

Just My Fallible Views, Again Replies to Some Enquiries

Prefatory Note

The text of this article is taken from parts of six e-mail replies, in 2011 and 2012, to three correspondents, with four of these replies being to one correspondent. The first correspondent listed here initially enquired about my Numinous Way and then about my extremist past and my current views in relation to politics. The second correspondent enquired about my current attitude to Islam, my experiences of the Muslim way of life, and about sundry other matters. The third correspondent enquired about my opinion regarding various 'right-wing' organizations and their opposition to Islam.

For publication here, I have corrected a few typos with [...] indicating some text has been omitted, and omitted mainly because it is of a personal nature or strayed rather off-topic. These extracts are published because they deal with topics I have been regularly asked about for the past three years.

David Myatt
2012

Correspondent #1 (2012)

Politics, Pathei-Mathos, and My Extremist Past

Yesterday was one of those glorious English Summer days of warm Sun, blue sky, when I - after a long walk - had sat down in the tufted grass on that slope of a hill to view the vista below. The river curving as it curved through the hedged-in fields of crops and pasture; the far distant greenful hills unclear in heat-made haze; the country lane that, now devoid of vehicles, would give access again to scattered houses and those well-separated working farms. It felt - perhaps was - paradise on Earth, for I fortunate to have water, food enough to feed me for a day; clothes and boots - though worn - sufficient for their purpose; even a place - dry, undamp, with bed - to sleep such sleep as might by night be gifted. It felt - and was - good to be alive, touched a little and for a while by some type of inner peace. So little, so very little, really needed...

The problem in the past had been me, my lack of understanding of myself and my egoism. It was my fault: not the place, not the time, not the people, for I so desired with that arrogance of youth to exchange this paradise, here, for those ideas, the idealism, the abstractions, I carried around in my prideful hubriatic head. Seldom content, for long, since happiness came with – was – the pursuit, or the gratification of my personal desires. So destructive, so very destructive. So hurtful, inconsiderate, selfish, profane.

The defining moment, for me – in terms of understanding myself, in terms of understanding politics and the error of my decades of extremism – was the tragic personal loss of a loved one in May 2006. In the hours following that event I just knew – tearfully knew without words – my own pathetic failure; what I had lost, what was important. Thus there came upon me that day a sense of overwhelming grief, compounded by a remembrance of another personal loss of a loved one thirteen years earlier. For it was as if in those intervening years I had learned nothing; as if I had made the life and the dying and death of Sue, in 1993 – and of what we shared in the years before – unimportant.

I have no words to describe how insignificant, how worthless, I felt that day in May 2006; no words to describe, recall, retell, the remorse, the pain. Suffice now to recount that my life was never, could never be, the same again. Gone – the arrogance that had sustained me for so many experiential decades. Gone – the beliefs, the abstractions, the extremisms, I had so cherished and so believed in. That it took me another three years, from that day, to finally, irretrievably, break the bonds of my Shahadah sworn six years earlier – and the oath of personal loyalty that I believed still bound me to one person still alive then in a far distant land – most certainly says something more about me, about my character, about my interior struggles.

Thus it was that I came to know, to feel, how irrelevant politics and political organizations were for me, personally. So that ever since I have had no desire whatsoever to involve myself in politics – or even in trying to somehow change the world be it by politics, or by religion, or by whatever. Instead, my concern has been to try to [fully] understand and thence reform myself; to reflect upon my four decades of diverse involvements, discovering as I did those involvements for the extremisms they were; and to try to, and finally sans all abstractions, answer important questions such as Quid Est Veritas.

As I wrote in my May 2012 essay *Pathei-Mathos, Genesis of My Unknowing*:

"What I painfully, slowly, came to understand, via pathei-mathos, was the importance - the human necessity, the virtue - of love, and how love expresses or can express the numinous in the most sublime, the most human, way. Of how extremism (of whatever political or religious or ideological kind) places some abstraction, some ideation, some notion of duty to some ideation, before a personal love, before a knowing and an appreciation of the numinous. Thus does extremism - usurping such humanizing personal love - replace human love with an extreme, an unbalanced, an intemperate, passion for something abstract: some ideation, some ideal, some dogma, some 'victory', some-thing always supra-personal and always destructive of personal happiness, personal dreams, personal hopes; and always manifesting an impersonal harshness: the harshness of hatred, intolerance, certitude-of-knowing, unfairness, violence, prejudice.

Thus, instead of a natural and a human concern with what is local, personal and personally known, extremism breeds a desire to harshly interfere in the lives of others - personally unknown and personally distant - on the basis of such a hubriatic certitude-of-knowing that strife and suffering are inevitable. For there is in all extremists that stark lack of personal humility, that unbalance, that occurs when - as in all extremisms - what is masculous is emphasized and idealized and glorified to the detriment (internal, and external) of what is muliebral, and thus when some ideology or some dogma or some faith or some cause is given precedence over love and when loyalty to some manufactured abstraction is given precedence over loyalty to family, loved ones, friends.

For I have sensed that there are only changeable individual ways and individual fallible answers, born again and again via pathei-mathos and whose subtle scent - the wisdom - words can neither capture nor describe, even though we try and perhaps need to try, and try perhaps (as for me) as one hopeful needful act of a non-religious redemption."

Therefore I have no political views now; I do not and cannot support any

political organization, as I do not adhere to nor believe in nor support any particular religion or even any conventional Way of Life. All I have are some personal and fallible answers to certain philosophical, personal, ethical, and theological, questions. No certainty about anything except about my own uncertainty of knowing and about the mistakes, the errors, of my past.

Having written so much - far too much - for so many decades and having made so many suffering-causing mistakes, I also have no desire now to write anymore about anything, except perchance for a few missives such as this, as part perhaps of my needed expiation, and in explanatory reply when asked of certain things. Such as in exposition of my mistakes, my remorse, and particularly in explanation of the personal love, the gentleness, the compassion, the humility, the peace, that I feel - feel, not know - might possibly enable us to find, to feel, our paradise on Earth, and so not cause suffering, not add to the suffering that so blights this world and has so blighted it for so long, mostly because of people such as me. The ideologues, the extremists, the fanatics, the terrorists, the bigots, the egoists. The unhumble ones unappreciative of the numinous: those whose certainty of knowing - and those whose sense of a personal 'destiny' - makes them uncompassionate, unempathic, hateful, prejudiced, intolerant, and devoted to either 'their cause' or to themselves. Those whose happiness comes with - and is - the pursuit, and/or the gratification of their so selfish desires.

Just how many more seasons - years, decades, centuries, millennia - will we humans as a species need to find and to live our mortal lives in compassionate, empathic, paradisaal peace?

[...]

Correspondent #2
(2012)

Reply 1

You seem very much preoccupied with lessons you have learned from grief and regret, pain and suffering [...]

[My] recent propensity to be somewhat subsumed with a certain sadness [arose] from not only pondering on such questions as *pathei-mathos*, the

causes/alleviation of suffering, and the nature of religion, expiation, and extremism, but also from understanding, from feeling, just how much suffering I personally have caused during my extremist decades and knowing that had it not been for the tragic death of a loved one some six years ago I would most probably have continued my career as a suffering-causing extremist.

Also, having spent decades trying to idealistically inspire people or manipulate them, and being manipulative either for allegedly idealistic reasons (some political or religious cause) or for purely selfish reasons, I finally came to know just how easy it is to make excuses for one's mistakes and unethical behaviour, especially in relation to some ideology or some political or religious cause. Having good intentions, I discovered, is not a valid reason to cause suffering, although believing one acted from good intentions does and can salve one's conscience. For I came to the conclusion that idealism itself was one of the fundamental causes of suffering, and that ultimately it is matter of us taking individual responsibility for ourselves and all our actions; for the suffering we cause, have caused, or can cause. To shift that responsibility onto others (as in some chain-of-command) - or onto some political cause or some faith - is just, in my fallible view at least, unethical. As is positing or believing in some supreme deity who will decide matters for us (and judge us and others) and/or who has, apparently, laid down what is right and what is wrong.

There are somewhat complex and difficult questions here (or at least they seem complex and difficult questions to me). Questions such as if there is no God/supreme-deity - and no mechanism such as karma and thus no rebirth - then how to understand suffering and what do reformation of ourselves and expiation mean, and do they even have, or should they have, any meaning sans religion? How do we - sans religion and ideology - decide, know, what is ethical and what can motivate us to act ethically? What is innocence? Horrid things happen every day to people who do not deserve them. Every minute of every day somewhere some human being suffers because of some deed done to them by some other human being. Should that concern us? If so, why, and what could/might we do about it, and will what we do cause more suffering?

What I have termed 'the philosophy, the way, of pathei-mathos' - that is, my now much revised 'numinous way' - is just my attempt to answer such questions. And an attempt born from me accepting the truth about myself

and my suffering-causing past. To do otherwise, I feel and felt, would have been to somehow in some way demean – to not learn from – that tragic recent death of a loved one. To, instead, continue with the arrogance, the hubris, of my past.

Perhaps it would have been easier for me to just accept the answers of some existing Way or of some religion. Certainly, a religious expiation could have eased the burden, relieved and relieve some or most of the grief, felt. A burden, a grief, which certainly has fuelled and infused my writings these past few years and some of which writings are my rather feeble attempts at a non-religious but hopefully still numinous expiation.

[...]

Reply 2

Perhaps all we can do is try and communicate, in some way (but gently) that wordless (empathic) knowing of another human being to others. A wordless humanizing knowing that I have come to appreciate many men seem to so often lack or believe or feel is far less important than their macho posturing and their love of and seeming need for conflict, control, competition, and war. Perhaps if women were more assertive, empowered, accepting of themselves, and perhaps if men appreciated women more – and men (heaven forbid) developed within themselves certain muliebral qualities – there might be less suffering in the world.

[...]

In my personal experience at least there is and was a positive aspect to Catholicism, as there is (again in my view and my experience) a positive aspect to most if not all conventional religions from Islam to Judaism to Buddhism to Christianity.

This is, they have the propensity to remind us of the need for humility by setting certain limits regarding our behaviour, and by in some way and in their own manner making us aware of the numinous, the sacred. Which is why, over the decades, I have learned to respect them and their adherents while accepting that their answers, their way, are not my answers, my way.

In respect of the sacred, for instance, I still find that one of the most beautiful expressions of the numinous is Catholic chant: Gregorian, Cistercien, and Vieux-Roman. Indeed, one of my favourite pieces of music

is now, as it has been for decades, *Répons de Matines pour la fête de Saint Bernard*. One of my treasured memories is, as a monk, singing the office of Compline and then, in the sublime silence of the church, going to the Lady Chapel to kneel in contemplative wordless prayer on the stone floor in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Such peace, such purity, in those moments. Another treasured memory is, decades later and when a Muslim, travelling in the Western Desert and with my Egyptian guide stopping to face Makkah and pray Zuhr Namaz while the hot Sun beat down and a hot breeze blew sand to cover part of my prayer mat. Again, a purity of silence - no one else around for perhaps a hundred miles - and a wordless warm feeling of connexion with something pure and far beyond and balancing our human hubris: to place us into the necessary supra-personal perspective.

Perhaps on balance the positive, humanizing, virtues of such religions now outweigh their negative qualities? Certainly, it seems to me, that most of the worst excesses of - for example - Christianity are now and hopefully historical (and one thinks here of excesses such as the Inquisition).

Another simple personal story; one from among so many in relation to other religions and their positive attributes. Once I happened to be travelling to [...] an area which colonial and imperialist Europeans formerly described as part of 'darkest Africa' [...] Part of this travel involved a really long journey on unpaved roads by bus from an urban area. You know the type of thing - an unreliable weekly or sporadic service in some old vehicle used by villagers to take themselves (and often their produce and sometimes their livestock) to and from an urban market and urban-dwelling relatives. On this service, to a remote area, it [seemed to be] the custom - before the journey could begin - for someone to stand at the front and say a Christian prayer with every passenger willingly joining in. It was quite touching. As was the fact that, at the village where I stayed (with a local family) near that grave, everyone went to Church on a Sunday, wearing the best clothes they could, and there was a real sense (at least to me) of how their faith helped them and gave them some guidance for the better, for it was if they, poor as they were, were in some way living, or were perhaps partly an embodiment of, the ethos expressed by the Sermon of the Mount, and although I no longer shared their Christian faith, I admired them and respected their belief and understood what that faith seemed to have given them. Who was - who am - I to try and preach to them, to judge them and that faith? I was

- I am - just one fallible human being who believes he may have some personal and fallible answers to certain questions; just one person among billions aware of his past arrogance and his suffering-causing mistakes.

You just seem so sad... and it's such a pity to waste time being sad when there are a million and one reasons not to be.

In a strange way a certain sadness seems to keep me focussed, balanced, and human, preventing - sans religion - the return of that arrogant, hubriatic, violent individual who incited and preached hatred, intolerance, violence, killing, and who was responsible for causing much suffering.

[...]

Not that long ago I was reminded of a veteran of the First World War I had briefly known during my first year as a nurse as I cared for him as he recovered from surgery and then, later on, lay dying. He came back from that war a changed and quiet man who abhorred war, with a desire to just live a simple, normal, life. So he married, became a father; a grandfather; his world his family. But he never forgot those years; their tragedy; the loss of so many of his comrades; the horror and - in his words - the futility of it all. He had a real dignity, partly because of that inner sadness that so seemed to suffuse him. He had also, many times, felt himself to be an interloper among people. This knowing of him, and his dying, moved me; causing me to consider and reconsider certain questions. But of course this feeling and such insights did not last, and within six months - having ceased to be a nurse - my hubriatic, warmongering, self had reasserted itself, yet again.

Thus consciously recalling my own pathei-mathos, and that of others, and feeling the sadness that is part of such a learning, is I feel somewhat necessary, at least for me and for now.

Reply 3

As I type this I am listening to the orchestral version of Ravel's Pavane pour une Infante Defunte, and the beautiful music, your message, remind me yet again of our strange human condition; of our ability, our potential, to do what is fair, to be kind and to love, and also of our propensity to hate, to resort to violence, to be barbaric, as if the suffering of so many

for so many millennia meant nothing, with nothing learned, except by a few.

A while ago, when I chanced to be travelling in England the train stopped at a station to allow new passengers to embark, I noticed a group of some four young men, in their early twenties. Yet even had not two of them been wearing (what I am informed are called) 'hoodies' embroidered with the name and symbol of their organization I would have recognized them. For forty years ago that would have been me, there, at such a place on such a day as that. A young man enthusiastically on his way to some political demonstration, or some meeting; proudly, defiantly, displaying his allegiance to his extremist cause, and standing, walking - holding himself - in such a way that you know he is ready for, even eager for, a fight.

This distant, momentary, and regardable encounter caused this ageing man - a when beyond three score - a certain sadness. What value, then - what purpose - my writings these past few years? For it was as if the pathos of that aged man, as that of so many others - our knowing of the human cost and consequences of hatred - had little or no effect. The same prejudice; the same propensity and need for violence; the same disruption of so many non-harming innocent lives; the same lack of empathy, understanding, love; the same intolerance and the same spewing forth and distribution of ignorant propaganda. Only the names, the people, the symbols and the flags, change; year following year, decade after decade.

I well knew the perceived enemies of these latter-day types: the people hated, reviled; the subject of the speeches, the propaganda, of their leaders. I well knew how they hated, and why. I well knew the slyness of their leaders, of how they desired to describe, to positively portray, themselves - and the excuses made regarding violence. Above all, perhaps, I know so well the ignorance, the intolerance, the inhumanity, on which their beliefs, their cause, was founded, and which ignorance, which intolerance, which inhumanity, was indeed their cause, whatever the words, whatever the name, whatever the flag, whatever the year.

Not long after that impersonal encounter I did personally try to rationally engage with a few supporters of that organization, in an effort to correct - from personal experience - at least some of their prejudices about Islam and Muslims. To no avail, of course, so deep, irrational, was that prejudice, so strong the hatred of their perceived enemies; so alien to

them was any vestige of humility. And would I, some forty years ago, have listened to some old man pontificating about his experiences, his life, his learning? I doubt it. For I then, as they now, had that certainty-of-knowing, that arrogance, that is one of the foundations of extremism, of whatever kind.

Perhaps my political opponents of decades past were right and that the only effective way to deal with such people of intolerance, hatred, violence, and prejudice is to oppose them 'on the streets' and take every opportunity to reveal them for the bigots they are... But I no longer have any definitive answers, having only a certain certitude about my own unknowing.

I was wondering what your impressions were of living in communities like this

Such [Muslim] communities gave me some of the most memorable moments of my life. Some of the most wonderful - some of the most human - people I have ever met. Being with - living with - Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) taught me humility, the ignorance of my past political beliefs, and how the Muslim way of life can be and certainly has been (on balance) an influence for good, just as Christianity (on balance) is and has been, and just as Judaism is and has been. But of course all religions, by their nature, have problems in respect of fallible human interpretations...

I felt really at home with, among, devout Muslims - those trying to follow the guidelines of Quran and Sunnah (or in the case of the Shia, being Taqlid of a Mujtahid). There was, and is, so much to admire about the Muslim way of life, from the modesty of women, the reverence for the Prophet, the cultivation of humility, the necessity of Wudhu, praying five times a day, the reliance on only Allah, fasting in Ramadan, the real feeling of belonging to the Ummah, the avoidance of intoxicating substances...

Of all the religions I have personal experience of, I found Islam to be perhaps the most human. In the Quran and Sunnah our weaknesses are laid bare, and in Shariah there is a guide to living in a balanced, a human, and a numinous, way.

One of the most difficult decisions of my life was leaving Islam [...]

living with them forces one to ask a lot of questions about freedom and personal choice versus duty to a community.

Such questions, in my fallible view, are important for an understanding of Islam, and thus important vis-a-vis resolving the conflict, both real and perceived, between Islam and the West, although were I to go into pedantic mode – as is a bad habit of mine – I should really write 'the conflict between the Muslim way of life and the ways of the West'.

It seems to me that the ways of the West value and give precedence to personal choice and to ideations such as 'freedom' (personal and otherwise), whereas the Muslim way is to value and give precedence to, to try and humbly submit to, the will of Allah as revealed by the Prophet in the Quran, and as manifest in Sunnah and Shariah. The only real personal choice a Muslim has – by virtue of being Muslim (of accepting the Shahadah) – is to submit to Allah, or not to submit to Allah, and thus freedom for a Muslim means living in a community under the guidance of Shariah, since Shariah is the path to Jannah, and Jannah is the Allah-given goal of this life and Shariah means that often (or mostly) the community, the Ummah, comes before one's own desires and before some posited, ideated, abstract, personal 'freedom'.

Problems arise, and have arisen, at least in my fallible view and in my experience, because of two things. First, for despite all the rhetoric in Western lands about freedom and tolerance and diversity there is the belief, both conscious and unconscious and held by an awful lot of people, that the ways of the West really are superior to the Muslim way of obedience to the will of Allah and the pursuit of Jannah. Second, certain Western governments keep interfering in the lives of Muslims, both in the lands of the Muslims and in the lands of the West, disliking or intolerant of or fearing as they do Shariah as the only law in Muslim lands, and – in the West – certain Muslim customs (such as hijab, the Adhan, and minarets) and the growing numbers of Muslims (resulting in the need for more Mosques).

Reply 4

[...]

To have such [youthful] certainty might make life easier and perhaps – in my case – as enjoyable as I remember those now long gone decades of

youth and early manhood. I, as I am sure many others do and have done, have occasionally day-dreamed about returning to some such time in the past with the understanding and the knowledge gained in the intervening years and so perhaps act differently and (at least in my case) thus avoid causing the suffering so caused then.

But I do believe that my lack of certainty now is - even at the cost of a certain sadness - a good thing for me, as it prevents that arrogance of my youthful self from returning and seems to somehow better enable me to appreciate, to feel, the numinous and thus the distinction between what is good and what is bad.

Hence I find myself in the curious position of now possibly understanding and appreciating the wordless *raison d'etat* of Catholic monasticism, manifest as this is in a personal humility; a humility that during my time as a monk my then still hubriatic self could not endure for long. Which recent understanding and appreciation led me for a short while at least, and only a few years ago, to wistfully if unrealistically yearn to return to that particular secluded way of life. And unrealistic because for all that understanding, appreciation, and yearning, I no longer had the type of faith that was required, the type of Christian faith I did have when I had lived that monastic way of life. A lack of faith I really discovered and felt when I went, during that not-too-long-ago period of yearning, to stay once again and for a while in a monastery...

You really do seem to have been born with an overwhelming urge to fix the world, don't you? Is that why you're so sad? Because you can't fix it?

Unfortunately, I do seem to have been cursed, for some forty years, with idealism and with a hubriatic, fanatical, belief in what I deludedly believed was 'a good cause'. Which idealism and which belief caused me, as an extremist, to inflict and contribute to suffering; to incite violence, hatred, prejudice, intolerance.

But my sadness now is because of that extremist past; because of my arrogance; because I did cause such suffering; because I for so long incited violence, hatred, prejudice, intolerance. Because I did what was wrong, and cannot undo the harm done.

This sadness - this knowing of my own mistakes, this knowing of my own arrogance, this knowing of the harm I have done - means that I have no desire whatsoever to try and 'fix the world'. Rather, it means a deep

personal remorse, a desire – however silly it might seem to others – for expiation. It means I do not like myself – as a person – knowing what I did, what I was capable of, and maybe still am capable of. It means I have to remember – every day – my mistakes, my uncertainty of knowing, and what is good, numinous, beautiful, innocent. It means living a quiet and quite reclusive life.

Which sadness and which remembering were part of the genesis of my philosophy of *pathei-mathos*. Of my feeling that perhaps we – as compassionate individuals aware of our fallibility and past mistakes – should not concern ourselves with what is beyond the purview of our empathy. Which in practice means the living of a private, a very personal, life where we do not concern ourselves with things we admit we do not really understand and have no personal knowledge of; that we do not meddle in the affairs of people we do not know and do not interact with on a personal basis; and that we only ever get involved in valourous defence of someone unfairly treated or unfairly attacked if we personally encounter such a situation or such an event.

[...]

It seems to me that a fair way to tentatively evaluate a religion, a way of life, is by a personal knowing of many of those who believe in that religion and who also try to follow its tenets, as opposed to just dryly studying its 'sacred books' or its theological doctrines. But of course I could be wrong, for my forty years of extremism certainly reveals my judgement to be often – or mostly – flawed.

I did read the Quran [...] but something about it seemed harsh and unforgiving.

Did you read the Quran in Arabic, or one of the English interpretations? Most interpretations do not really capture the often poetic expressions of the original, although some try to, as for example:

"This present life is only like water which We send down from the clouds so that the luxuriant herbage sustaining man and beast may grow; until when the Earth puts on its lovely garment and becomes adorned, and its people believe that they are its masters – down then comes Our scourge upon it by night or in broad day, laying it waste as though it had not blossomed yesterday. Thus We make plain our Signs to thoughtful men." 10:

24-25 (Interpretation of Meaning)

"Allah (alone) has power over, and is the (sole) master of, all things. The creations in Heaven and Earth, the very change of Night to Day, are Signs for those gifted with intelligence, those who whether sitting, standing or reclining on their sides, give praise to Allah and who frequently recall these creations in Heaven and Earth, (saying): 'You who are our Rabb - You created all these things for a purpose; the achievement is Yours alone.' "

3:189-191 (Interpretation of Meaning)

Personally, and in my experience, I think the Quran needs to be understood, studied, and appreciated, in relation to Ahadith, to the Sunnah. In the context of the lives of ordinary Muslims and of the history of Islam, and thus in the context of Adab - of the manners, the morals, the culture - of those Muslims who do undertake the obligatory daily prayers, who do fast in Ramadan, who do believe in Jannah, and who do try to avoid what is haram.

[Therefore] in this context - of the affects and consequences of the Quran and the Sunnah - I do not agree that the Quran seems harsh and unforgiving.

[...]

Correspondent #3
(2011)

Views Regarding Islam

Although I no longer consider myself a Muslim, I retain a great respect for that particular Way of Life, as I do for several other Ways I have personal experience of, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism. And a respect for two basic reasons. First, because I feel that those and many other Ways - for example Judaism and Hinduism - have been and are a means to remind us of the numinous, of the error of hubris, of the need for a certain personal humility. For they all, diverse as they appear to be, can enable us to glimpse or feel or know that supra-personal perspective which inclines us or can incline us toward living a more moral life, expressed as such a life often is in personal virtues such as compassion, self-restraint, honesty, modesty. Second, because I am acutely aware of how fallible I am, that I could be wrong, that I have been wrong in the

past, and that my answers to certain philosophical, theological, and moral questions (as evident for example in my philosophy of *pathei-mathos*) are only my own often tentative and certainly fallible answers.

As for my reasons for leaving Islam, they were intellectual, theological, and personal.

Personally, I was greatly affected by the suicide of my fiancée in 2006; a tragic event which changed me fundamentally, forcing me as it did to honestly confront myself, my failings, and my selfish life-long passion for abstractions and ideologies over and above empathy, a personal love, and a personal loyalty.

Intellectually, I had concluded – as later tentatively expressed in writings such as *Religion and The Numinous Way: Three Essays Concerning The Nature of Religion* – that many or most Ways eventually became religions [1] and thus, irrespective of how they might enable us to feel and appreciate the numinous, they were or they became beset with problems of dogma, doctrine, and exegesis, especially if as many of them did they relied on or were based on certain texts regarded as sacred or divinely inspired or authoritative. Which problems led to, in my view, the positing of new categories, abstractions, and which abstractions human beings were expected to strive for, or conform to, and which striving or expected conformity often resulted in a particular personal attitude antithetical to *pathei-mathos* and empathy, because what was or came to be valued over and above *pathei-mathos* and empathy was the wisdom said to be contained in scripture or in some text or in some interpretation or in some dogma or doctrine propounded by some theological authority. There was or there developed a clash of interpretations, categories, dogma, and doctrine, which resulted in schism, reforms, and often gave rise to practical conflict and thence to human suffering.

Theologically – that is, in respect of matters divine – I had come to consider that it was a personal empathy that should be the basis for ethics as well as being a primary means – sans abstractions – of knowing and appreciating the numinous, *rerum divinarum et humanarum*. And that *pathei-mathos* possessed, as Aeschylus suggested, a numinous authority which replaced the authority of texts, faith, and belief.

However, this process of personal change, of intellectual and theological reflexion, occurred over a period of many years, only ending in 2009. It was, as I mentioned in *Myngath*, a profound inner struggle which

"revealed to me the most important truth concerning human life. Which is that a shared, a loyal, love between two people is the most beautiful, the most numinous, the most valuable thing of all."

Anti-Muslim Organizations

Reluctant as I am and have been for some time to give my personal opinion about such political organizations – given my own lamentable history of extremism and my many errors of experience spanning some four decades – I cannot quite escape the feeling that perhaps by not criticizing such groups, when directly asked and on the basis of my personal experience and knowledge of extremism, I am somehow not doing something I morally should do. For I have – on the basis of my *pathei-mathos* – concluded that such groups, and the views and the actions they encourage and incite, are most certainly morally reprehensible and therefore can and should be criticized and opposed for otherwise the bigotry, the extremism, they represent and express will assuredly continue and cause suffering [...]

So, for what it is worth, here is my personal and fallible opinion in respect of the anti-Islamic organizations you mention. Apropos of such groups, I do wonder what their leaders, their organizers, and their members know about Islam – how long they have studied Islam (including Shariah) and if that study was of a scholarly nature – and what practical and personal experience, if any, they have of Muslim communities, Muslim families, and the Muslim way of life in general.

For it seems to me – judging by their rhetoric, their propaganda, their literature, and their behaviour at meetings and demonstrations and toward Muslims – that they have little knowledge of Islam and no personal and practical experience of the Muslim way of life, and that therefore despite what they say or write (or may even believe about themselves) their views about Islam and Muslims are based on, and express, prejudice, intolerance, fear, arrogance, harshness, and hatred. That is, such organizations are themselves of an extremist nature, incite extremism and bigotry, and recruit and encourage extremists and bigots, where by an extremist I mean

"a person who tends toward harshness, or who is harsh, or who supports/incites harshness, in pursuit of some objective, usually of a political or a religious nature. Here, *harsh* is: rough, severe, a tendency to be unfeeling, unempathic. Hence *extremism* is

considered to be: (a) the result of such harshness, and (b) the principles, the causes, the characteristics, that promote, incite, or describe the harsh action of extremists."

The intolerance and the prejudice of bigotry is based on, and thrives on and encourages, ignorance and fear. In the case of such organizations an ignorance of and a fear of Islam, of the Muslim way of life, and of Shariah.

For instance, have the leaders and the organizers and those who bankroll such organizations read the Quran in Arabic? Have they studied the Sunnah - at the very least the collections of Bukhari and Muslim? Have they studied Al-Adab Al-Mufrad? Have they studied Islamic jurisprudence and discussed Shariah with a Qadi? How many conversations about Islam have they had with learned Imaams? Have they lived in a land where the majority of people are Muslim? How many times have they been guests of Muslim families and so shared meals and personal conversations and thus empathised with Muslims? How many Muslim women have they interviewed or asked about Hijab - about why they wear it and how it makes them feel?

If they have not done all those things then they are, in my view, fundamentally ignorant concerning Islam and the Muslim way of life, and thus they speak and write and demonstrate in public about what they personally are uneducated about and about those whom they have not personally interacted with in a courteous way. Thus their opinions, their views, are those of bigots, and their behaviour is uncivilized - that is, the behaviour of people who are unlearned, ill-informed, uncultured, uncourteous, hubriatic. They are also hypocritical, for these leaders and organizers - and those who bankroll them - are virulent in their praise of 'Western civilization and Western values' without, it seems to me, realizing that they themselves with their ignorance, their hubris, their intolerance, their prejudice - their bigotry - are excellent examples of the new barbarians assailing Western culture.

For what does Western culture mean to such home-grown extremists? The culture of Homer, Sappho, Aristotle, Cicero, Livy, Mary Magdelene, Hillel the Elder, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Joan of Arc, Dante Alighieri, Isaac Newton, JS Bach, Jane Austen, TS Eliot, Mother Teresa, Niels Bohr, Martin Luther King, and many many others? The culture of a classical education and of scholarship, of a Christian humility and compassion, of chivalry and manners, of humanism, of fairness, of tolerance, of freedom of religion, and of equal and impartial justice under the law? Certainly not

- judging by the views, the behaviour, and the extremism of those unlearned, ill-informed, uncultured, uncourteous, hubriatic extremists.

Note, Post Scriptum:

[1] I have endeavoured to make a distinction between a Way and a religion.

" By the term Way - or Way of Life - is meant a weltanschauung shared among or accepted by a number of people where there is distinction made between the realm of the sacred/the-revered /the-numinous and the realm of the ordinary or the human, but which: (i) is not codified in writings or books but which is often or mostly transmitted aurally; (ii) has no organization beyond - and does not require any organization beyond - the communal/local level; and (iii) whose ethos and rites and customs are inclined toward maintaining the natural balance - the natural healthy harmonious relation between humans, life, and 'the sacred' - and not toward avoiding the punishment of some powerful deity/gods or some supra-personal power(s). One essential difference thus between a religion and a Way is that a religion requires faith and belief (and thus words, concepts, and dogma and organization and conformity), whereas a Way tends to be empathic/intuitive and more a customary, unspoken, way of doing things and which way of doing things - not being organized and by its ethos neither requiring organization nor conformity - varies or can vary from place to place.

Thus, religions tend to be or tend to manifest what is masculous whereas Ways in the past tended to be or tended to manifest what is muliebral.

Some religions began as spiritual Ways, but evolved over long durations of causal Time to become religions." *FAQ Numinous Way* (Last Modified: 30/May/2012)
