

lenging the constitutionality of the code are still working their way through Nigeria's slow but increasingly independent judiciary. If one of those cases makes it to the Supreme Court and forces a divisive judgment, the impact could be catastrophic.

Lack of economic progress and continuing elite corruption also threaten the fragile democratic situation in Nigeria. Growing hosts of frustrated youths on both sides of the religious divide could join militant factions, which take advantage of local, national, or international incidents to vent their anger. In the north, Bin Laden's hope that Nigeria will become a new front in his war remains, at best, wishful thinking. Nonetheless, economic crisis and poor governance could still make it possible, and several small pockets of militants, such as the Nigerian Taliban, stand poised to benefit if state and federal governments cannot reverse the situation.

So, too, extensive Christian proselytizing throughout core Muslim regions is seen by northern Muslims as a direct provocation. Yet evangelism is perceived by many Nigerian Christians as a central obligation of their faith. It is the one goal on which all the Christian churches agree, yet it is the one issue that Muslim groups cannot accept.

Nigeria's new president, Umaru Yar'Adua, is a moderate but devout Muslim and a former Shari'a governor who was handpicked by outgoing president and born-again Christian Obasanjo. Although Yar'Adua came to power through fraudulent elections in April 2007, he has shown himself increasingly credible and intent on improving governance. His faith and Shari'a credentials will likely give him greater leverage in managing potential Islamist challenges from the north, but they also leave him little influence with the Christian evangelicals from the south.

Leaders of violence-prone groups on both sides of the religious fault clearly benefit from bad government, corruption, and economic decay. President Yar'Adua should be pressed to follow through on his promised reforms to deepen democracy as soon as possible. But his tenuous position on the religious divide should be kept in mind as well. A national version of the Kaduna Compromise may offer one solution—which could make Nigeria a model of interest to the United States in its war on terror.

Without progress in democratic and economic reform, however, the nascent religious compromises of recent years will not hold, and Nigeria may well become what it has long threatened to be: the violent epicenter of a global clash of civilizations.

Darren Kew is an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and author of a forthcoming book on democracy-building in Nigeria.

On the Recent Publication of Kahlil Gibran's *Collected Works*

Alan Jacobs

I

Expansive and yet vacuous is the prose of Kahlil
Gibran,

And weary grows the mind doomed to read it.

The hours of my penance lengthen,

The penance established for me by the editor of this
magazine,

And those hours may be numbered as the sands of the
desert.

And for each of them Kahlil Gibran has prepared

Another ornamental phrase,

Another faux-Biblical cadence,

Another affirmation proverbial in its intent

But alas! lacking the moral substance,

The peasant shrewdness, of the true proverb.

O Book, O *Collected Works of Kahlil Gibran*,

Published by Everyman's Library on a dark day,

I lift you from the Earth to which I recently flung you

When my wrath grew too mighty for me,

I lift you from the Earth,

Noticing once more your annoying heft,

And thanking God—though such thanks are sinful—

That Kahlil Gibran died in New York in 1931

At the age of forty-eight,

So that he could write no more words,

So that this Book would not be yet larger than it is.

O Book—

To return to my point,

Which I had misplaced in my wrath—

O Book,

Five times I open you at random,

Five times I record for my readers what I see.

At the first opening, these words:

"And I gazed at Him, and my soul quivered within
me, for He was beautiful."

At the second opening, these words:

"You the talkative I have loved, saying, 'Life hath

much to say'; and you the dumb I have loved,
whispering to myself, "Says he not in silence what I
would fain hear in words?"

At the third opening, these words:
"Work is love made visible."
To which I reply, You must have been pretty lucky in
your job,
If you ever actually had a job,
But then I recall myself to myself,
And I discern that my task at the moment is but to
open the book,
Not to comment thereupon.

Therefore I turn, and cause the Book to be opened a
fourth time:
"Men do not desire blessedness upon their lips, nor
truth in their bowels"
— And I make no comment about the bowels,
But rather allow the completion of the thought, such
as it is—
"For blessedness is the daughter of tears, and truth is
but the son of pain."

And therefore the fifth and thank God the last
Opening of the Book is at hand:
"Absolve me from things of pomp and state,
For the earth in its all is my land,
And all mankind my countrymen."

Five times I have opened the Book,
And here I swear a great vow that I opened truly at
random,
Except that once I opened to a narrative passage
That, had I quoted it, would not have made sense.

Not that any of the rest made sense either,
But you, my reader—you know what I mean.

II

In the twenty-third year of the twentieth century,
Alfred A. Knopf published *The Prophet*,
Written by this Kahlil Gibran,
And lo, the copies of it that have been bought
Would fill the granaries and storehouses of Lebanon,
From whence the Author came to this country as a
child.
Even now, these many decades later,
In the great marketplace of Amazon,
The sales rank of *The Prophet* is high,
Higher at this moment than any of my books has ever
been,

Except one of them, once, fleetingly,
And at that thought I gnash my teeth
And once more fling the Book to the Earth.

But wise is the author who can master the rage of
jealousy,
And the mastery thereof is peace;
So I calm the spirit within me and ask,
What desert of human desire is watered by Gibran's
oases,
The Prophet above all, but also *The Garden of the
Prophet*
And *Jesus the Son of Man* and *Spirits Rebellious*
And poems and sketches numerous and
miscellaneous?
Wherefore do readers turn to these books,
And what do they find within them that nourishes and
comforts?

Let it be known, first, that the lands of the West
Treasure up in their hearts images of Araby.
In the time of the great Queen known as Victoria
There arose in England a race of men
Whose delight was in the desert,
Who dreamed of Scheherazade and her tales of
Haroun-al-Raschid,
The greatest of the Caliphs, the master of disguise,
Who glided half-hidden through the markets and
alleys of Baghdad.
Sir Richard Burton found English words to tell of him.
Likewise did Edward Fitzgerald give unto us many
Englished quatrains
Of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, that old Persian
Whose heart found its twin in dark-minded Koheleth:

*'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.*

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

So spoke Fitzgerald's Persian bard,
And the people of Victoria heard him and sighed,
And thought unto themselves "Vanity of vanities, all is
vanity,"
And turned again to contemplate, now sad, their
railway timetables.

To these who loved their Orient, their Persian Araby

(For in England and America those two lands seemed one),
 Gibran came with a double portion, yea a triple,
 He poured it out without stint
 And oft, it seems, without editing.

This is the first cause of his great renown.
 And the second is like unto it: Gibran's Jesus,
 An oriental sage, a speaker of wry Wisdom,
 A lover of paradox, a Judge only of others—
 Oh yes, He can be wrathful,
 But never to me the reader of Gibran,
 Only to those whom I already dislike,
 The powerful, the greedy, the cruel:
 Those with whom I shall never be confused.
 (The family Gibran was Marionite Catholic,
 And in this faith Kahlil was raised,
 And though he loathed the Church
 He claimed always to love Jesus.
 But the truth of this claim I cannot tell.)

To me—and perhaps to you, dear sisters and
 brothers—
 The Jesus given by Kahlil Gibran, and likewise his
 Prophet,
 Who is himself somewhat Jesusish, bring words of
 comfort:
 What befalls us is part of the plan.
 But no—I repent me of some lowercase letters—
 I mean to say, Part of the Plan.

The Prophet teaches us to rest and to accept.
 The Prophet teaches us that our desire for Freedom
 binds us,
 That our aversion to Pain hurts us,
 That we foolishly seek Knowledge because we do not
 Know that we already Know,
 Or something like that.
 But how this Wisdom shall comfort those whom
 disease afflicts,
 Or who rot in prison,
 Or who grow faint with hunger,
 That too I cannot tell.
 Yet surely the Prophet speaks well and wisely.

That the Prophet delights in paradox
 I need not say.
 If he contradicts himself, he contradicts himself,
 But in so doing illuminates us all the more.
 The Prophet warns,
 "Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have
 found a truth,'"

One of infinitely many truths, it seems,
 "For the soul walks upon all paths,"
 Which means that anything the Prophet says
 Falls like a perfectly formed olive leaf
 Upon at least one of those paths,
 So that His profundity is everlasting and without
 diminishment,
 As long as he pronounces oratorically
 After the manner of Sir Laurence Olivier
 Reading the King James Bible.

And it is the voice of Sir Laurence
 Reading the King James Bible
 That I hear within me as I write these words,
 Which echo resonates within and bequeaths to me
 The Prophetic Strain,
 At least as far as you know.
 Once that voice enters the mind,
 As it does when one has read hundreds and hundreds
 of pages of Kahlil Gibran,
 Its abode is fixed within,
 It refuses all notices of eviction,
 It continues to loop within the sphere of one's skull,
 An earworm, dread and implacable.

III

Envy me not, then,
 O my friends, my readers;
 Though the Prophetic Strain echoes in each line I
 write,
 Though you covet said Strain for your own,
 Heed me and flee.
 The words I give you now are words of Life, and not
 Death,
 Though I suppose the Prophet would proclaim that
 Death and Life are the same,
 And that only the foolish would divide the two,
 The Two which are One.
 But He'd be wrong about that, I'm pretty sure.
 So again I turn and I say to you,
 Pass by the *Collected Works of Kahlil Gibran*,
 Touch it not nor gaze upon it,
 But go about your ways in peace of heart and with
 thanksgiving.
Fly, you fools!

*Alan Jacobs is professor of English at Wheaton College
 and author of The Narnian: The Life and Imagination
 of C.S. Lewis.*