

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

It is difficult to identify a thinker who integrates as many opposites in his person and in his ideas as Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938). A juxtaposition of some of the opposites that he integrates would look like this:

He is among the last classical Persian and Urdu poets.

He is among the first modern Muslim philosophers.

He is considered the intellectual father of Pakistan.

One of his poems is among the national songs of India.

His *Javed Namah* is an expression of his love for Rumi.

His *Payam-e-Mashriq* is an expression of his love for Goethe.

The Turks honored him, giving him an honorary resting place alongside Rumi in Konya.

The Germans honored him by naming a park after him in Heidelberg.

He counted Rumi, Ibn Khaldun, Ghazali, Akbar Allahabadi among his teachers.

He openly acknowledged his debt to Emerson, Whitehead, Bergson, James, Royce.

The leading philosophers of his day counted him as one of their own.

The leading mystics of his day counted him as one of their own.

His work demonstrates intimate knowledge of modern science and Western philosophy.

He considered all his poetry and philosophy to be an exegesis of the Qur'an.

Iqbal's quest to build bridges and establish relationship between opposites embodies the spirit of *Tawheed* and is a major reason for his widespread popularity in the Muslim world. His Urdu poetry is known throughout the Indo-Pak subcontinent and his Persian

poetry—in Iran and the Persian-speaking Central Asian republics. Arabic translations of his poetry have been put to song by the Arab icon Umm Kulthum. His works in translation are avidly read in Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia. With the spread of the Muslim diaspora in the West, academies have been established in England, Norway, the United States, and elsewhere to disseminate his work.

As Iqbal points out repeatedly in his poetry and prose, his quest to build bridges and establish relations is the result of a Qur'anically inspired vision. This *tawheedic* vision aspires to transform life-denying divisions into life-giving relationships. A partial list of the divisions that are transformed into relationships in Iqbal's thought would include: modernity/tradition, East/West, religion/science, philosophy/mysticism, and the human self/Divine Other. His best-known work in prose, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, is the one place where Iqbal's philosophy is outlined most clearly and systematically. This is a seminal text for both Islamic and modern Western philosophy. For a variety of reasons, it has been published only once by a Western press, Oxford University Press in 1934, in an unedited, unfootnoted form. After a lapse of almost eighty years, a collaboration between the Iqbal Academy Pakistan and Stanford University Press addressed this lacuna. Given the centrality of the Qur'an in Iqbal's thought (the Qur'an is the most often cited source in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*), it is very fitting that this text is being re-introduced to a Western audience as part of the Encountering Traditions series.

The publication of this classic by Stanford University Press introduces the thought of one of the most important Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century to a new generation of Western scholars. Iqbal's thought played a decisive role in the establishment of one Muslim nation-state (Pakistan), it played a critical role in one of the major political revolutions in the twentieth century (the Iranian Revolution), and it made a significant contribution to the survival of Muslim identity in parts of the former USSR. Given the significant impact of Iqbal's ideas in different parts of the Muslim world, direct access to this text opens up the possibility of a better understanding of the Muslim world.

Still, it would be a gross underestimation of the significance of Iqbal's thought if one were to assume that its relevance is limited to the Muslim world. Robert Whittemore argues that while Iqbal's

philosophy is faithful to the teachings of the Qur'an, it is "an achievement possessing a philosophical importance far transcending the world of Islam."¹ Iqbal's *falsafa-e-khudi* offers a possible resolution to one of the most intractable conflicts in globalized Western modernity: "the perennial conflict between science, philosophy, and religion."² Commenting on the place of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* in modern philosophy, Whittemore notes, "Iqbal, in fact, has added yet another dimension to that cosmological point of view associated in the west with such names as Whitehead, Berdyaev, Montague, Hartshorne, and William James."³ Iqbal's work does not add to modern philosophy in merely quantitative terms. Whittemore concludes his analysis by suggesting that the breadth and success of Iqbal's reconstruction project make it a unique achievement in the annals of modern Western philosophy.

Charles Taylor argues that Iqbal's thought is significant not only from the perspective of intellectual history but also because it speaks directly to our present cultural condition. After noting (in 2010) that "we must reread Iqbal," Taylor goes on to explain:

We . . . have shared reasons, Western, Muslim and Eastern merged together, in reading this remarkable man. Because our dialogues are troubled by a deep and mutual distrust. This distrust is partly derived from our own uncertainty regarding our identity, which sometimes gives us a feeling of insecurity under the gaze of others. It's this feeling that can lead to a sort of hyper-confidence, tightening around a rigid identity, and the belligerent rejection of the other as the bearer of evil. To seek out and define oneself using references found in the other's tradition becomes impossible, becomes treasonous.⁴

Iqbal is of special relevance in a cultural setting in which the affirmation of the self is practically impossible without labeling the other "as the bearer of evil." In environments shadowed by distrust and fear of the alien other, Iqbal is especially relevant: "In this atmosphere of suspicion and anger, it is a joy to hear the voice of Iqbal, both passionate and serene. It is the voice of a soul that is deeply anchored in the Qur'anic Revelation, and precisely for that reason, open to all the other voices, seeking in them the path of his own fidelity."⁵ Consequently, "we all need to hear him again,"⁶ whether we are citizens of the East or the West, Muslim or non-Muslim, believers or non-believers.

A few people deserve special mention in bringing this project to fruition. Suheyl Umar, director of the Iqbal Academy Pakistan, played the most critical role in the process. Acquisitions editor Emily-Jane Cohen at Stanford University Press deserves special thanks as well. The project would not have reached fruition without the efforts of the academic editorial board of the Encountering Traditions series at Stanford University Press: Stanley Hauerwas, Peter Ochs, Randi Rashkover, and Maria Dakake. It is hoped that the collaboration across cultures, institutions, traditions, countries, and religions that resulted in the publication of this text will lead to the generation of new relationships and to the opening of new horizons for its readers.

Basit Bilal Koshul
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Lahore, Pakistan

Notes

1. R. Whitemore, "Iqbal's Pantheism," *The Review of Metaphysics* 9, no. 4 (June 1956): 681–99, 682.
2. *Ibid.*, 698.
3. *Ibid.*, 682.
4. C. Taylor, "Preface" in S. B. Diagne, *Islam and Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, xi–xii; translated from the French by Melissa McMahon (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2010), xi.
5. *Ibid.*, xii.
6. *Ibid.*