

"O mankind, surely we have created you from male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know one another."
(Quran 49:13)

PROGRESSIVE ISLAM

*A monthly publication dedicated to the promotion of knowledge concerning
Islam and modern thought.*

Editor: Hussein Alatas, Address: Ceintuurbaan 302-I, Amsterdam Holland. Telephone 793950

THE ISLAMIC ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR

Islam is an all embracing way of life aiming at a sound integration of human activity in all its various domains. Labour, being, without any exaggeration, the most important branch of human activity, is not only recognized as such by the Islamic faith, but also regarded as a condition of leading a righteous life. Such being the case, it would not surprise us to know that the religion of Islam, in its attempt to integrate our life in society, provided certain rules and principles with which the entire domain of labour ought to be organized. Not only in the individual but also in society that organization becomes the characteristic category of life. As William MacDougall observed, both the individual and the group minds developed in an organized process. As soon as there was a purpose in any activity organization took place. Similarly, as soon as labour was endowed with meaning and purpose, organization became an inalienable aspect of it. Thus we have in the Islamic way of life a conception of labour with a distinctively laid down emphasis on the manner by which it is organized.

Our present duty. Those of us who had expressed a great deal of concern about the welfare of the Mussulman society had, in general, devoted more time and attention towards education and political emancipation rather than towards the organization of labour. As a proof of this we could point out to the absence of labour unions run on fundamentally Islamic bases in most of the Muslim countries. Truth required us

to admit that the pioneers in this respect were the upholders of communism and socialism. Most of our leaders were satisfied by the mere fact that they also desired to promote the condition of labour without properly apprehending its significance and perceiving the necessity that the realization of an aim involved the employment of means which had to be organized. Never before in human history had labour acquired a potentiality as it possesses now. We know that

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in the past civilizations had always been dependent on labour. But labour had never before exerted a considerable force on the making of policy as it is the case at present. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of industrialization which was in itself a unique phenomenon. For the Muslim ulama, both industrialization and the new meaning of labour are novel subjects on which they could engage their minds. Reasoning by analogy or referring to the consensus of the pious and learned, would help us to evaluate the position connected with it. The problems of to-day are not completely identical with those of yesterday. Thus our present duty is to comprehend the meaning and position of labour in a sound and thorough manner. Together with this, we must begin, wherever it is possible, to organize labour in the interest of justice and humanity. This implies that we must strive for the creation of Islamic labour unions, fighting for the rights of the labourers without necessarily sacrificing the solidarity of the Muslim community.

The coming industrialization: Industrialization had already started in most of the Muslim countries. In some decades the effects released by this industrialization shall be considerably more. One of these shall be the tremendous increase of the labour group. If we do not make timely preparations and adjustments to this coming event of great importance, the inevitable result shall be that an influential section of our Islamic brotherhood, that is the labour class, would experience the evils of injustice and inhuman treatments. Already we are noticing this dark aspect of industrialization in many of our factories and other departments of labour. Already our industrialists are beginning to conceive the whole process of production in terms of profit and the good order of the machines. The human element involved in it is beginning to recede into the background. Is not labour the most immediate field of reforms lying before those from among the people of Islam whose hearts are inclined to truth and virtuous deeds? For it is here that the forces of injustice work its way most thoroughly!

The necessity to organize our labour. The necessity to organize our labour lies not only in the realm of material wants but also in that of the psychological growth and development of the human personality. This implies that our labour organization, like any other organization striving for human requirements or ideals, must not be devoid of a philosophical basis. The Islamic basis has already the advantage of being a system thus providing a well defined purpose for action and clarity of thought. The philosophical

basis of an organization such as the one we envisage is a very important thing. Not only the aims and purposes are presented by it, but also its temper shall be formed by it. Notice for instance the Communist labour organization. Whoever thinks that the final aim of Communist labour organizations is merely material welfare expressed certainly a naive and superficial attitude. Communism's ultimate aim is the realization of a certain type of social order involving particular conceptions of the role of the individual in that social order which is not purely functioning for the satisfaction of material needs. This particular conception of the individual, which includes the desirability of maintaining a certain type of temper, cannot be dissociated from the total Communist outlook on life. The Communist belief in the primary importance of human division into interest groups and later into classes accompanied by the intensity of the struggle between different classes such that it dominated the whole area of human thought and action, engendered a type of temper that lived very much upon the emotion of hatred.

The notable psychologist Franz Alexander is of the opinion that no other philosophy or belief had utilized man's emotion of hatred more than Communism. Alexander, however, saw a connection between Communist recourse to hatred and the personality of Karl Marx, the founder (1). *On the other hand, the faith of Islam desires to cultivate a temper that combines both calmness and dynamic action. For the attainment of any end, our temper and our attitude are of vital importance. In this the Prophet of Islam is a lucid example for the Muslims. It is for the reasons mentioned above that in the organization of our labour all the factors we have mentioned must be properly understood by our labour leaders so that there would exist a uniformity of growth in our Islamic society.* In the Western European civilization the class struggle had always been severe and intense. In the Athenian city-state, in the Empire of Rome, in the Middle Ages, and worst of all after the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, the struggle between the different social classes had always hampered the growth of a just and humane social order. The thinking of their elites was always blurred by the interests of the different classes. Not that this did not exist in Islamic society in the past or at present, or even in any other society. But in the West it had by far exceeded the proportion which we would believe to be healthy. If we are not careful in handling this problem when it is yet not too late, we would, like the societies of ancient Greece, Rome and Western Europe now, be infected by the same disease which is very difficult to eradicate. It is not our aim to

go deeper into the various causes of such a destructive struggle between the different classes. But suffice it to say that we must be on our look out. In the past the class that had been the greatest victim to this class struggle had always been the artisans and the peasantry, and to these is now added the modern industrial labourers. *To save the disruption of our society from within, we must sincerely and audaciously strive for the welfare of our lowest income group, this time the industrial labourers and also the other types of labourers. If we do not do this, we shall betray our Islamic way of life and by our own hands our society shall be blown to pieces.*

Our philosophical basis: Our philosophical basis shall certainly be the Islamic faith. In the subjects of labour and human development, the works of Ibn Khaldun shall certainly be very illuminating for us. We may be surprised to learn that Ibn Khaldun, long before Marx, introduced the idea that the wealth of the community must actually not be valued according to its gold and property but according to its labour force. But nevertheless the Mussulman of today

must be thankful to Marx and his followers for emphasizing this when it was nearly forgotten by them. At the same time he must be careful and independent enough not to be awed by the doctrines of Communism, which, as it is now, have to be met with the forces at our disposal. The Moslem Labour Union of Indonesia (Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia), is one of those labour unions which realized the incompatibility between the teachings of religion and the doctrines of Communism. (2) We hope that there would be more of such unions in the Muslim countries so that one day they could all form an international Islamic federation of trade unions for the good of the Islamic society and simultaneously for the welfare of humanity as a whole.

¹ Franz Alexander, 'Our age of unreason'.

² It is here presumed that our readers are familiar with the fundamental differences between Islam and Communism. It is not only with the theoretical differences that we are here concerned about, but still more the practices of the Communist parties towards Islam and the Muslims. ED.

HUMAN RIGHTS

by

Hamidullah Siddiqi, M.A., LL.M

A distinction must be made at the very outset between the notion involved in the two expressions, namely, "the Universal Human Rights" and "the Universal Conception of Human Rights". The former is simply a recognition of the fact that human rights accrue to every man and woman without any distinction whatsoever. This is largely the result of an instinctive belief that all members of the human society are entitled to the enjoyment of certain rights. They sum up the practical truths which have emerged from common experience of mankind, though they are justified on grounds different from or even opposed to each other. On the basis of similar experience, social groups and political communities have felt the necessity of promulgating a number of rules of behaviour and principles of action in order to solve their practical problems arising

between man and man and between man and society. The pragmatic approach does not immediately require a philosophical foundation. What it is directly concerned with is an affirmation of certain human rights and the contrivance of means to control the enjoyment by men of these rights. In this way an adjustment is sought between conflicting claims. Undoubtedly men would continue to quarrel on the question of the ultimate nature and notion of human rights. That would not, however, prevent them from agreeing on joint declarations of them and on a single body of rules for purposes of action.

Universal Rights.

The conviction that human rights are universal has recently been further strengthened by the fact that the United Nations, symbolising the Inter-

national Community, is well advanced on its way to growing into an effective power. It has exhibited the inter-dependence of the world in a way never done before in man's history.

The expression "The Universal Conception of Human Rights" is linked, on the other hand, with the formation of a philosophical idea as to the ultimate nature and structure of human rights. The issue is how to conceive them with due regard to the significant aspects of experience. Broadly speaking, there are two theories on this point: —

According to one view, human rights originate in and derive their ultimate sanction from the Natural Law which lays down rules of conduct for the guidance of mankind in general. Its principles are written, so to say, in the hearts of men and they can be discovered and made explicit by the application of reason in man. It is divine in nature and it is based upon the Universal Reason in which every human being more or less participates by virtue of his innate rational nature, the written laws must on no account go against it, and to the extent to which they are repugnant to it they would be held to be irrational and blasphemous. Accordingly, the principles of the Natural law emanating from the Transcendent Reason, call it God or what you please, furnish the standard of perfection to man in the light of which he ought to guide his footsteps during the course of his earthly career. As they are imposed from outside and by no less than God Himself, contingencies are not permitted to impugn the absoluteness of their demands.

Law of Nature

"Things which were regarded as intrinsically right or wrong were assumed to be so by force of the law of Nature. Thus the right to life and liberty, the duty of worship and maintenance of the family, sprang from the Law of Nature. Similarly crime such as murder, theft or perjury were wrongs acts contrary to the Law of Nature; they were, therefore, *mala in se* as contrasted with merely man-made offences — *mala prohibita*. Justice itself was either "Natural" or "Conventional" (Osborn).

Man possesses Reason. This fact entitles him to certain absolute and inalienable rights. Conversely duties are imposed which, in so far as they do not reach the requisite measure of excellence, are looked upon as infringements of the Natural Law.

It would be seen from the above account that the Natural Law is conceived to be antecedent

both to the individual and to the society, so that rights and obligations with their interrelations can only be justified on their conformity to the *a priori* requirements of the State of Nature without taking into account the conditions of life. The necessities imposed by the Natural Law are inexorable and no regard for social utility, howsoever urgently requiring their relaxation, could impinge on their absolute character. Human rights, accordingly, are fundamental and imprescriptible.

In its cosmological transcription, the Law of Nature is completely transcendent to the world of phenomena to which, however, it is supposed to prescribe rules of behaviour. This amounts to the adoption of the metaphysical doctrine of External Relations, implying that each one of the existents composing the order of nature subsists by virtue of its private qualifications and therefore becomes understandable without any reference to other individuals. Descartes defined "Substance" in some such way when he declared that it is that which exists by itself and requires nothing except itself to exist. This is but an affirmation of External Relations. Whatever necessity is imposed on an individual to enter into relationships with other individuals, it has its roots neither in his nature nor in his experience nor in the historical situation but in the extraneous Absolute Law. This means firstly an extremely individualistic conception of man, endowed with absolute rights and duties unrelated to the actual conditions of his existence Secondly, all connections he forms with others are external to his own being. The earlier Declarations of Human Rights were based on this theory with the result that the emphasis fell on the rights of the individual as against the society rather than on his duties to the latter, apart from any historical justification. This was due to the belief that the individuals ought to realise themselves completely by pursuing their private and personal ends, the only limitation being the external relations consequent on the myth of a Social Contract. The principle of *Laissez Faire* was the logical outcome of the conception of man as an insular being. Rights and duties of men, therefore, could integrate on no better foundation than the fiction of Social Contract.

Artificial Concept

The concept of Natural Law has rightly been denounced not only as artificial but also as totally misleading. It was soon realised that in spite of several declarations of his Civil and Political Rights, Man lacked the means to implement them in actual practice, because of the perverted use of

the concept of Natural Law by a minority in securing all material advantages for themselves. It was felt that unless right and duties lost their absolute character and were regarded as relative to the material conditions of well-being, needs and their satisfaction against the background of historical situation, man would continue to suffer injustice. Thus the verdict of history went against the doctrine of absolute rights.

The theory of the Natural Law, on critical examination, would appear, to be based upon the dualism of the Greek thought. Plato who looked upon the world of the senses as a copy of the extra-temporal Ideas could not find a foothold in the transient life for certainty of knowledge. The eternal Ideas alone could be understood and not this changing world. He was therefore, forced by the assumption of his thought to search for the absolute principles of knowledge from the characteristics of the immutable Ideas. Consistently with this position, it was not possible for him to regard the material world as real. The Doctrine of External Relations, being the logical outcome of the Natural Law, meant a denial of the reality of evolution and, therefore, of time. The relativity of a large number of human rights, accordingly, cannot be explained on the basis of the Natural Law. The reason is obvious. Relativity implies a constant shift in the positions of the relata. It was, therefore, necessary to discard the concept of external relation so as to accommodate the notion of growth. Any world-view recognising the validity of change cannot do without an idea of some sort of Internal Relations.

As a reaction against the absolutist theory of human rights, another view has been put forward according to which man's rights and liberties derive their legitimacy and sanction from his role in the historic evolution of the community of which he is a member. Human rights, it is thought, are relative to and conditioned by the material surroundings and as the latter are perpetually varying, being always in a state of flux, the rights are the product of society itself, depending upon the level of its material development, constraints and structure at any particular time in its history.

Pantheism.

When God is conceived to be completely immanent in the Universe without having a transcendental character, the consequence is pantheism, making the world of his creation exhaust His being without a remainder. Any attempt at equating the Creator with His creation would end in His depersonalization, as it happened in

Buddhism. Historical Materialism, too, is grounded in immanence. Immanence whether material or spiritual, is based on the idea of non-durational change which is interpreted in terms of internal relation as a series of logical deductions. Where there is nothing except change, no security is left for any values, material or spiritual, nor can the world be prevented from relapsing into lawlessness.

Meaningless Jargon.

These two theories take opposite views of man's status in the universe and between them completely invert the scales of values. No conciliation, therefore, appears possible. For one the source of human rights is in spiritual principle which is thoroughly transcendental; for the other it is totally immanent in the world where the material forces, chiefly economic, are the determining factors. The conflict that has been raging between them has produced a great crisis in civilisation which, if not removed before long, would in all probability spell ruin for human society. One of the frightful results is that confidence in human worth and dignity has been shaken. If the human ego has no centrality of its own and is simply a chain of reflexes in the enormous mechanism of material forces, all talk about higher values and spiritual ideals is a meaningless jargon.

Relativist Theory

Various solutions have been offered to put an end to the deadlock and two of them by way of illustrations, are as under: —

1. Social and economic rights stressed by the exponents of the relativist theory are complementary to the civil and political rights embodied in the declarations of the 17th and 18th Centuries. As both sets of rights have their justifications in history, they cannot be considered to be opposed to each other but rather they should be regarded as exemplifying various stages in the development of human society. Political and civil rights remain incomplete unless there are placed at the service of the individual certain social and economic guarantees. This is what historical Materialism claims to have done.

A compromise like this is philosophically unsound. Unless there is some common ground between the two conflicting theories, the fundamental cleavage between them cannot be repaired. It would be agreed that human rights like rights in general sprout from the substrata of values which are left *exhypothesi* in the same state of antagonism as before. The solution, therefore, is not substantial.

2. It is suggested that the only difference between the two conceptions of human rights pertains firstly to the Area or the sphere of their application and secondly to the method of their implementation. As to the Area, it is pointed out that whereas formerly the stress was laid on the negative rights of man, now the positive rights are given priority. As to the Method instead of the *Laissez Faire* policy another technique was necessary to make the enjoyment of social and economic rights full and real which has been found in the socialistic organisation of national economy. This solution also does not go to the root cause. The divergence between the two approaches is too fundamental to be composed by their simple reduction to a difference in technique. At the base of the conflict lie contradictory concepts about the status of man. Unless a consensus is reached on the doctrinal side, it is not possible to reconcile them by designating them as mere questions of procedure, method, or area. (1)

It will be conceded that a way out from the difficulty demands a creative synthesis of the truths contained in each of these conceptions. Various attempts have been made by thinkers in this respect but they have not commended themselves to acceptance generally. As men differ in their outlook on life and on values which ultimately relate to their metaphysical and spiritual convictions, it is too much to hope that any solution, howsoever meritorious, would be assented to and adopted by a large majority. Efforts, however, should not be relaxed. If not today, some time hence experience may reveal the excess and failings of the two views to their respective adherents who may veer away from the positions which they hold at present and meet each other halfway.

This discussion reveals that the following points should be kept in view while formulating a concept of human rights on the basis of a rational interpretation of experience.

Absolute Rights

1. Some of these rights must be considered to be absolute, as for instance, the right to live. This necessitates the First Principles to be transcendental so that the nucleus of a constitutional framework may be provided to the existents before initiation of action and life become possible. Values require security in the ultimate scheme of things. In fact this is the principle of Creation which the Qur'an calls "Taqqir":

"Of what thing did He create him? Of a small life-germ. He created him, then He made him according to a measure. Then (as for the way) He made it easy for him." (80 : 18-20)

It is only the objective solidarity of values which imparts meaning to our ideals that we are exhorted to realise for the purposes of spiritual development.

It will be interesting to note that a case was decided in England in the last Century in which Judges held that human life could under no circumstances be taken away unless justice required it. The facts of the case were:

A few sailors in a boat got astray on the high seas and for a number of days they went without food and water. As they were on the verge of death due to starvation, they killed one of them who happened to be the youngest amongst them and unmarried. Thus they saved their lives. Sometimes afterwards they were hauled up before the court on the charge of murder of the deceased. It was argued on behalf of the accused persons that considering the facts of the case, there was no other alternative than to kill him with a view to saving so many lives on the boat. The plea was not accepted on the ground that man's right to his life is absolute. An almost similar decision has been reported from the early history of Islam.

First Principle.

2. The First Principle must also be immanent in the Universe so as to accommodate the claim to reality of material existence. This is necessary because we do not want to be thrown into the wilderness like the supporters of the classical theory of the Natural Law. If these relations in their mutuality are not conceived as mere Universals or external as the Absolutist philosophy preaches, the material conditions can metaphysically limit the operations of human rights other than those of the absolute ones e.g., economic and social rights belong to this category. The relativity of most of the human rights will be provided for in this way.

The above analysis makes it imperative that we should also form a notion of the scale of values strictly within the above principles. Everybody in practice does make such a distinction. Those with greater value should be given a priority over those of lesser value.

Qur'anic Solution.

Let us see if the Qur'an gives us any clue as to the solution of the problem. The following verses are relevant in this connection: —

"We have made Our Signs clear to those who meditate." (5 : 127)

"Those who reflect on the Creation of the heavens and the earth exclaim: 'Our Lord! Thou hast not created all this in vain'."

(2 : 192)

"And He hath subjected to you the night and the day, the sun and the moon and stars too are subject to you by His behest; verily in this are signs for those who understand." (16 : 12)

"The East and West are God's: therefore whichever way ye turn, there is the face of God." (2 : 109)

"We created man and we know what his soul whispereth to him and we are closer to him than his jugular-vein." (50 : 15)

"Already, before your time, have precedents been made. Traverse the earth then and see what hath been the end of those who falsify the signs of God." (3 : 131)

"He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden and He is Cognizant of all things." (47 : 3)

"Say—go through the earth and see how God hath brought forth all creation; thereafter will He give it another birth." (29 : 19)

"He (God) adds to His Creation what He wills." (35 : 1)

God And His Creation.

"We have not created the Heavens and the Earth and whatever is between them in sport; we have not created them but for a serious end; but the greater part of them understand it not." (44 : 38)

"And the birds and the trees do adore Him." (55 : 6)

"Every moment He is in a newer glory." (55 : 29)

"And your Lord Saith, call Me and I respond to your call."

"If ye do good, ye do good for your own souls, and if ye do evil, it is for them (in like manner)." (17 : 7)

"And how many signs in the heavens and the earth which they pass by yet they turn aside them." (12 : 105)

"And people are naught but a single nation." (10 : 19)

"The seven heavens declare His glory and the earth too, and those who are in them; and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him

with His Praise, but ye do not understand their glorification." (17 : 44)

God and His Creation

The verses cited above make it clear that God is organic with the world. His relation to His creation may be conceived as one of soul to body. The world is organically and completely dependent on Him. It is in the making and is constantly developing from moment to moment. In other words it is a plastic world. Time is real and is the essential form of the cosmic process. God is both immanent and transcendent. He is not without a keen interest in our struggle. In short, He is essentially bound up with the life in time. He has laid down the rules for the guidance of man and now it is up to him which way to choose — the way of evil or the way of virtue and goodness. God alone is the true repository of all values and it is from Him alone that they derive their objective reality. The world we live in exhibits degrees of reality inasmuch as it is the manifestation of God's attributes.

Islam on Human Rights

The following observations may accordingly be made as to how Islam looks at the problem of human rights: —

1. The right to equality is based on the primordial oneness of the human race which, with the passage of time, has got differentiated into so many clans, nations and tribes under the pressures of physical existence. The idea of brotherhood of man is ultimately based on the assumption that the Creator is a unity. It is obvious, therefore, that without a living personal God it is not possible to conceive the idea of human brotherhood. Islam, which is a monotheistic religion, has exhibited the truth of this observation in that it alone amongst all creeds of the world has been able to level down the irritations brought about by prejudices as to race, sex, colour and religion. Humanism cannot be a substitute for a personal God for a twofold reason. In the first place, it cannot provide any metaphysical ground for the objectivity of values. Man not only wants to realise values but he also seeks some sort of security for the gains achieved. In the second place it has not succeeded in evolving any satisfactory moral ends and all attempts so far made in this direction have proved to be a failure. Naturalistic morality cannot find its bearings in anything higher than self-interest and expediency.

2. The fundamental rights of equality and liberty can find scope for any sizeable application only in a democracy in which the lead and initiative remain in the hands of the enlightened peo-

ple. The Islamic principle of *Ijma'* remains unexcelled as an instrument for the extraction of fresh rights and obligations as well as for their conservation. The democracy envisaged by Islam can never produce the tyranny of the masses unlike some of the democracies of the modern world.

3. The doctrine of the Natural Law requires restatement so that it may serve as a metaphysical basis for Universal Conception of Human Rights. The Law must be both immanent and transcendent in recognition of the relativity of a large number of human rights and the absolute character of certain values respectively. This is possible only on the lines suggested by the Qur'an which, as we have seen, regards the Creator as Transcendent yet organically related to His creation. To the Absolute of the Platonic tradition

the idea of progress and evolution is foreign; only a God actively engaged in the continuous creation can permit flexibility. The Absolute gives us only a block universe and, therefore, denudes the material world of meaning. The Quran locates the Natural Law in the heart of man to whom it is no longer unknown. His ideals and purposes gain in significance in his actual pursuit of them amidst his environment and surroundings. Nature becomes understandable and the language it speaks is discovered to be the language of his ideal self.

¹ This is a completely sound observation which had often been neglected. Power conflicts were always rooted in what were ultimately doctrinal issues. Note, for instance, the consequences of the rise of Nazism as described by H. Rauschnig in his "Revolution of nihilism". E.D.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Mr. Mohd. Roem's opinion on the nature of Islam as a complete way of life embracing the activity of the state and society.

On his way back to Indonesia in May this year from the United States, Mr. Mohd. Roem, a prominent member of the Masjumi party of Indonesia, and more than once minister in the Indonesian government, broke his journey for a few days stay in the Netherlands. On the invitation of the editor of Progressive Islam, Mr. Roem delivered a brief talk on Islam in the politics in Indonesia, in a private residence in Amsterdam. Mr. Roem commenced his talk, amongst others, by mentioning the fact that Islam, after some hundred years had found a fertile ground in Indonesia. The Muslims in Indonesia not only believe in Islam as a religion dealing with a purely individual and private affair, but also as a broad and tolerant social system capable of ordering society as a whole in a democratic manner. This social order, Mr. Roem explained, shall not be for the Muslims only but also for the non-Muslims. The interests of the non-Muslims shall neither be neglected nor be injured. Mr. Roem did not forget to mention that there are of course some Muslims who do not believe in Islam as an ideology having the function of ordering society as a

whole, like socialism or Communism. He did not agree with this group of Muslims who believe in the separation of the state from religion. If we believe that religion ought to transform man, then, according to Mr. Roem, religion must not be separated from the state. Mr. Roem did not deny the possibility that a misunderstanding could arise in connection with this subject if we rely on European history when we want to form a judgement regarding the unity between religion and state. He also did not deny the fact that religion had, at times, been utilized for purposes other than itself such as in Nazism and Communism. Concerning the significant aspects of Islam, Mr. Roem mentioned that both democracy and the fundamental conception of human rights, are contained in the Islamic faith.

About the Prophet of Islam, Mr. Roem believed that the attempts he made to unify the Arabs resulted in the establishment of a social order which possesses the nature of a modern state. The leader of this state was then the Prophet Muhammad, who, Mr. Roem reminded us, is the last of the prophets and after whom no other prophets shall appear. The successors of the Prophet shall not have the same authority as he had. Amongst them Mr. Roem mentioned the great Imams whose task was to impart knowledge to the people in general.

ISLAM AND THE CRISIS IN EUROPE

by
Hussein Alatas

Crises in valuation and thinking.

At a certain period in the history of every society, there was an occasion when the pressure of forces hitherto unknown became so strong that it shook the fabric of its very foundation. Many of us here in the West have not yet realized that the society in which we are now living is not a normal one.¹ It is a society in which might is right, in which there is despair and uncertainty, in which people are tired not only of trying to find a way out but even of maintaining hope. Despite the material splendour that we find here and the amazing rapidity in the progress of technology, the West, viewed as a whole, has not even reached a higher stage than that attained by primitive society.² Unity or inter-adjustment in the basis of thinking is not to be found. People not only disagree in what they think but they also disagree on how to think. "We are not only divided against each other in our evaluation of the big issues, such as the principles of the Good Life and those of the best social organizations," said Mannheim, the well-known social scientist, "but we have no settled views, especially in our democratic societies concerning the right patterns of human endeavour and conduct".³ Referring to our daily activities, Mannheim continues: "Thus there is nothing in our lives, not even on the level of basic habits, such as food, manners, behaviour, about which our views are not at variance. We do not even agree as to whether this great variety of opinions is good or bad, whether the greater conformity of the past or the modern emphasis on choice is to be preferred." Amidst these conflicting views of life one thing is certain, and this Mannheim expressed when he wrote: "There is, however, one last issue about which we are clear. It is definitely not good to live in a society whose norms are unsettled and develop in an unsteady way".⁴

The spiritual vacuum in Europe responsible for present-day tension.

The result of all this is that the West now moves towards a spiritual vacuum. This gives the

opportunity for each dissenting group to put into practice, sometimes by force, its own views of good and bad founded on the assumption of unbridled relativism. A common basis on which the dissenting groups can ultimately fall back for reference in cases of acute differences has disappeared. In this heart-rending situation it is not surprising that reactionary forces, which tended to wipe out human freedom and all the basic values of the Western way of life, became strong enough to threaten not only Europe but other parts of the world. The birth of Fascism is an example that proved that something is wrong with the whole organism. This absence of common criteria for truth does not only create catastrophic consequences in the major events of the world, but also in the daily life of individuals. Another social scientist⁵ attributed most of the deplorable things that happened in Western society to this very loss of belief in everything that has to do with the value and meaning of life. "The world," he wrote, "has been splintered into countless fragments of atomized individuals and groups. The disruption in the wholeness of individual experience corresponds to the disintegration in culture and group solidarity. When the bases of unified collective action begin to weaken, the social structure tends to break and to produce a condition which Emil Durkheim has termed 'anomie', by which he means a situation which might be described as a sort of social emptiness or void. Under such conditions suicide, crime, and disorder are phenomena to be expected because individual existence no longer is rooted in a stable and integrated social *milieu* and much of life's activity loses its sense and meaning."⁵

Europe in need of a new system of life to fit in its traditions.

After realizing in what sort of society people are now living here, it would be interesting to know the reactions made on those who are most concerned with the conditions of the West. Some in despair resign themselves to the inevitable decline of the West; some await the calamity im-

pending from these crises; some take the line of least resistance by closing their eyes to what is happening; and some look around with a sober mind, hoping to discover a solution. Despite the different views they maintain on the future of the West, they are all agreed that the present situation is a precarious one, capable of generating various kinds of disasters. It is not only the material condition of the people that is affected but also their spiritual well-being. To be clear about this, we have only to glance back at recent events still fresh in our memories.

All these signs indicate that the West is in need of a new system of life in order to regain the meaning and valuation that give content to existence, which have been lost in the whirlpool of doubt and perplexities. By a new system I do not mean one that is meant only for a group or a few individuals, but an all-embracing way of life that can be made the basis of the Western world in the future. Apart from this, since no society can possibly disentangle itself from its past history in the sense of a complete and thorough-going change, the basic virtues of that new way of life should conform to those of the West.

To know what this system should be let us first try to know more about what is happening now by making a modest inquiry into the past, in the hope of understanding the factors that influence the present instability. This inquiry will certainly be limited and one-sided, for it aims at bring forward only the factors most conspicuously related to the system of life.

Amongst the distinctive peculiarities of the West which played an important role in moulding its history are its dynamism and its diversities. Together with these is the polarity of its extremes. To cite an instance, the period between 400 and 1400 C.E. was marked by its dogmatism and hostility to free inquiry. Then came the revival of learning known as the Renaissance, which signalized the breakdown of the former dogmatic order. From about 1600 C.E. the spirit of inquiry, liberated from medieval captivity, attempted to explore the various domains of knowledge. This culminated in the instability of the 19th century in the realm of thought and experience. Ever since then, besides the rise and fall of philosophical systems with values cancelling one another, the instability of Europe became more and more untenable. To-day it is characterized by violent shocks on the social as well as the spiritual planes. Although the reason for this is the transition from one type of society to another, it is not enough to produce such effects unless the prevailing system failed to digest and

absorb the changes. Such being the case, the presence of tension, which sometimes breaks at the pressure of centrifugal forces, is to be expected.

An outline of the new system wanted by Europe.

We are now in a better position to know what the new system has to take into account.

Since the operation of any system depends on its general acceptance by the people, and since this should not happen by force, it is therefore quite fair to expect the people to ask, why must we adopt this or that system? There are many systems each claiming perfection, but none has so far proved its claim.

Before we go further let us convince ourselves what kind of characteristics a system must possess. To put it briefly, what should be the criteria of a true system of life? I believe a true system of life should be that its teaching strives for goodness; secondly, it should be all-embracing; thirdly, it should have a trustworthy insight into the nature of existence; fourthly, it must be real and alive; and fifthly, it should have a tradition which occasions no unpleasant memories, because the past is the source of inspiration to the present. Another thing which we must also take into account is the fact that people can no longer believe blindly in just anything presented to them. Man has reached a stage of intellectual development, wherein it is no more possible not to question his belief. He cannot return to the age in which he accepted without asking why. As al-Ghazali, the Muslim mystic and philosopher of the 12th century, said: "Having once surrendered blind belief, it is impossible to return to it, for the essence of such belief is to be unconscious of itself. As soon as this unconsciousness ceases, it is shattered like a glass whose fragments cannot be again reunited except by being cast again into the furnace and refashioned."⁶

The Insufficiency of Philosophy and Science.

We will now proceed to test the various systems by the above criteria. All systems based only on philosophy do not satisfy the requirements we have said. Philosophy, besides satisfying only a few individuals or a class, is also incapable of becoming a vital force in our life. It cannot exert the necessary influence strong enough to make us willingly perform the sacrifices in times of difficulties. Furthermore, philosophy with its great degree of dependence on the Age, the Place, and the Knowing Mind, is not even certain of the validity of its methods. Forced, as it is, to rest it-

self ultimately on belief, philosophy in this sense is a mere rationalization of the philosopher's individual belief, which is not free from his emotions and interests.

Other systems which have adopted pure science as their basis are no more trustworthy than philosophy. Science, while not only starting with certain presuppositions and hypotheses, gives us only sectional views of reality. It cannot be made the basis of our conception of the true life because science by itself does no mean anything. Progress in science does not guarantee human welfare unless it is accompanied by the similar increase of the moral power which lies beyond the reach of science. Writing about a scientific civilization, Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher, said: "If, therefore, a scientific civilization is to be a good civilization, it is necessary that increase in knowledge should be accompanied by increase of wisdom. I mean by wisdom a right conception of the ends of life. This is something which science in itself does not provide. Increase of science by itself, therefore, is not enough to guarantee any genuine progress, though it provides one of the ingredients which progress requires."⁷

The Muslim philosopher and poet Iqbal thought that science is not capable of giving us a total view of reality. He said: "Natural science deals with Matter, with Life and with Mind; but the moment you ask the question how Matter, Life and Mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character."⁸

Islam's role.

Thus it is now clear to us that neither science nor philosophy can provide us with the way of life we are searching for, despite the fact we do not deny their usefulness in our lives. So the only way open to us is through religion. Religion seeks to explain the totality of human experience and therein has laid down certain ends and values in life which, when striven for with the aid of our inner ability, produce a kind of peace and tranquillity in the mind and the heart. Such

being the nature of religion, it should therefore not be hostile either to science or to philosophy but instead should incorporate them into its essence. Taking all these into consideration and applying now our five criteria to test the truth of religion, we shall find that Islam is the only one that passes the test.

The religion of Islam is all-embracing and pervades the whole of life. It preaches freedom, human brotherhood, tolerance and continuous striving to attain the good life embodied in the meaning of the word Islam, that is, peace with God and our fellow beings. The basis of the freedom of belief and the independence of truth from any accidental human arbitration is firmly established in the Qur'an, when it states: "There should be no compulsion in religion; for truth by its own nature separates itself from falsehood" (2 : 256). It requests us to use our understanding and accept the guidance of God not for any other purpose than our own good. It requires us to utilize all our talents and capacities to attain our aim. "Man", says the Qur'an, "shall only attain what he strives for" (53 : 39). True to its essence, by appealing to our reason and understanding as being complimentary to our feeling, Islam incorporates science and philosophy into its system and regards them as blessings from God. It was the Prophet himself who was the first seeker for knowledge in Islam. His prayer was: "O God, grant me the knowledge of the ultimate nature of things!"⁹

Islam meets the needs of human nature.

True religion as conceived by Islam must be such as will meet the needs and longings of human nature and will form in itself the ideal towards which humanity will develop. In this sense, according to Islam, to be loyal to God is to be true to our own ideal nature, for "Islam is the nature created by God in which He has created man" (The Qur'an, 30 : 30). It enjoins

us to follow the middle way in our thinking and action without surrendering what is noble in man to mere circumstances.

When considering the nature of Islam and its moral teaching, a Turkish author wrote: "The Quran tells us to overcome evil with good. Forgiveness is described in it as a supreme wisdom of life, but forgiveness can only be the fruit of sincere repentance. God Himself grants pardon only to him whose state of minds fits him to receive it. On the other hand it is our duty to stand firm in resisting deliberate violence and outrage." The author further writes: "The prac-

tice of equity and sincerity in all our dealings with others, the brotherhood of all who share the same faith, love and respect for parents and relatives, veracity in speech, and honesty and fidelity in keeping our engagements and carrying out what we have undertaken, kindness and sympathetic benevolence to others, decency and chastity between the two sexes, a modest and gracious bearing amongst our equals. together with humility before God, these are virtues insisted upon from one end of the Quran to the other. It tells us that good works and good deeds raise us towards God, and bring us near to Him. In face of the trials and vicissitudes of life it exhorts us to show courage, when danger threatens, to meet disaster and sorrow with fortitude and firmness, and to persevere steadfastly in our efforts to do good. Thus there are no virtues either personal or social which are not required of us by Islam in the name of piety and the transcendent aims and ends of Religion itself.”¹⁰

Such being the nature of Islam, it is not surprising that Goethe, when making a general review of Islam as an educational force, said: “You see this teaching never fails; with all our systems we cannot go, and generally speaking no man can go, farther than that.”⁹

Professor Arnold Toynbee on Islam.

Returning to our beginning about the condition of Europe, many people now recognize the merit of Islam. Already the well-known historian Arnold Toynbee welcomed the beneficial influence of Islam on Western Society. He writes:¹¹ “We can however, discern certain principles of Islam which, if brought to bear on the social life of the new cosmopolitan proletariat, might have important salutary effects on ‘the great society’ in the nearer future. Two conspicuous sources of danger — one psychological and the other material — in the present relation with the dominant element in our modern Western society, are race consciousness and alcohol, and in the struggle with each of these evils the Islamic spirit has a service to render which might prove, if it were accepted, to be of high moral and social value.”¹¹

“The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims,” continues Toynbee, “is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue; for although the record of history would seem on the whole to show that race consciousness has been the exception and not the rule in the constant inter-breeding of the human species, it is a fatality of the present situation that this consciousness is felt — and felt

OFFICES AND AGENTS OF P. I.

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Agent in Burma

Muslim Students' Society, Madressa Islamia Building, Bogyoke Road, Maymyo, Burma.

strongly — by the very peoples who, in the competition of the last four centuries between several Western powers, have won — at least for the moment — the lion's share of the inheritance of the earth.”¹¹

“As things are now,” says Toynbee again, “the exponents of racial intolerance are in the ascendant, and, if their attitude towards ‘the race question’ prevails, it may eventually provoke a general catastrophe. Yet the forces of racial toleration, which at present seem to be fighting a losing battle in a spiritual struggle of immense importance to mankind, might still regain the upper hand, if any strong influence militating against race consciousness that has hitherto been held in reserve were now to be thrown into the scales. It is conceivable that the spirit of Islam might be the timely reinforcement which would decide this issue in favour of tolerance and peace.”¹¹

¹ This article was first published in the June 1951 issue of the Islamic Review. The title and the notes were altered here.

² Karl Mannheim, *Mankind in an Age of Reconstruction*. This is of course, only in connection with morality and not with the other incomparable achievements of the West.

³ Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of our time*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Professor Wirth in the preface of *Ideology and Utopia*, by Mannheim.

⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Confession of al-Ghazali*.

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Scientific Outlook*.

⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam*, Oxford, 1934.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Mahmud Mukhtar Katircioglu, *The Wisdom of the Quran*, Oxford, 1937.

¹¹ A. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, London, 1949.