategy was simply to respond to each argument which was being used to deprive women of their human (as well as Islamic) rights. What had to be done, first and foremost, in my opinion, was to examine the theological ground in which all the anti-women arguments were rooted to see if, indeed, a case could be made for asserting that from the point of view of normative Islam, men and women were essentially equal, despite biological and other differences.

Three Foundational Theological Assumptions

As a result of further study and reflection I came to perceive that in the Islamic, as well as in the Jewish and the Christian traditions, there are three theological assumptions on which the super-structure of men's alleged superiority to women has been erected. These three assumptions are: (1) that
God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man's rib, hence is derivative and secondary ontologically; (2) that woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is generally referred to as "man's fall" or man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hence "all daughters of Eve" are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt; and (3) that woman was created not only from man but also for man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not fundamental. The three theological questions to which the above assumptions appropriately may be regarded as answers are: (1) How was woman created? (2) Was woman responsible for the "Fall" of man? and (3) Why was woman created?

It is not possible within the scope of this article to deal exhaustively with any of the above-mentioned questions. However, I would like to focus briefly on the first question which deals with the issue of woman's creation. I consider this issue to be more basic and important, philosophically and theologically, than any other in the context of woman-man equality because if man and woman have been created equal by Allah who is the ultimate arbiter of value, then they cannot become essentially unequal at a subsequent time. On the other hand, if man and woman have been created unequal by Allah, then they cannot become essentially equal at a subsequent time.

The Issue of Woman's Creation

The ordinary Muslim believes, as seriously as the ordinary Jew or Christian, that Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib. While this myth obviously is rooted in the Yahwist's account of creation in Genesis 2: 18-24, it has no basis whatever in the Qur'an which describes the creation of humanity in completely egalitarian terms. In the thirty or so passages pertaining to the subject of human creation, the Qur'an uses generic terms for humanity ("an-nas," "al-insan," "bashar") and there is no mention in it of Hawwa' or Eve. The word "Adam" occurs twenty-five times in the Qur'an but it is used in twenty-one cases as a symbol for self-conscious humanity. Here, it is pertinent to point out that the word "Adam" is a Hebrew word (from "adamah" meaning "the soil") and it functions generally as a collective noun referring to "the human" rather than to a male person. In the Qur'an, the word "Adam" (which Arabic borrowed from Hebrew) mostly does not refer to a particular human being. Rather, it refers to human beings in a particular way. As pointed out by Muhammad Iqbal:

Indeed, in the verses which deal with the origin of man as a living being, the Qur'an uses the words "Bashar" or "Insan," not "Adam" which it reserves for man in his capacity of God's vicegerent on earth. The purpose of the Qur'an is further secured by the omission of the proper names mentioned in the Biblical narration of Adam and Eve. The term "Adam" is retained and used more as a concept than as a name of a concrete human individual. The word
An analysis of the Qur’anic descriptions of human creation shows how the Qur’an evenhandedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single source. That God’s original creation was undifferentiated humanity and not either man or woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time) is implicit in a number of Qur’anic passages. If the Qur’an makes no distinction between the creation of man and woman—as it clearly does not—why do Muslims believe that Hawwa’ was created from Adam’s rib? It is difficult to imagine that Muslims got this idea directly from Genesis 2 since very few Muslims read the Bible. It is much more likely that the rib story entered the Islamic tradition through being incorporated in the hadith literature during the early centuries of Islam. In this context the following six hadith are particularly important since they are cited in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which Sunni Muslims regard as the two most authoritative hadith collections whose authority is exceeded only by the Qur’an:

1. Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so if you would try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely. 4
2. The woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her, she will break. So if you want to get benefit from her, do so while she still has some crookedness. 5
3. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor. And I advise you to take care of the women, for they are created from a rib and the most crooked part of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked, so I urge you to take care of woman. 4
4. Woman is like a rib. When you attempt to straighten it, you would break it. And if you leave her alone you would benefit by her, and crookedness will remain in her. 7

5. Ibid., p. 80.
6. Ibid., p. 81.
5. Woman has been created from a rib and will in no way be straightened for you; so if you wish to benefit by her, benefit by her while crookedness remains in her. And if you attempt to straighten her, you will break her, and breaking her is divorcing her.\

6. He who believes in Allah and the Hereafter, if he witnesses any matter he should talk in good terms about it or keep quiet. Act kindly towards women, for woman is created from a rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is its top. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it, its crookedness will remain there so act kindly towards women.

In my research/writings I have examined the above *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*) and shown them to be weak with regard to their formal aspect (i.e., with reference to their *isnad*, or list of transmitters). As far as their content (*matn*) is concerned, it is obviously in opposition to the Qur'anic accounts about human creation. Since all Muslim scholars agree on the principle that any *hadith* which is in contradiction to the Qur'an cannot be accepted as authentic, the above-mentioned *ahadith* ought to be rejected on material grounds. However, they still continue to be a part of the Islamic tradition. This is due, in significant measure, to the fact that they are included in the *hadith* collections by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (810-70) and Muslim bin al-Hallaj (817-75), collectively known as the *Sahihan* (from “sahih” meaning sound or authentic) and “form an almost unassailable authority, subject indeed to criticisms in details, yet deriving an indestructible influence from the ‘ijma’ or general consent of the community in custom and belief, which it is their function to authenticate.” The continuing popularity of these *ahadith* amongst Muslims in general also indicates that they articulate something deeply embedded in Muslim culture, namely, the belief that women are derivative and secondary in the context of human creation.

Theologically, the history of women's inferior status in the Islamic (as well as the Jewish and Christian) tradition began with the story of Hawwa's creation from a (crooked) rib. The negative impact of this story on the life of Jewish, Christian and Muslim women is impossible to overstate. However, if one bears in mind that the rib story has no place in the Qur'an which upholds the view that man and woman were created equal by God, then the existing inequality between men and women cannot be seen as having been mandated by God but must be seen as a subversion of God's original plan for humanity.

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., pp. 752-753.
Muslim Women: Qur'anic Ethics versus Muslim Practice

Reference has been made in the foregoing account to the fundamental theological assumptions that have colored the way in which Muslim culture in general has viewed women. That these assumptions have had serious negative consequences and implications—both theoretical and practical—for Muslim women throughout Muslim history up till the present time needs to be emphasized. At the same time, it needs to be borne in mind that the Qur’an, which to Muslims in general is the most authoritative source of Islam, does not discriminate against women despite the sad and bitter fact of history that the cumulative (Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, Bedouin, and other) biases which existed in the Arab-Islamic culture of the early centuries of Islam infiltrated the Islamic tradition, largely through the hadith literature, and undermined the intent of the Qur’an to liberate women from the status of chattel or inferior creatures, making them free and equal to men. Not only does the Qur’an emphasize that righteousness is identical in the case of man or woman, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women’s equality with men and their fundamental right to actualize the human potential that they share equally with men. In fact, when seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Qur’an goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits particular solicitude toward women as also toward other classes of disadvantaged persons. Further, it provides particular safeguards for protecting women’s special sexual/biological functions such as carrying, delivering, suckling, and rearing, offspring.

God, who speaks through the Qur’an, is characterized by justice, and it is stated clearly in the Qur’an that God never can be guilty of zulm (unfairness, tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing). Hence, the Qur’an, as God’s word, cannot be made the source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived. The goal of Qur’anic Islam is to establish peace, which only can exist within a just environment. Here it is of importance to note that there is more Qur’anic legislation pertaining to the establishment of justice in the context of family relationships than on any other subject. This points to the assumption implicit in much Qur’anic legislation, namely, that if human beings can learn to order their homes justly so that the rights of all within it—children, women, men—are safeguarded, then they also can order their society and the world at large, justly. In other words, the Qur’an regards the home as a microcosm of the ummah (community of believers) and the world community, and emphasizes the importance of making it “the abode of peace” through just living.

In my judgment, the importance of developing what the West calls “feminist theology” in the context of the Islamic tradition is paramount today in order to liberate not only Muslim women, but also Muslim men, from unjust social structures and systems of thought that make a peer relationship between men and women impossible. It is extremely important for Muslim women activists to
and merciful and that, as a creature of this just and merciful God, she is entitled
to justice and protection from every kind of oppression and inequity. I make
this statement because I have seen the eyes of many Muslim women who have
lived in hopelessness and helplessness, light up when they realize what immense
possibilities for development exist for them within the framework of the belief-
system which defines their world.

In the end a word needs to be said about the representation of Muslim
women in the West and by the Western media. Since the 1970s there has been
a growing interest in the West in Islam and Muslims. Much of this interest has
been focused, however, on a few subjects such as “Islamic Revival,” “Islamic
than on understanding the complexity and diversity of “the World of Islam.”
Not only the choice of subjects which tend to evoke or provoke strong emotive
responses in both Westerners and Muslims, but also the manner in which these
subjects generally have been portrayed by Western media or popular literature,
calls into question the motivation that underlies the selective Western interest in
Islam and Muslims.

Given the reservoir of negative images associated with Islam and Muslims
in “the collective unconscious” of the West, it is hardly surprising that, since the
demise of the Soviet Empire, “the World of Islam” is being seen as the new
“enemy,” which is perhaps even more incomprehensible and intractable than the
last one. The routine portrayal of Islam as a religion spread by the sword and
characterized by “holy war,” and of Muslims as barbarous and backward,
frenzied and fanatic, volatile and violent, has led, in recent times, to an alarming
increase in “Muslim-bashing”—verbal and physical, as well as psychological—
in a number of Western countries. In the midst of so much hatred and aversion
toward Islam and Muslims in general, the outpouring of so much sympathy in,
and by, the West toward Muslim women appears—at least at a prima facie
level—to be an amazing contradiction. For are Muslim women also not
adherents of Islam? And are Muslim women also not victims of “Muslim-
bashing?” Few of us can forget the brutal burning of Turkish Muslim girls by
German gangsters or the ruthless rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian
soldiers.

Since the modern notion of human rights originated in a Western, secular
context, Muslims in general, but Muslim women in particular, find themselves
in a quandary when they initiate, or participate in, a discussion on human rights
whether in the West or in Muslim societies. Based on their life experience,
most Muslim women who become human rights advocates or activists feel
strongly that virtually all Muslim societies discriminate against women from
cradle to grave. This leads many of them to become deeply alienated from
Muslim culture in a number of ways. This sense of alienation oftentimes leads
to anger and bitterness toward the patriarchal structures and systems of thought
which dominate Muslim societies. Muslim women often find much support and
sympathy in the West so long as they are seen as rebels and deviants within the
world of Islam. But many of them begin to realize, sooner or later, that while
they have serious difficulties with Muslim culture, they also are not able, for
many reasons, to identify with Western, secular culture. This realization leads
them to feel—at least for a time—isolated and alone. Much attention has been
focused, in Western media and literature, on the sorry plight of Muslim women
who are “poor and oppressed” in visible or tangible ways. Hardly any notice
has been taken, however, of the profound tragedy and trauma suffered by the
self-aware Muslim women who are struggling to maintain their religious identity
and personal autonomy in the face of the intransigence of Muslim culture, on the
one hand, and the imperialism of Western, secular culture, on the other hand.

Although the West constantly bemoans what it refers to as the “rise of
Islamic fundamentalism,” it does not extend significant recognition or support
to progressive Muslims who are far more representative of “mainstream”
modern Islam than either the conservative Muslims on the right or the “secular”
Muslims on the left. Even after the Iranian Revolution and the “Islamization”
of an increasing number of Muslim societies, many Western analysts are still
unable or unwilling to see Islam as a religion capable of being interpreted in a
progressive way or a source of liberation to Muslim peoples. An even deeper
problem is their refusal to understand the pivotal role of Islam in the lives of
Muslims, the vast majority of whom—in a worldwide community estimated to
be over one billion—are “believers” rather than “unbelievers.” Compelled by
facts of modern history, some social scientists in the West are now beginning
to concede that Islam is one of the factors that needs to be considered—along
with political, economic, ethnic, social and other factors—in planning and
evaluating development projects. This approach, though an improvement on the
one which does not take account of religion at all, is still not adequate for
understanding the issues of the Muslim world or finding ways of resolving them.
Islam is not, in my judgment, simply one of the factors which impact on the
lives of Muslims. It is the matrix in which all other factors are grounded. I do
not believe that any viable model of self-actualization can be constructed in
Muslim societies for women or men which is outside the framework of
normative Islam deriving from Qur’anic teachings and exemplified in the life of
the Prophet of Islam. Nor do I believe that any profoundly meaningful or
constructive dialogue can take place between “the World of Islam” and “the
West” without a proper recognition of what Islam means to millions of Muslims.

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