Religion and Revolution:
Spiritual and Political Islām in Ernesto Cardenal

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By

John Andrew Morrow

Foreword by Zafar Bangash

Featuring
"Interlude of the Revolution in Iran"
by Ernesto Cardenal
and
"Ernesto Cardenal in Iran: A Visual Voyage"
by Nita M. Renfrew

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To Abu Dharr

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FOREWORD

Ernesto Cardenal may not be a household name in the Muslim world, but it does not mean he has nothing to offer those far-off brethren. Likewise, barring a few notable exceptions, few Muslims are familiar with his poetry or prose. Again, the reason is not because Cardenal's work is not of value. On the contrary, there is much that one can gain from his poetry as well as the insights he offers about Islām, Muslims and the broader Muslim world, knowledge gained during his tenure as representative of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua first as "roving ambassador" and later as Minister of Culture, to numerous Muslim countries especially the Islāmic Republic of Iran.

Several reasons are apparent for Muslims' general lack of awareness of the man and his works. One is the language barrier. Since Cardenal's works are all in Spanish, a language that the overwhelming majority of Muslims do not speak, their lack of familiarity with his works is understandable. At the political level, the common historical experience of Muslims has been as victims of Western colonialism whether originating in Europe or, in more recent times, from the US. Thus, the primary concern of the Muslim world was and remains North America and Europe. Although separated by the Atlantic Ocean, Europe and North America represent essentially one entity; their governments coordinate their policies vis-à-vis countries in the "Third World." Many feel that this geographic duo is also primarily responsible for the suffering inflicted on Muslims and indeed the rest of humanity. Such torment continues in the form of direct interference in the internal affairs of Muslim societies, accomplished by propping up dictators and opposing those governments—Islāmic Iran, for instance—that want to serve the interests of their own people, independent of Western influence or manipulation. In this scenario, Spanish America does not appear on the radar screen of most Muslims, hence the lack of knowledge about Cardenal's contribution to poetry, his interaction with Islāmic spirituality or his understanding of Islām's view of politics.

For the first time, this wall of ignorance—and silence—has been pierced by the pioneering efforts of Dr. John Andrew Morrow who brings to light the works of Ernesto Cardenal. Under the more expansive title, *Religion and Revolution: Spiritual and Political Islām in Ernesto*

Cardenal, Dr. Morrow focuses only on one part, "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran" from Cardenal's *Memorias* [*Memoirs*]. Being fully conversant both in Spanish, the original language of Cardenal's works, and English, Dr Morrow is eminently qualified to write on the subject.

At the source of this work is the fascinating circumstance that while Cardenal was trained as a Catholic priest, he has been deeply influenced by Ṣūfī poetry. The origin of Cardenal's interest in Sūfism, according to Dr. Morrow, can be traced to Thomas Merton and Luce López-Baralt, both of whom are connected to the Maryamiyyah Ṣūfī Order of Frithjof Schuon and Dr. Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr. And as member of the Sandinista revolutionary movement struggling to overthrow the yoke of US imperialism, it was not difficult for Cardenal to understand and, therefore, empathize with Iran's Islāmic revolutionary struggle even if he has creatively skirted around the issue by trying to frame it in Christian-Marxist terminology. Interestingly, and tellingly, Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) dismissed Cardenal from priesthood for indulging too deeply in Liberation Theology. Given the Vatican's long history as an ally of colonialism and imperialism and the fact that a long line of popes have regularly received briefings from the American CIA, Pope John Paul's decision to dismiss Cardenal from priesthood should not come as too much of a surprise.

While being faithful to Cardenal's works, Dr. Morrow does not shy away from pointing out errors, whether related to facts or interpretations. He disagrees with Cardenal on several points with concision and understanding. While praising his poetry both for its style and clarity, Dr. Morrow is less forgiving when dealing with Cardenal's memoirs. He cites numerous inconsistencies in names, dates, and facts. "At times, the chronology is incorrect," writes Dr. Morrow. He adds: "the citations provided seem to have passed through one or more ideological filters." Explaining the possible reasons for such inconsistencies, Dr. Morrow identifies four factors at play: "a faulty memory, forgetfulness, the desire to tell a good story, and the desire to present his person in the best possible light." But Dr. Morrow is quick to state that he is not accusing Cardenal of falsifying facts; merely that "he is subjective as are any and all authors of autobiographical works. What Cardenal has presented is his interpretation of his own reality based on his recollections" of Islām, Muslims and the Islāmic Revolution in Iran.

But Cardenal's "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran" is important because it offers fresh insights into the Islāmic Revolution and the foundation of the Islāmic Republic of Iran from the perspective of a person who is not a Muslim. In fact, he comes from a distinctly Christian

tradition, albeit one that is already immersed in Liberation Theology. Cardenal had the opportunity to meet the most important political and religious figures of Iran, including meetings on two separate occasions with Imām Khomeinī. This was a rare privilege granted to few foreign guests. Cardenal was the second foreign official to meet Imām Khomeinī, the first being Yāsir ʻArafāt who turned out to be a total disappointment despite being received by the Imām and handed the keys to the building that had served as Zionist Israel's embassy in Tehrān during the Shāh's regime.

In his meeting with Cardenal, Imām Khomeinī emphasized that the Islāmic revolution was not Iranian, but universal. This conviction arose from his conviction that the entire world would unite, rise up, and liberate itself from the yoke of oppression. He expressed his deepest feelings when he said he yearned for the fall of Anastasio Somoza (1925-1980), and asked Cardenal to share the following message with the Nicaraguan people: "*Que los niños, hombres y mujeres, todos se lancen unidos de la mano en contra Somoza*" [May every man, woman, and child, rise up, hand in hand, against Somoza].

Cardenal also met a number of leading *marāji'* or Sources of Emulation, including Ayatullāhs Ṭāleghānī, Rūḥanī, and Sharīʻatmadārī. As the roving ambassador of the Sandinistas, Cardenal had unprecedented access to leaders of the Islāmic Revolution of Iran. He confirms in the "Interlude" that it was Iran, not the Soviet Union or Cuba, that was the greatest financial supporter of the Sandinistas. This point is significant for several reasons. First, despite being faced with severe financial constraints as a result of US sanctions, Islāmic Iran took a deliberate decision to help a non-Muslim country facing US imperialist threats. This, along with other similar actions, clearly establishes Iran's revolutionary credentials and proves that the Islāmic revolution is not merely for Muslims but for all oppressed people of the world.

The years 1980 to 1988 were the most difficult for Iran because of the Iraqi-imposed war that was launched at the behest of the US and the confederacy of Arab potentates. As part of the US-Saudi plot, the price of oil was dropped to $10/barrel through Saudi over-production. One aim of this strategy was to bankrupt Islāmic Iran since oil was the main source of its earnings. In 1986, Iran's total oil earnings had dropped to $6 billion annually. For a country with a population of 64 million (currently around 73 million) and faced with sanctions and a prolonged war, to offer financial assistance to the Sandinistas during these critical times constituted a remarkable degree of self-sacrifice. It would be rare to find examples of other nations contributing substantially to a cause so far from

its borders while its own affairs were so critically compromised.

While Cardenal's presentation of facts relating to Islāmic Iran, and more broadly to Islām and Muslims, is not always accurate, his overall attitude is positive. Nevertheless, Muslims would find some of his comments about the Prophet of Islām, upon whom be peace, particularly offensive since they spring not only from a complete misunderstanding of historical facts but also represent a clear contradiction in Cardenal's own arguments. He says that the Prophet (upon whom be peace) authorized the killing of opponents and that he permitted his followers to attack caravans. He describes such acts as "terrorism" that no Prophet of God would allow.

As Dr. Morrow points out, numerous Prophets—Moses, David and Solomon (upon them all be peace)—had killed or ordered the killing of people. Further, and more tellingly, while Cardenal espouses, inaccurately, the Christian notion that Jesus (upon whom be peace) urged his followers to "turn the other cheek," the Sandinistas contradicted this by taking up arms for their own struggle and, naturally, killed people, some of them innocent. As the virtual ambassador of war of the Sandinistas, Cardenal went in search of weapons, including to the Islāmic Republic of Iran. These weapons were meant to wage war and to kill people. Such contradictions abound in Christian and leftist discourse when dealing with Islām and Muslims.

In reviewing the works of Cardenal, Dr. Morrow provides a broad sweep of Iran's relations with many countries in Latin America including Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Cuba. This last offers an interesting example of magnanimity shown by leaders of the Islāmic Republic. Despite Cuba's close relations with Ba'athist Iraq and its support of Saddam's regime while it waged a brutal war against the Islāmic Republic, Tehrān did not cite that as a reason to curtail relations with Cuba. In fact, the Islāmic Republic has gone the extra mile to cultivate relations with Havana because it views Cuba as a victim of US imperialism. This fits in with the principled position adopted by the Islāmic Republic in formulating its foreign relations. These are based on the principle that it would have strong relations with any country that has an Islāmic government (none does thus far); any country that is anti-imperialist and faces threats from the US and its allies; and finally, any country that is not hostile to the Islāmic Republic. Viewed in this context, Islāmic Iran has adhered to this principled position throughout its nearly 33 years of revolutionary existence.

By introducing the works of Cardenal to English speaking Muslims, Dr. Morrow has opened an important window on a region of the world not usually considered by most Muslims as important. It also provides a closer

look at the thinking of Christian-Marxists. One can, therefore, conclude that Cardenal's works represent a genuine effort to build bridges between East and West, Christianity and Islām, and Latin America and Islāmic Iran. And that is certainly a welcome development.

Zafar Bangash
Director
Institute of Contemporary Islāmic Thought
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
January 1, 2012

PREFACE

Ernesto Cardenal has always moved me by his modesty. He was very frustrated by the fact that I described him as one of the greatest Spanish language poets. While he appreciated my passion for his poetry, he insisted that I was greatly exaggerating the literary value of his work. When I explained to him that I was completing a study on spiritual Islām in his poetry, he stressed that he was simply a student of Ṣūfism: "No soy muy buen conocedor del islam" [I am not very knowledgeable about Islām], he humbly confessed ("Carta," Nov. 1, 2010). When I requested permission to translate his "Interludio de la revolución de Irán" [Interlude of the Revolution in Iran] into English, accompanied by my critical comments, the poet seemed pleasantly surprised, and perhaps even a little bit puzzled:

> Con gusto te doy autorización para que publiques en inglés mi texto sobre el viaje a Irán junto con esos comentarios tuyos. Aunque no creo que sea mucho lo que se pueda comentar sobre mi poesía y el islam.
>
> [It is with pleasure that I authorize you to publish an English translation of my text dealing with my trip to Iran along with your commentaries. I do not, however, believe that much can be said about my poetry and Islām].

Initially, the feeling was mutual and I shared Cardenal's concern that his works could not supply enough information on Islām for a sizeable study. I believed that I merely had enough material for a simple conference paper. That initial exploration, "Islāmic Elements in the Works of Ernesto Cardenal," was presented at the 2010 Conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) which took place in my home city of Toronto. In the months that followed, however, as I continued surveying Cardenal's poetry and prose, I found myself adding more and more material until I had reached twenty, forty, one hundred, and finally over two hundred double-spaced pages. Although the study has grown exponentially, I still feel that much has been left unsaid and encourage other scholars to complete further studies on such a fascinating, but seriously overlooked, subject.

Besides breaking new ground, and opening an entirely new sub-

branch of studies on Ernesto Cardenal, this work shares the beauty of his sublime Ṣūfi-inspired poetry with the English-speaking world. It traces the origin of Cardenal's interest in Ṣūfism to Thomas Merton and Luce López-Baralt, both of whom are connected to the Maryamiyyah Ṣūfī Order of Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr and Frithjof Schuon. The work identifies the sources of the poet's Ṣūfī citations and expounds upon their spiritual significance in light of the transcendental unity of all revealed religions.

This study also provides the first partial translation of Cardenal's *Memorias* [*Memoirs*] in English. Although Cardenal is a good story-teller, his *Memoirs* are of little literary value compared to the cultivated poetic prose of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* [*Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*]. More like diary entries than memoirs, the work contains many incomplete sentences. In order to maintain a degree of literary flow, I have taken the liberty of inserting verbs when required in order to create complete sentences. If Cardenal's poetry is highly cultivated yet crystalline in clarity, and his academic articles are elevated in expression, the prose in his *Memoirs* is sometimes quite colloquial. If his poetry is sophisticated yet simple, combining both style and substance, the prose in his *Memorias* is mainly a medium for conveying meaning in a clear and concise form.

It should be remembered, however, that Cardenal's *Memorias* are precisely, well, memoirs, a subjective written account of one's memory of certain events and people which must be distinguished from an objective, historically accurate, biography. Although I have only translated one section of his *Memoirs*, the "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran," I have pointed out numerous inconsistencies in names, dates, and facts. At times, the chronology is incorrect. At others, the citations provided seem to have passed through one or more ideological filters.

Of course, I am not the first to point out discrepancies between Cardenal's *Memoirs* and established fact. Rebecca Janzen, a graduate student at the University of Toronto, pointed out that Cardenal's descriptions of the *talleres de pintura/arte/escultura*, the famous painting, art, and sculpture workshops, found in the second volume of his *Memorias* are suspicious. As she observed, the anecdotes provided by Cardenal decades later differ from those what were recorded by Philip and Sally Scharper in *The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname* which was published in 1984. In what can only be described as an attempt to portray his life as the fulfillment of a divinely pre-ordained mission, Cardenal makes it seem that he had been called to God for a long time. However, Teófilo Cabestrero's *Ministers of God, Ministers of the People* does not make this out to be the case.

What explains, then, the inconsistencies found in Cardenal's *Memoirs*? There appear to be four factors at play: a faulty memory, lack of careful notes, the desire to tell a good story, and the desire to present his person in the best possible light. As Belli admits in her brief impressionistic review titled "Ernesto Cardenal y sus memorias: la revolución perdida:" "Se podría decir que la visión que presenta Ernesto es romántica y es la visión idealizada de la Revolución" (27) [It could be said that the vision presented by Ernesto is romantic and represents an idealized vision of the Revolution]. For many famous figures, the focus is less on facts than on one's future legacy. This is not to suggest that Cardenal has falsified facts. It simply means that he is subjective as are any and all authors of autobiographical works. What Cardenal has presented is his interpretation of his own reality based on his recollections. Since people are the product of their environment, upbringing, education, and formation, it is only natural that they interpret entirely new realities on the basis of their ideological background and life experiences.

Due to his tone-deafness, Cardenal misunderstood many of the Persian names he heard in Iran resulting in erroneous transliterations and, in one case, misidentification. For the sake of consistency, I have standardized the spelling of Arabic and Persian names and words found in Cardenal's works and all the other sources that I cite. There are, of course, some exceptions. Since his name is almost always transliterated as Khomeinī, I have respected this spelling instead of Khumaynī. If some scholars, such as Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, have selected their own non-standard transliteration for their names, I have respected their personal decisions while inserting diacritical marks when and where possible to ensure greater precision in pronunciation. To avoid annoying the eye, I have attempted to keep citations as uniform as possible in terms of spelling and capitalization. Since there are so many spelling mistakes in some of my sources, I have simply corrected the typos without splattering this work with a myriad of [sic] notations. Since Cardenal's *Memorias* were reviewed and edited by Luce López-Baralt, a scholar who has devoted so many studies to Arabic and Islāmic matters, it is certainly surprising that so many glaring errors in spelling, style, and usage went unnoticed and uncorrected.

The real value of the "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran" resides in its content as opposed to its style. It provides fresh insight into the Islāmic Revolution and the foundation of the Islāmic Republic of Iran from the perspective of a person who was hosted by the Prime Minister of Iran and who had the opportunity to meet with its most important religious and revolutionary leaders, including: Imām Khomeinī, and other Grand

Ayatullāhs, such as Ṭāleghānī, Rūḥanī, and Sharī'atmadārī. As one of the leading spokesmen of the Sandinistas, Ernesto Cardenal had unprecedented access to the leaders of the Islāmic Revolution of Iran, visiting with Khomeinī in 1979, shortly after the triumph of the Revolution, and for a second time in 1982, when he was the Minister of Culture. Cardenal's "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran" exposes the connection between the Iranians, the Sandinistas, and other leftist regimes in Latin America. As Cardenal has confirmed, it was Iran, and not the Soviet Union or Cuba, which was the greatest financial supporter of the Sandinistas.

Readers should be well-aware that the italicized sections which appear at the beginning of the "Interlude of the Revolution in Iran," in the main body of the text, and at its end did not form part of the original narrative. These were written over twenty years after the fact and, as one reader pointed out, represent an attempt to make peace with both God and the Devil. Since Cardenal has to contend with the constraints of the Roman Catholic Church, seeking to avoid any further controversy with the Magisterium, and considering that he has Jewish associates who sympathize with the state of Israel, along with leftist and liberal comrades who oppose the Islāmic Republic of Iran, viewing it as some sort of right-wing retrograde regime, it is possible that he seeks to distance himself from revolutionary Islām so as to avoid alienating his friends and allies. It would seem that in the poet's wish to be diplomatic, he delicately danced around some dangerous topics. However, since he makes many allegations which cannot be corroborated, he seems to *sembrar más bosta que flores* [he spreads more manure than he plants flowers], as we say in Spanish.

It should also be stressed that Cardenal's "Interlude" represents a self-censored version of events. As Nita Renfrew, the journalist who accompanied Cardenal to Iran in 1979, informed me in February of 2012: "He told me when he was writing about the trip that he was leaving some things out because of political concerns." Although Cardenal has not provided all of the details about his historic trips to the Islāmic Republic of Iran in 1979 and 1982, and his presentation of the facts is not always perfect, his overall attitude towards Islām and Muslims is positive. Consequently, his works represent an authentic effort to build bridges between East and West, Christianity and Islām, and Latin America and Iran.

Dr. John Andrew Morrow

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Ernesto Cardenal for granting me permission to publish a translation of his "Interludio de la Revolución de Irán" preceded by my critical comments. Since we first met in 2009, Cardenal has graciously responded to all my queries into his life and works. I consider myself privileged to have kept his company, honored to have received his blessing, and humbled to have received his accolades.

Cardenal was especially kind to provide me with several of the original Spanish poems from *El origen de las especies* [*The Origin of Species*]. While the work was supposed to be simultaneously published in 2011 in both Spanish and English editions, the English translation was the only one released at the time this study was submitted to the publisher. Thanks to Cardenal, I was able to include both Spanish and English citations of several of these poems.

I would also like to thank Nita M. Renfrew. An inter-spiritual artist, writer, and healer living in New York, she arranged with her friend ʻAbdollāh Ghasghāʼī for Ernesto Cardenal to receive an official invitation to visit Iran in the very early days of the triumph of the Islāmic Revolution. Not only did she accompany Cardenal as his interpreter, she acted as the photographer during the diplomatic voyage. I am particularly pleased that she allowed me to include the photographs from her scrapbook of the visit, thus providing a visual chronology of events.

I am especially grateful to Héctor Horacio Manzolillo, my close friend and colleague, for repeatedly reviewing the work and making many valuable comments and corrections. Not only was his dedication and devotion to this project unmatched, his incisive political analysis was both priceless and unparalleled.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to ʻAbd Allāh Shahīn for the enormous amount of field work he completed on my behalf, contacting all sorts of scholars in Qum and the rest of Iran. I am especially honored that Zafar Bangash, an attentive analyst of all things Iranian, and an individual with an exceptional level of expertise in contemporary Islāmic political thought, has provided a foreword for this study.

I am particularly pleased that Cambridge Scholars Press has contracted to publish this work and wish to recognize the support I received from Carol Koulikourdi and Dr. Andy Nercessian.

Most of all, I would like to thank my wife and children for enduring my extended absences. Were it not for their love, patience, support, and encouragement, this book could never have been completed.

TRANSLITERATION

Arabic Letter	Transliteration
ء	’
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	t / h
ه	h

Short Vowels	
◌َ	a
◌ُ	u
◌ِ	i
Long Vowels	
ا & ى	ā
◌ُو	ū
◌ِي	ī
Dipthongs	
◌َوْ	aw
◌َيْ	ay
◌ِيّ	iyy
◌ُوّ	uww
Shaddah = doubled letters	
بّ	bb
Etc.	
Dialectal Vowels	
◌َ	ei
◌ُ	o
Dialectal Diphtongs	
◌َيْ	ei

The method of transliteration is based mainly on the one employed by Ghulam Sarwar, with some minor modifications regarding the representation of dipthongs and the *shaddah*. I have also chosen to ignore

the initial *hamzah*. The practice of placing diacritical marks on English words of Arabic origin to ensure their proper pronunciation is taken from Ghulam Sarwar and Ian Netton, among other scholars of Arabic and Islām. While it is customary to say *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* after the name Allāh, *'alayhi al-salām* after the name of the Prophet, and *raḍiyya Allāhu 'anhu* after the names of the Companions, I have chosen to drop them to maintain the flow of the English. While these pious formulaic phrases are not included, they are intended and readers are free to use them. The same applies for honorifics and titles of respect for prophets, messengers, scholars, and other personalities. Directly addressing an individual by his/her last name is a cultural and academic convention and should never be construed as an act of disrespect.

INTRODUCTION

While much has been written about the influence of Christianity, Communism, and Nativism in the poetry of Ernesto Cardenal, little or nothing has been written regarding the Islāmic elements in the works of the great Nicaraguan poet. However, to the surprise of most scholars, the works of Ernesto Cardenal contain a small, but significant, amount of positive references to Islām in its dual spiritual and political dimensions. In this study, I propose to examine the political, theological, and mystical manifestations of Islām in the works of the revolutionary poet-priest.

Chronological in organization, this study examines Cardenal's initial exposure to *taṣawwuf*, Ṣūfism, or Islāmic Gnosis at the hands of Thomas Merton, the famous Franco-American monk. Although Merton only taught Ṣūfism to his novices shortly after Cardenal's departure from the monastery, he maintained his Nicaraguan disciple well-informed of his interests in Islām through their extensive epistolary exchanges. As my study shall show, Cardenal was indirectly connected to the Maryamiyyah Ṣūfī Order by means of Merton. Since Schuonian Ṣūfis are so secretive about membership in the mystical order of the Maryamiyyah, Cardenal, like many scholars and writers, may have absorbed its traditionalist ideas while being oblivious to the very existence of this highly influential intellectual movement which stands in opposition to Modernity.

After exploring Merton's influence on Cardenal in matters of Muslim mysticism, I delve into an analysis of the Ṣūfī sources found in the poetry of the accomplished Nicaraguan author. While they are only a handful of voices that sing in the same universal choir, the symphony of the *Cántico cósmico* [*Cosmic canticle*] contains solos from such Ṣūfī sopranos as Rūmī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Ḥallāj, and al-Ṣūfī. Although Cardenal is not a specialist on the subject of Ṣūfism, his use of mystical Muslim sources suggests a great degree of culture and sophistication. In short, he has masterfully appropriated and integrated Ṣūfī sources in his powerhouse presentation on perennial philosophy.

As mystically-minded as he may be, Cardenal is also a man with concrete socio-political, economic, and humanitarian concerns. Consequently, it comes as no surpise that most of the Muslim material in his works deals with political Islām as opposed to spiritual Islām. Although his knowledge of Ṣūfism came primarily from English translations and secondary

sources, Cardenal's comprehension of Muslim political reality came from direct contact with Arabs and Persians in the Middle East and North Africa. As a roving revolutionary who represented the Sandinistas, Cardenal traveled to Libya, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as Iraq and Iran, where he met with Muslims of varying political persuasions, including proponents of nationalism, Socialism, and Islāmism.

While his travels to the Arab world proved influential, Cardenal was most noticeably marked by his two trips to the Islāmic Republic of Iran where he met with Imām Khomeinī on both occasions, along with many other leading religious and political figures. Cardenal's depiction of the early days of the Islāmic Revolution is fresh, insightful, poignant, and powerful. As a person of culture and class, he shows a sensitivity to Iranian culture, history, and political reality that is rarely found among other writers on the subject. In short, despite occasional subjective shortcomings, Cardenal maintains a high degree of objectivity when tackling touchy topics such as *ḥijāb*.

Although he met with many Grand Ayatullāhs, including Rūḥānī, Sharī'atmadārī, and Ṭāleghānī, Cardenal's meeting with Imām Khomeinī was the most remarkable as well as the most revealing. As such, it serves as a superlative source when it comes to comparing the thoughts of two religious revolutionaries from differing spiritual traditions. The socio-political and spiritual similarities between Khomeinī, the representative of revolutionary Islām, and Cardenal, the representative of revolutionary Christianity, are highly suggestive. Still, important ideological differences remain which can cause potential conflict between members of both movements.

Taking the encounter between the Leader of the Islāmic Republic of Iran and the Minister of Culture of Sandinista Nicaragua as a starting point, I proceed to explore the ties between Islāmists and leftists. I explore the role of Iran in Latin America as well as the role of Latin America in Iran from 1979 to 2012 signalling certain accords between Islāmists and leftists. As beneficial as these increased economic, cultural, and political ties may be to both parties, they are increasingly cause for concern for the United States and its allies. While fanned by political players from all parties, these fears are greatly exaggerated.

Since a literary critic cannot simply serve as a sycophant, objectivity and academic integrity demands the airing of grievances. As open-minded, well-informed, and tolerant as Cardenal may be on most matters, his knowledge gap in the area of Islām has resulted in some very serious missteps. The unsubstantiated and patently false allegations that Cardenal has made about the Prophet Muḥammad are examples of mistakes that can

deeply offend most Muslims. His suggestion that Imām Khomeinī may have been involved in the death of Grand Ayatullāh Maḥmūd Ṭāleghānī is also manifestly untrue. This bogus, politically-concocted, claim is based on rumors rather than reliable research. Cardenal's post-scriptum criticism of the Islāmic Republic of Iran is equally based on false assumptions and a lack of verifiable, first-hand, information.

If actions are judged on the basis of intentions, Cardenal's questionable comments seem to be the result of ignorance as opposed to ill-will. Despite small, but significant, shortcomings, Cardenal remains, to all appearances, a friend of Islām and Muslims as opposed to a foe. Whether it is Algeria or Palestine, Lebanon or Iran, Cardenal has repeatedly expressed his solidarity with the struggle of the Muslims masses against colonialism, imperialism, and dictatorial despotism. As such, he very much merits the magnanimity of the Muslim world for the occasional errors in interpretation that he has made concerning the Prophet, Imām Khomeinī, and the Islāmic Republic of Iran. As the Qur'ān commands: "Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; But turn away from the ignorant" (7:199).

Following in this critical, descriptive, line, the final portion of this study focuses on orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Ernesto Cardenal. While the Nicaraguan poet expresses interest in the Islāmic world, he is particularly interested in Ṣūfism and Shī'ism, as opposed to Sunnism, and more attracted to Persians than to Arabs. Although Cardenal is a Roman Catholic priest, he holds many views which differ from those of the Magisterium. Similarly, rather than be attracted to mainstream Ṣūfism or Shī'ism, Cardenal tends to be attracted to fringe elements of these religious movements, embracing ideas which, for most mainstream Muslims, verge on heterodoxy if not heresy. After all, he is a revolutionary in every regard.

After completing a thorough reading of this comprehensive analysis of Cardenal's *Cosmic Canticle* and *Memoirs*, two conclusions should become evident to the informed reader: firstly, that Cardenal draws from Ṣūfī sources in order to support his theological and philosophical ideas, and secondly, that he assimilates aspects of revolutionary Islāmic thought in order to advance his own political views. Whether readers agree or disagree with any or all of Cardenal's spiritual and political ideas, one fact is inescapable: Cardenal has created a highly complex, perhaps even contradictory, worldview, combining aspects from varying philosophical, economic, and religious systems, that is sure to expand the intellects of many analysts and fascinate the minds of friends and foes alike.

CHAPTER ONE

THOMAS MERTON AND ṢŪFĪSM: THE INFLUENCE OF CARDENAL'S MYSTICAL MENTOR

And to every people a guide. (Qur'ān 13:7)

Although most scholars are aware that Cardenal (b. 1925) was a disciple of Thomas Merton (1915-1968), few are aware that Merton had ties to Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), also known as Shaykh 'Isā Nūreddīn al-'Alawī, the Swiss metaphysician and perennialist who founded the Maryamiyyah Ṣūfī Order. Schuon himself had connections to René Guénon (1886-1951), also known as Yaḥyā 'Abd al-Wāḥid, who was a *shaykh* of the Shādhiliyyah Ṣūfī Order, and another exponent of the Perennial School and the transcendental unity of all revealed religions. Guénon himself was initiated into Islām by Ivan Aguéli (1869-1917), also known as Shaykh 'Abdul-Hādī 'Aqīlī, the wandering Swedish Ṣūfī leader, painter, and author, who was the representative of the Shādhiliyyah Ṣūfī Order, headed by Egyptian *shaykh* 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ilyash al-Kabīr (1840-1921), himself a close friend of 'Abd al-Qādir, the Algerian Ṣūfī Emir. Known by the epithet of *Nūr al-Shamāl* or "Light of the North," 'Abd al-Hādī was the first *muqaddam* or official representative of a Ṣūfī Order to bring Ṣūfism or *taṣawwuf* to Western Europe and Scandinavia.

The Ṣūfī influence on Merton is well-established and has been documented in great detail in such works as *Merton and Ṣūfism: The Untold Story*, edited by Rob Baker. As his letters reveal, Merton was introduced to Islāmic mysticism by none other than Louis Massignon (1883-1962), the famous French Orientalist, with whom he corresponded from 1959-1968, resulting in 21 items containing 31 pages in total. As Shannon has noted:

> Thomas Merton greatly admired Massignon who proved to be an important influence in leading him to study Ṣūfism. Merton felt humbled before him and looked on him as a kind of spiritual father. (275)

Merton also communicated with Reẓā Arasteh (b. 1927), the Iranian psychiatrist and Ṣūfī scholar, from 1965-1968, producing 28 items containing 37 pages. Most of all, Merton was influenced by ʻAbdul ʻAzīz (b. 1914), the Pakistani student of Ṣūfism, as can be noted from their epistolary exchange which dates from 1959-1968, and which produced 59 items containing 139 pages.

As evidenced by his voluminous correspondence, Merton was well-versed in the Qur'ān, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (570-632), the thoughts of Ṣūfī authors such as Rūmī (1207-1273), Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (c. 820-c. 905-910), Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (c. 858-922), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (781-857), Abū Saʻīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899), Junayd al-Baghdādī (830-910), ʻAlī al-Hujwīrī (c. 990-1077), Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (1145-1220), Ibn al-ʻArabī (1165-1240), Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877-1938), Shāh Walīullāh (1703-1762), al-Qūshayrī (986-1074), ʻAlī Shāh (1922-2005), Syed Idries Shāh (1924-1996), ʻAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī (13th century), ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (1077-1166), Ibn Sīnā (c. 980-1037), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111), and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), among others. As Merton admitted, he yearned to learn Arabic and Persian in order to read Ṣūfī books in their original languages (*Witness* 270; Baker 127). Besides his sound grounding in primary Islāmic sources, he was also familiar with the major secondary scholarly sources produced by Western Orientalists.

Merton was especially influenced by Ṣūfī scholars such as René Guénon, also known as Yaḥyā ʻAbd al-Wāḥid, Frithjof Schuon, who adopted the name ʻIsā Nūreddīn, Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984), whose Ṣūfī name was Sidī Ibrāhīm, Martin Lings (1909-2005), also known as Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn, Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr (b. 1933), Henry Corbin (1903-1978), ʻAbdul ʻAzīz (b. 1914), Reẓā Arasteh (b. 1927), Sidī ʻAbdesalām (c. 1900-1980), and Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʻAlawī (1869-1934). He was equally influenced by the works of non-Muslim scholars of Islām such as Paul Nwyia (1925-1980), the Iraqi Jesuit, and, especially, Louis Massignon (1883–1962) who, although Catholic, devoted his scholarly life to the study of Ṣūfism. Merton was also influenced by traditionalist authors like Marco Pallis (1895-1989) a close follower of Frithjof Schuon, along with Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy (1905-1970), and Lord Northbourne (1896-1982), who had connections to traditionalist ideas.

Although he explored many other spiritual paths during his life, Merton immersed himself in the study of Ṣūfism for nearly ten years, from 1959-1968. Not only did he study Ṣūfism, and correspond with Ṣūfī scholars and shaykhs, he received a personal visit from Sidī ʻAbdesalām in October 1966. In a letter to Jacques Martin, Merton described the Ṣūfī leader as "[a] true contemplative of the highest order…a very pure and

sober spirit" (*The Courage* 49). According to Merton, the Shaykh "insisted that I was a 'true Ṣūfī' which made me happy" (49).

A Moroccan Ṣūfī teacher from Tetouan, Sidī 'Abdesalām was the North African successor of Shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī, the Algerian Ṣūfī master who had brought Schuon into Ṣūfī Islām. As Merton wrote in his journal on June 16, 1966, he was even invited to join Schuon's Maryamiyyah *ṭarīqah*, the European derivative of the Shādhiliyyah Ṣūfī Order (Baker 220). As he wrote:

> Another letter, and an important one, came: a message from a Muslim Shaykh (Spiritual Master)—actually a European, but formed by one of the great Muslim saints and mystics of the age (Aḥmad al-'Alawī). That I can be accepted in a personal and confidential relationship, not exactly as a disciple, but at any rate as one of those who are entitled to consult him directly and personally. This is a matter of great importance to me, because in the light of their traditional ideas it puts me in contact with the spirit and teaching of Aḥmad al-'Alawī in a way that is inaccessible just to the scholar or the student. (qtd. Baker 220-221)

Although Merton never had the opportunity to accept Schuon's invitation before his suspicious and untimely death in 1968, he wrote about his eagerness to be initiated into Ṣūfism. In a letter sent to Marco Pallis on May 28th, 1966, he wrote: "I do think it is important to enter into contact with a source of guidance like that of Shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī and this is possible through M. Schuon" (qtd. Baker 222).

By the time he delivered a series of six lectures on Ṣūfism, which took place from 1967-1968, Merton had acquired a sound knowledge of the topic, through both study and practice. As he wrote to 'Alī 'Abd al-Ghānī from Alexandria, Egypt, in 1967: "I am very familiar with the traditions of Ṣūfism, and have of course read much of the Holy Qur'ān" (*Witness to Freedom* 335). Besides reading the Qur'ān, Merton was also fond of *dhikr*, a type of Muslim *mantra* in which the names of God are repeated. Although a Catholic, he celebrated the month of Ramaḍān (*A Life of Letters* 348), and performed special prayers during *Laylat al-Qadr*, the Night of Power, in which the Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (*A Life in Letters* 350). He also produced a small, but beautiful, body of Ṣūfī poetry, some of which was Shī'ite in inspiration. Throughout the six lectures he delivered on Ṣūfism at the Abby at Gethsemani, which included "Introduction to Islām and the Ṣūfī Mystic," "The Mystical Knowledge of God," "The Creative Love and Compassion of God," "The Straight Way," and "Ṣūfism: The Desire of God" (Part I and II), Merton expounded on the various spiritual subjects like a veritable sage.

If the Ṣūfī influence on Merton has been well-established, so has the Mertonian influence on Ernesto Cardenal, who was a disciple of the Trappist monk from 1957 to 1968. Not only did Cardenal benefit from two years of direct guidance from Merton at the Abby of Gethsemani from 1957-1959, he visited his mentor once more in 1965, and kept in regular communication with him via correspondence. Although Cardenal was only a novice at the monastery, leaving shortly before Merton delved into Islāmic mysticism, he was kept current of his master's intellectual and spiritual interests through 131 items of correspondence amounting to 217 pages in total. As Cardenal acknowledges in his *Memorias* [*Memoirs*]:

> Merton era una persona que cambiaba de entusiasmos: primero la espiritualidad monástica medieval; después los Padres del Desierto; el misticismo ortodoxo ruso; cuando yo llegué fue América Latina y los indios; después los movimientos pacifistas; la defensa de los derechos civiles en los Estados Unidos; *la mística sufí*; el budismo zen... (*Memorias* I 161-62) [emphasis mine]
>
> [Merton was a person who changed interests: first, he was interested in medieval monastic spirituality; after, it was the Desert Fathers and Russian Orthodox mysticism. When I arrived, it was Latin America and the Indians. After, it was the pacifist movements; the civil rights movements in the United States; *Ṣūfī mysticism*; and Zen Buddhism…] [emphasis mine]

If Merton introduced Cardenal to socially-committed Christianity, the indigenous world, and the union of religion and science while he was at Gethsemani, he also introduced him to Ṣūfism through the Perennialist School of René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon, and the works of the great Muslim mystics after he left the Abby. Although Cardenal kept current with Merton's interests, the Nicaraguan poet explained to me in a 2010 letter that "Merton no nos habló de los sufies cuando yo estuve en Gethsemani" [Merton did not speak to us about the Ṣūfīs when I was at Gethsemani].

In a letter dated September 11th, 1961, Merton informed Cardenal that "He estado en correspondencia con un estudiante musulmán de misticismo en Pakistán que me manda muy buenas cartas y libros interesantes sobre sufismo, algunos de los cuales son admirables" [I have been in correspondence with a Muslim student of mysticism in Pakistan who sends very fine letters and interesting books on Ṣūfism, some of which are admirable] (*Merton-Cardenal* 77; *The Courage* 126). He also sent him a poem regarding the Angel of Death based on an Islāmic text he described as "espléndido y deslumbrante" [splendid and dazzling] (*Merton-Cardenal*

77; *The Courage* 127). Besides informing Cardenal of his contact with ʻAbdul ʻAzīz, the Pakistani student of Ṣūfism, Merton shared with him that he has been corresponding regularly with Louis Massignon, "el más reputado erudito de estudios islámicos" [the scholar most reputed for Islāmic studies] (*Merton-Cardenal* 77; *The Courage* 127). When Massignon passed away, Merton asked Cardenal to pray for the "gran especialista en el islam" [great Islām scholar] who contributed greatly to the "diálogo cristiano-musulmán" [Christian-Muslim dialogue] in a letter dated November 17th, 1962 (*Merton-Cardenal* 108; *The Courage* 137). Not only did Merton admit that he was "deeply impregnated with Ṣūfism" (qtd. Baker 109), he recognized that it formed a central part of his spiritual calling. As he explained, "Asia, Zen, Islām, etc, all these things come together in my life. It would be madness for me to attempt to create a monastic life for myself by excluding these" (Merton, *A Vow* 62; qtd. Baker 41).

Although Merton guided Cardenal to the study of Islāmic mysticism during his lifetime, the Nicaraguan poet has continued to study Ṣūfī sources on his own for the past four decades. The poet is a close personal friend of Luce López-Baralt, the Puerto Rican Hispanist and Islāmicist who focuses on Muslim mysticism. López-Baralt has published numerous works on Islām, paying particular attention to the Ṣūfī influence on Spanish literature. Her works include *Islām in Spanish Literature: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1992), *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islām* (1986), *The Ṣūfī* trobar clus *and Spanish Mysticism: A Shared Symbolism* (2000), *El viaje maravilloso de Buluqiya a los confines del universo* (2004) and *Un Kama Sutra español* (1992). She has also published *Moradas de los corazones* (1999), a Spanish translation of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nūrī al-Baghdādī's (d. 907) *Maqamāt al-qulūb* or *Stations of the Heart*, an early Ṣūfī work by a spiritual disciple of Jaʻfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), the Sixth Shīʻite Imām, as well as al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 910).

López-Baralt, it should be stressed, is a friend, colleague, and disciple of Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, the leader of the Maryamiyyah Ṣūfī Order, and the successor of Schuon. She even wrote the "Introduction" to Naṣr's *The Pilgrimage of Life and the Wisdom of Rūmī* (2007). Like most suspected members of the Maryamiyyah, López-Baralt has not "come out" openly as a Muslim, a Ṣūfī, or a Schuonian. However, the terms she uses to describe Naṣr are so saturated with Ṣūfī symbolism and Perennialist ideas that they are highly suggestive if not completely conclusive. In her review of *The Essential Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr* (2007), López-Baralt described Naṣr in terms that only a member of the Maryamiyyah movement would employ:

> Naṣr's sapiental knowledge is such that I can only think of him as the