PREFACE

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The papers present in this book, compiled and published by the Fondation pour l’innovation politique, enlighten today’s debates over the true values of Islam and other issues related to the presence of France’s second religion. By contemplating the line that is indiscriminately drawn between Islam and violence, we are inevitably led to reflect upon those challenges that threaten the future togetherness of our society. For many of our fellow citizens, the essence of this religion seems to be made up of terrorism, all-conquering jihad and the supremacy of Sharia law. This issue is further clouded by the religion’s apparent use of fear, its hyper-mediatisation of horror, rejection of others and withdrawn stance in society. It is a troubling state of affairs that is maintained by the complicit silence of some, and aggravated by the political and ideological manipulation of others. How can we respond to such a challenge, without upsetting those who benefit from it? It is inconceivable to do so without challenging the simplistic notion that the world is divided into Good and Evil. In order to survive and prosper, society needs a shared vision, one centred on a meaningful common denominator that unifies and engenders togetherness. Only with this may individuals realise that they belong to one shared body and that, by acting for the common good, they are also acting for their own benefit.

Over the course of the texts that make up this book, eleven eminent specialists help to navigate us through the fog of muddled definitions – Islamism, Salafism, fundamentalism, extremism, etc. – that only serve to distort Islam’s original message. They usher in a more serene debate aimed at a better understanding of the situation, helping us to identify ways to calm tensions and remedy a virus that is consuming the flesh of our social organism. Everybody here – be they a politician, historian, expert on Islam or believer – is committed to addressing this problem in an open, honest and forthright manner. Without any prior consultation, their analyses all find common ground in the internal factors that are harming this religion, and in the means to be implemented in order for its underlying message to help unite a society in its common destiny. They call for ijtihad (an effort to interpret) and for a reconnection of Muslim thought with universal values centred on the teachings of tolerance and harmony, the social foundations of liberty, equality and fraternity.

What does it mean to be Muslim today? To be a full and equal citizen, or to be marginalized? Muslims represent over 20% of those employed by the main public
organs of the army, the civil guard, the police, and the systems of public care and national education. Have they therefore not been a key component of society for many generations? Now is the moment to act, and urgently, at a time when many young people see no more cause for hope, opting instead for destructive radicalism and falling prey to those who purport to offer them a passport to paradise.

All around the world, a fringe group of media-savvy Islamists use the same words, ideas and customs as they tempt troubled young people with a sort of Islamic one-stop-shop, ultimately rewarded by a ticket to paradise. As such, the weak and uneducated are corrupted. This brings to mind a sort of International Islam, yet the reality is not so coherent. Who nowadays speaks to us of the great diversity of thinkers, philosophers and poets, of the numerous legal schools and mystic traditions to have emerged from the Islam of Enlightenment, from the East and the West, which have made such a mark on Muslim civilisation? We must establish a genuine educational and civic path that teaches values, knowledge, practices and behaviours. We must encourage effective and efficient participation in both social and professional life. We must all exercise our own freedoms while respecting the rights of others, reject violence, and learn to contest without confrontation.

These authors are at last calling for a prescriptive, stagnant, inward-looking, neurotic and powerless Islam to transform itself and to adapt to modern times. Each separate population practices an Islam influenced by their own culture – the ummah is a cloth of many colours. Yet nowadays the religion has been taken hostage: after fifteen centuries of history, we are faced with a one-size-fits-all religion that is formatted, standardised and ready for use. The list of deaths and suicide attacks grows longer by the day. Meanwhile Islamic rhetoric, like all political rhetoric, delivers the same “truths” and ultimately promotes an ideology that is no different from that of its so-called enemies, consisting as it does of one uniform way of life for the whole planet.

In their own way, all the authors assembled on these pages underline the importance of choosing a path governed by faith and reason. They advise returning to a living spirituality, one that carries meaning and is based on responsibility, positive actions and enlightening education. From the very beginning, societies have always been founded on education and the transferral of values, be they material, moral or spiritual. Over the ages, men have repeatedly built civilisations out of the continued transferral of values and principles that have often changed, developed and even regressed. Our present-day society, having inherited this past, is faced with mutation and cultural mixing on a spectacular scale. The boundaries between the East and the West are becoming increasingly blurred and the reach of globalisation extends further and further, with no regard for people’s values. It would appear that uniformity and globality reign supreme.

This trend, far from leading us towards unity, is instead driving us towards a binary, dualist and increasingly atomised world. It is creating an environment that is troublingly characterised by opposition and antagonism. Far from the harmonious world of universal values suggested to us by wisdoms and traditions, the current
path does not allow us as beings to live and experience this unity through Creation, and less still to bring it about ourselves. Diversity, which we each individually perceive in our own way, consists of an extraordinary variety of species, colours and shapes. But in fact, if we observe it attentively and scientifically, we discover that life in all its diversity is as one.

The universe is made up of one unique substance, whether energy or matter, albeit one that manifests itself to us in various forms. This unity is at the heart of Creation.

The education of spiritual enlightenment – which guides us towards this unity – has been forgotten today, even by the Muslim world, for which it was the essential message: *tawhid*, uniqueness. This path leads slowly but surely towards the rediscovery of a primordial origin found in us, and then to that of the unity of All, the unity of the Living.

Our “temporal reality” is part of an “absolute reality”. We can only grasp its meaning by transcendentally liberating our mind and allowing it access to this other vision of the world, founded on the notion of Unity. This source, the origin of the eternal Living, is continually calling out to us throughout our brief spell on earth, inviting us to shun self-regard and duality, and instead to recognise the universal reality that embraces All.

Who could possibly not wish to live in a peaceful world? It is somewhat paradoxical that deep down everyone yearns for peace, but that we are incapable of freeing ourselves from savagery, from the violence that has been drilled into us throughout the history of mankind. We have been shaken by the attacks in Toulouse in 2012; in Paris, Montrouge and the Porte de Vincennes on 7th, 8th and 9th January 2015; in Paris and St Denis on 13th November of the same year; in addition to all the other acts of violence that regularly take place the world over. They demonstrate to us how fragile and monstrous the behaviour of certain people can be. These murderous attacks target all of us, and impact all of us. These acts are aimed at the heart of the universal values that unite human beings in our diversity, in order to create a climate of terror, to establish the supremacy of chaos and brutality. Blind extremism has no religion. Its goal is to sew death and confusion. These acts only add to the suffering endured on a daily basis by millions of men, women and children. Let us guard against being carried away by this whirlwind of violence and hatred. The blood of the victims, still warm, demands justice and recompense. It requires us to examine our conscience and to seek objectivity. Two wrongs do not make a right, and returning evil for evil is not the solution. We must find within ourselves the strength, the energy and the enlightenment to eradicate the ills from society’s ailing body. The surge of refugees who cross the Mediterranean each day in their thousands, chased from their homes by conflicts that sew chaos and destruction, reminds us that we live in an unstable and rapidly changing world. Peace is a state of being that is first sewn, and then cultivated, in our minds in order to change our outlook and to shape a world where violence will no longer tear us apart. Some will say that this is just the stuff of fantasy, but is our challenge not to turn that dream into reality? It is a mission on which our lives, the lives of future generations, and the fate of our planet depend; a
necessity, required to raise awareness of the fraternal links that bind humanity together; a civic engagement, a common vision and a desire to live together more harmoniously, to know each other more intimately and to understand each other more deeply, be it in our towns, cities, countries, communities or institutions.

I extend my warm thanks to the Fondation pour l’innovation politique, and particularly to its Executive Director and our friend, Dominique Reynié, for having created this platform for reflection. My thanks also go to the authors who have contributed to enriching this debate. Let us each carefully read and reflect upon their brave and committed writing and contemplate how we can work with, rather than against, each other to create synergy and build a shared future.

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