

# Islamic Review

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**RABĪ'U 'L-AWWAL, 1348 A.H.**

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# THE ISLAMIC REVIEW

RABĪ'U 'L-AWWAL, 1348 A.H.

VOL. XVII.

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No. 8

## THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE- OLOGY IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

*An Address given by Dr. Walter Walsh, Leader of the Free Religious Movement, to the British Muslim Society, III Campden Hill Road, London, W.8 (London Muslim Prayer House).*

THE surest guide to English theology is the theology of the Church of England, since it is the national Church, by law established. Besides, with the exception of the Church of Rome, which is the same throughout the world, the Anglican Church is the only great ecclesiastical body with a fixed creed. The great Nonconformist bodies are generally without elaborate official standards, though they may be regarded in general as holding diluted versions of the 39 Articles of the Church of England. Further, the present position of theology in the Church of England may be best ascertained by a survey of the discussions of the Church Congress.

I could not but recall the fable of the lying spirit in the mouths of certain Jewish prophets, as day by day I followed the proceedings of the recent Church Congress. The Church is certainly doomed. And the moving cause of its vanishment will be its temper of worldly wisdom, of compromise, of casuistry, of duplicity—the disposition which a ruder age did not hesitate to stigmatize as “a lying spirit.”

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The events attending the Church Congress show that we are not discussing dead issues. Lord Halifax's letter shows with what vigour he and his eight hundred supporters denounced those members of his communion who were men enough to speak something of the truth, and called (to all intents and purposes) for their excommunication.

I cannot agree with the Bishop of Gloucester that the question under discussion is this: Is Christianity true? That is indeed a fundamental question, to answer which, however, would necessitate agreement upon the previous question: What *is* Christianity? No, my lord bishop; the question of the hour is this: Is *the Church* true? In view of the proceedings at the Congress, and notwithstanding that it includes a number of true men who are bravely fighting for truth, it is obvious that the Church is not true.

It may be helpful to decide what we mean by "the Church." Most unprejudiced persons will accept Tolstoy's description of the Church:

"A body of men who claim for themselves that they are in complete and sole possession of the truth. And these bodies, having in course of time, aided by the support of the temporal authorities, developed into powerful institutions, have been the principal obstacles to the diffusion of a true comprehension of the teaching of [Jesus]."

Into this body of men claiming to be in complete and sole possession of the truth, and to be instinct with divine power to bless and to curse (think of its pretence to pardon and absolve from sin, its confessional, its assertion that whatever it binds or looses on earth is bound or loosed in Heaven), comes the theological portent known as "Modernism," which may be described as the opposite of Medievalism. The church creeds, being medieval, do not fit the minds of modern men, who, finding it impossible to shape their minds to the Middle-age pattern, are impelled to alter the Middle-age pattern to fit their minds. An eminently sensible procedure, you will say. The progressive churchmen who lead this forward movement

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do not allow that it is a heresy, but announce it as the newest form of orthodoxy; which exactly explains why we welcome it on the one hand, and on the other hand are unable to join in the chorus of acclamation raised by liberal newspaperdom. We ourselves fought these battles out a generation ago. For which reason we give a willing cheer to the courageous reformers who are now taking their official life in their hands for the sake of another step towards the goal of religious freedom. But we beg them, for the love of God, not to establish any more orthodoxies, either old or new. We want no more orthodoxies. Every orthodoxy is a barrier erected against the progressivist of a future age. Free Religion wants all barriers down. No more creeds, no more confessions, no more orthodoxies, but freedom to think, to speak, to differ, to be true to the facts of life and the universe as they are increasingly discovered, and true to ourselves—each to himself—in relating the facts to our inner experience. The creed that seems true to-day, to-morrow will be as a stuffed scare-crow to the young truth-seeker, a bogey to frighten him from the onward path. No more creeds—not even yours, not even mine.

I suppose some people find theological disquisitions tedious, and would take even Modernist theology on trust rather than suffer an exposition of it. However, we are out to smash theological idols, and it is as important for the average man to know the why and the wherefore of Modernism distinguished from Orthodoxy as it is to know why Liberalism and Labour dissent from Conservatism. Bear with this concise statement, therefore, derived from Dr. Major's paper, *The Modern Churchman*:

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the Virgin birth of Jesus.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the physical resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the penal character of the sufferings of Jesus, and that on the Cross he offered a propitiation or satisfaction to God.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the omniscience and omnipotence of Jesus.

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Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the trustworthy character of Bible apocalyptic pictures, portraying the end of the world.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the fleshly resurrection of human beings.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, apostolic authority for the monarchical episcopate [Bishops].

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, the evidential value of miracles, and that they are capable of attesting a divine revelation.

Modernism denies, while Orthodoxy accepts, Biblical and ecclesiastical infallibility.

All this sounds very well, but before we fling our caps in the air let us note how Bishop Headlam, the Chairman of the Congress, interprets it.

Take the Virgin birth:

“The truth and implications of this doctrine must at the present time be submitted to reverent and careful investigation if many people are not to be driven into a dogmatic rejection of it.”

The Bishop does not say, but implies, that the Virgin birth is a cardinal truth of Christianity, which, however, he proposes to investigate. Is it not rather late in the day, my lord? How does Bishop Headlam propose to investigate the manner of the conception and birth of a child born two thousand years ago, and who may not even have been born at all, since the historicity itself is a reopened question! Dare I suggest that I see the episcopal tongue in the episcopal cheek? Or take the allied doctrine of the Incarnation. Says Dr. Major:

“The Modernist believes in a perfectly human non-miraculous Christ . . . Jesus claimed to be God’s son in a moral sense in which all human beings are the sons of God. . . . The consciousness of Jesus was a full human consciousness; it was not supernatural or miraculous.”

It is most regrettable that the Modernist leader should countenance the subtle ecclesiastical device of employing the

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proper name "Jesus" and the official title "Christ" as interchangeable terms. The phrase, "a human non-miraculous Christ" is a confounding of terms which differ *toto cælo*. A human non-miraculous Jesus, by all means, but a human Christ, a non-miraculous Christ are impossible combinations. To the Church, "Christ" is one of the three persons of the God-head or he is nothing at all. What is left is merely the human non-miraculous Jesus. Will Modernism stand for that? Not yet.

What says the Chairman of the Congress?

"I have found no evidence that [Dr. Major] does not really believe in the truth of the Incarnation . . . (or) denies the Divinity of the Lord. . . . We have new problems before us—the question of the human knowledge and consciousness of our Lord. . . . What the implications of this may be, and how it is related to his divine personality present the most difficult problems."

Now, with all deference to his lordship the Bishop, I submit that it is inaccurate to describe these as new problems. They are indeed very old problems. They sprang up like nettles from the very cradle of the Church. They were bones of contention in various church councils, where holy fathers fought each other like wolves with every weapon of diplomacy, chicanery, jury-packing, and commination. For their sake nations were arrayed against nations, multitudes of splendid heretics were massacred with all their families, and rivers of blood flowed in three continents. And all this falsehood and cruelty sprang from the initial dogma of the Church—the dogma which turned Jesus the Jewish reformer, first into a "Christ" and then into a God instead of a man. Until the Church casts off that dogma the bloody persecutions associated with it may be suspended, but the casuistry, the ambiguity, the make-believe, and the falsehood to which it inevitably leads will continue. It is not at all certain that blood will not again flow from this fountain-head of Christian intolerance.

The position is really dreadful, and projects blood-red clouds into the future. The Church first created the dogma of the Godhood of Jesus; then it was driven to explain how he could be

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both God and man; and, failing in that, proceeded to persecute and destroy those whom it could not convince. As long as that dogma remains, the danger remains. Rome is not yet dead. That is one good reason why we hail the advent and growth of Modernism inside the Church. Modernism has not yet made a frontal attack upon the dogma, but it is indirectly detaching the public mind from the superstitions and legends out of which the dogma sprang, and it is exposing their incongruity with science, history, and reason. This is much, and we earnestly beg Modernists to keep forcing the Church on, while at the same time we shall play our part by forcing Modernists to go farther than they have yet gone, even if they have to go outside like the rest of us, leaving the Church to flounder till it sinks in the bog of its own making. At its birth, every institution holds the germ of its own dissolution. In the case of the Church, that germ was its doctrine of a metaphysical, mythological, apocryphal Christ. Such a being is entirely out with the field of history. With such a being modern science will have nothing to do. The fate of the Church's Christ will be the same as that of the great world-saviours who preceded him—Hermes, Osiris, and the rest—and if he leaves a rack behind him it will be the tradition of a human Jesus associated with all the traditional prophets and teachers from Manu and Moses to Muhammad in the development of a perfectly human society, a universal brotherhood of man.

That brings me to the last point with which I can deal to-day—the important question of unity. Bishop Headlam laid down, not only the basis of unity within the Church, but the basis on which alone there could be reunion with Nonconformists in this and other countries. What are the terms? These three, as nearly as I can gather them: “The Gospel of Christ”—“the Catholic Faith”—“The Episcopate.” O me! With one tremendous slide we are into the bog again. For every vicious old war of words, aye and swords, is raised by these three so-called “principles of unity.” For what is “the Gospel of Christ”? What is “the Catholic Faith”? And why should Bishops (*episcopoi*) be indispensable to religion? One cannot imagine a sensible man thinking—nobody but an ecclesiastic is capable

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of imagining—that on the basis of such irrational and unhistorical figments it would be possible to “bind together in one society all the people of this country . . . which may help to bring together the nations of the world in a spiritual union.” Can the wildest imagination perceive the Jews, Muhammadans, and the other great religious peoples—not to mention the growing number of Free-thinkers in every land—uniting on the basis of the Bishop’s three essentials?

Strange to say, the Modernist leader himself made yet another divisive suggestion. Not only did he insist on “the faith” (rightly interpreted), and on “the Scriptures” (rightly understood)—and so plumped headlong into the bog again—but he went out of his way (as it seems to me) to emphasize what he described as

“the comprehensiveness and reasonableness of the English interpretation of the Christian Faith . . . the extreme value of the English interpretation of the faith, not simply for the English people at home and beyond the seas, but for humanity, and so shun the popular ecclesiastical vice of continentalizing our theology.”

This reminds me irresistibly of Parson Thwackum’s delicious morsel of conceit—one of Fielding’s priceless gems of satire. I turn up my *Tom Jones* and read:

“When I mention religion I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England.”

After the manner of Walt Whitman I exclaim: What blurt is this against “continentalizing our theology”? What real scholar is there who has not again and again in his heart thanked God for continental theology, for the theology of Germany, France, Holland, which led the way when English theology was lagging a generation behind! Yes, and the purer theology which hails from Russia, from Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and the others. And with due respect to England, there is a little bit of country in the north called Scotland, whose contribution to theology is recognized on the Continent at any rate,



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however it may be with England. But then Scotland, like the Continent, rejected Anglicanism. I suppose that is why Anglican Episcopalians, while they sniff at continental theology because it is "Lutheran" or "Reformed," ignore Scottish theology because it is "Presbyterian." Is that, I ask you, the way to unity either at home or abroad?

To make myself quite plain. I am seeking unity—not by conformity to any ecclesiastical theories, but by mutual recognition, appreciation, and co-operation in struggles for justice and in works of mercy. In these I will join with Anglican churchmen if they will refrain from imposing terms on me. I ask that they will join with me as I refrain from imposing terms on them. I call that a square deal. And if there is no dealing on the square, there can be no unity. We will accept brotherhood but no arrogance.

Now I can but express my horror and indignation that in the twentieth century, the Church should still be entangling society in the interminable jungle of ancient myths and superstitions, while workless men walk our streets, while thousands of homes are on the brink—nay, over the brink—of starvation, while extravagance and turgid show flaunt shamelessly in the wan face of poverty, and cowardly politicians backed by anti-human chemistry and mechanics are preparing to hurl mankind into the hell of the next war; and all this—shame, gentlemen, shame!—because you persist, not in doing the things he said, but in turning an old-world human teacher into a God!

And still they teach his doctrines, still they claim  
To be his children—hallowed be his Name!—  
Yet never when my<sup>1</sup> throne was in the skies  
Was earth so rent with hate as now it lies,  
Never so torn with strife, so filled with woe,  
Nor so estranged from Love and Peace, nor so  
Laden with cares, which each man strives to pack  
Upon his brother's back!<sup>2</sup>

Modernism is limited by *tradition*. There is, of course, a tradition which is natural and helpful, an interior unexhausted

<sup>1</sup> The speaker is Jove.

<sup>2</sup> From "Gods in Exile," in *The Divine Tragedy* by A. St. John Adcock.

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energy ever tending to adapt and re-create the life which it informs; but there is also a tradition which clouds the view and clogs the wing and finally smothers that to which it clings. Such is ecclesiastical tradition. With all its anxiety to win the favour of science, Modernism dare not discard its supernatural tradition, and while striving to make good its foundation in history it cannot renounce its claim to pre-eminence as a specially revealed divine religion. It would fain adopt scientific methods, but cannot do so fully without renouncing the spirit and organization of the Church as a divine institution. Hence it speaks with two voices. Listen to Bishop Headlam:

"I would ask you to believe that Dr. Major . . . is a sincere believer in the Divinity of our Lord and in the Gospel of Christ . . . that he is anxious to defend the truth that he believes; and that he is attempting to build up an apologetic and a philosophy of his faith which is in accordance with modern thought."

What does this mean—what can it mean—but that the old unprovable supernaturalisms are to be retained, only they are to be presented with new glosses? It cannot be otherwise. Church offices and dogmas would be discredited if the study of Christian origins were pursued in a temper rigidly scientific. Historical science and tradition cannot set up house together; the banns are eternally forbidden. The sciences of geology and astronomy have already killed the doctrine of Bible infallibility. Historical science, biology, anthropology, and comparative religion are killing the dogma of a man-god.

Modernism is limited by *the Church*. The very form and organization of the Church are held to be divinely ordained, and since every institution is limited by the law of its being, the Church cannot surrender supernatural origin without ceasing to be the Church. Even for the Modernist, Christianity is the absolute religion. The other religions sprang out of human nature—so goes the plea—but Christianity was miraculously begun, was miraculously established, and is miraculously sustained by a special deity known as "The Holy Ghost." From that theory sprouts the ecclesiastical arrogance which regards

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all other religions as belonging to a lower order, and which in particular made the Church the bitterest persecutor of Jews. Criticism and scientific method destroy these high pretensions, and it would be impossible for a Modernist to apply them ruthlessly to the Church and yet remain inside it.

The Church retains enormous vitality, influence, and prestige, but these are directed chiefly to the defence of unbelievable propositions and the strengthening of barriers to free thought and social emancipation. Like an iceberg it floats athwart the navigable waters of the modern world to the immanent danger of voyagers and explorers, but the warmer waves of general knowledge are lapping its base, the currents of special sciences are undermining its foundations, and the temperature of the modern mind is rising with impatience—so that the end, though distant, is certain. It is no longer a question of this dogma or that. The fate of the entire fabric is involved. If there is no truth in the miraculous origin of the Church, the entire structure founded upon the actuality of miracle tumbles to the ground.

Modernism is limited by *the creeds*. Modernists chafe under the restriction, and are ample in their apologies: "No one is expected to believe every word in a creed or confession of faith," they plead. . . . The meaning of words necessarily changes from letter to spirit, and finally becomes merely a symbol of mystic truth. Thus it comes about that creeds which are totally disbelieved are retained in the Prayer Book and recited in private and public worship. This has become a great scandal to honest people.

Fundamentalist leaflets were distributed at the Church Congress demanding—

"How can any man who denies the Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Ascension, Second Advent, and Atonement recite the Apostles' Creed and the Consecration Prayer in the Communion Office?"

How indeed!

There are three ways of joining up disbelief with the creed. *First*: The dogma means nothing. It is silly, but not false. Therefore it may be accepted.

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*Second* : Assert that the dogma means the very opposite of what it plainly states, and then say that you accept it.

*Third* : Profess to accept the dogma, although you believe it to be false.

To return to Modernism.

Modernists are painfully aware of the discrepancy and even conflict between their creeds and science, though church leaders boastfully declaim no such conflict exists. The various sciences have compelled churchmen to surrender in turn the Bible story of creation, the special creation and fall of man, original sin, the flood, the flat earth, the spatial heaven and hell, the personality of the devil, and of demons who are the authors of disease, along with various recorded miracles. The Church has contested every foot of the way, fighting a rear-guard action from Galileo's day to Darwin's. Modernism attempts to effect some sort of concordat, though science will have none of it. Modernism adopts the modern tone in its talks with science, while at the same time assuring the Church that the essentials of the creeds are not affected. It is merely putting new meanings into old phrases. Lord Halifax and Dr. Major, cheek by jowl, can then pray out of the same book, the former making his orisons in the Fundamentalist sense, while the latter mixes his petitions with the leaven of Modernism. The one prayer cancels the other, and both petitioners are happy. The arrangement suits the Church quite well. It is her ancient game of casuistry, which she plays with incomparable skill. But the scientist stands apart and smiles or frowns according to his mood. Or he speaks in ironic parables, like Mr. Robert Arch, from whom I borrow the story of a certain dealer in old furniture who offered for sale an arm-chair which looked suspiciously new. In reply to questions he explained: "You see, the legs came off one by one, and had to be replaced. Then the back began to look very shabby, and I gave it a fresh one. Then a fat gentleman sat down on it and broke the arms and the seat, and it was necessary to renew them. *But it is the same chair.*"

If we ask the question, How did the creeds grow? we shall

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find this go-as-you-please arrangement less satisfactory. The creeds grew up in ages when the laws of evidence, the course of history, and the methods of science were alike unknown. The mightiest intellects worked in an atmosphere of unimaginable childishness, so that their most formidable structures, touched by the finger of logic, collapse like houses of cards.

For illustration, take the formulary known as "The Apostles' Creed." It took five hundred of Europe's darkest centuries to bring that short recital to its existing form. Starting with the foundation miracles of the Resurrection and Ascension, including the Second Advent, and successively incorporating the Virgin birth, the descent into hell, the Catholic Church, the forgiveness of sin, and the resurrection of the body, this string of incredibilities retains its place in the Prayer Book as the most popular summary of the Christian faith. Is it any wonder that the Modernist endeavour to pour the new wine of twentieth-century thought into that old bottleful of superstition meets with scant encouragement either from the extreme right of Evangelicalism or the extreme left of Rationalism? "O Heaven, keep us safe amid the perils of modern thought," one may hear intoned by the Bishop of Gloucester. "Yea, Lord, deliver us from any thought at all," responds Lord Halifax.

Other impossible limitations to the power of Modernism must be indicated, but more briefly.

*The Bible* is one of them. True, the Modernist is no bibliolater; he has ceased to regard the Bible as infallible, but he still regards it as inspired sufficiently to be a competent guide-book for the modern Christian. Always, as he says, "rightly interpreted," which is just the point. Who is to be the judge of right interpretation—Lord Halifax, Dr. Major, or Father Woodlock? But why this idolistic hugging of Jewish and Christian literature? Why should it be necessary to find there only our warrant for religious belief or moral conduct? The modern world rightly refuses to be limited in its religious thought or its ethical standards by books—however fine in many ways—written two thousand or three thousand years ago. Rational religion frankly places the Bible among the other great literatures of the ancient world from the Vedas to the Qur-án, and

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among the great literatures of our own time, to indicate which would require a catalogue.

Another Modernist limitation is *the historical or traditional Jesus*. Modernism no doubt discountenances what Shaw describes as "the idolatrous or iconographic worship of Christ," but it clings to the idea of "the Incarnation" as manifested uniquely by the hero of the four Gospels. Though he is neither the incarnate deity of orthodoxy, nor the fallible man of rationalism, to the Modernist Jesus is still the special revelation of God, and the manifestation of God's nature and character. Holding in terms to the unique personality of the Jewish reformer, Modernism attempts to neutralize the supernatural theory by that of the general incarnation of God in man, which by proving too much proves nothing. In Jesus (the Modernist still thinks) are revealed the divinity of man and the humanity of God. Or he flees to pure mysticism, speaking of "the Christ within," "the Christ of faith," and so on. Either way, whether leaning to rationalism or to mysticism, the Modernist regards Jesus as at once the object of faith and the standard of conduct—a limitation unjustified by history, contradicted by such records as we possess, and inimical to religious, ethical, and social progress.

Our examination has made plain, I hope, that the cleaving limitations of Modernism in its every phase make up, finally, a fatal *obscuration*, from which it cannot escape without passing into something else quite different. Modernism does not shed the direct light of the sun. Rather is it the moonshine which lends an illusive radiance to objects at hand, but leaves the horizon curtained in darkness. By nature the Church is obscurantist.

Alfred Fawkes brings a terrible indictment against the clerical mind in the following words: "The clerical mind is a thing apart. Those who possess it are often capable of signal heroism; their personal holiness is, or seems to be, beyond question; they are men of interior life, of asceticism or prayer. But they will do with a light heart what men of the world, little troubled by scruples, scruple at; there is scarcely a crime from which they will shrink; it would be difficult to find an act

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of cruelty, of duplicity or meanness at which they will hesitate. not directly in their own interests (though the two tend to run into one another), but in what they believe to be the interests of God."

"The matter is not one which admits of discussion," cried Lord Halifax—a zealous repudiation of free thought and free speech. The Modernist indeed carries free thought and speech much farther than does his Fundamentalist fellow, but he also stops short at certain things, to overpass which would cost him his churchmanship, even his Christianity, and he pulls up like a horse at a five-barred gate.

The Modernist rejects the miraculous in Bible story, but continues to practise rites and ceremonies which are the citadels of superstitious belief in continuous miracle effected by the offices of the Church. The Eucharist is a notorious instance. But there are others. Take the rite of ordination, according to which spiritual power has been passed on from Bishop to Bishop from the day of Peter the fisherman to our own. When a Bishop gifted with this miraculous power lays his hands on the head of a youth who has taken the ordination vows, he confers on this youth certain powers—the number and quality of which differ in various Romish and Protestant communities. Modernism leaves the matter in convenient vagueness. In the course of an ordination sermon Dr. Major said:

"There were some who would regard the act of ordination as an ancient and picturesque ceremony, but as having very little significance for the modern world and its needs."

Instead of expounding the significance of priestly ordination for the modern world, however, Dr. Major proceeded to scold the modern world for its secularistic inclinations. But if after two thousand years of ordained priestism the world is growing more secularistic, what is the use of ordination and episcopacy? Dr. Major, please, Dr. Major, what actually is the significance of ordination!

Moreover, the Modernist is permitted to abandon the resur-

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rection of Jesus as a fact of history, since he willingly accepts it as an act of faith. His historical and Biblical criticism is not thorough; his Christology does not go to the root of the investigation. He dare not question the historical warrant for the Bishop of Gloucester's three fundamental principles—"The Gospel of Christ," "the Catholic Faith," "the Episcopate." That is Modernism's fatal defect. It shrinks from its own conclusions. For these conclusions would be equal to the virtual abandonment of Christianity.

Would not that be a terrible loss to humanity? On the contrary, it would be a great gain. It would mean the merging of a huge haughty sect with the universal religion of mankind.

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## WAHHABISM IN ARABIA<sup>1</sup>

### PAST AND PRESENT

By SHEIKH HAFIZ WAHBA

Counsellor to His Majesty the King of Hedjaz and Minister of Education. (*Translated from the Arabic by Mr. A. A. Shukry.*)

MY LORD, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I thank you one and all for the trouble you have taken in coming over here this afternoon to listen to this brief sketch in which I endeavour to review the history of Wahhabism, its origin in former times, its recent progress; or, in other words, I shall analyse to you, as clearly and as precisely as I can, the Gospel which they are preaching and the principles which they are propagating.

If I regret anything this afternoon, it is my inability to address you in your own beautiful language, which I have set myself the task of learning and mastering; for what could be more romantic than to see a real and genuine "Sheikh" addressing such a brilliant gathering in the heart of London in the English tongue?

<sup>1</sup> Being the text of a lecture delivered before the Central Asian Society, London, on July 5, 1929. Field-Marshal Lord Allenby was in the chair.



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Ladies and gentlemen, you will allow me to state at the outset that this sketch is of a general character; it is a purely unbiased historical survey which aims neither at raising any religious controversy, nor at supporting a certain creed or sect against another; it is solely and purely a colourless elucidation of Wahhabism as it really is. After that, you can pass your judgment for or against it.

### A RETROSPECT : APPEARANCE OF IBN TAIMIYYAH

Before dealing with the origin of Wahhabism I must ask your indulgence to cast a hurried glance at the events which took place at the beginning of the seventh century of the Muslim era, which roughly corresponds to the thirteenth century of the Christian era. I particularly chose that period because it is closely connected with the rise of Wahhabism.

It was in the seventh century (Muslim era) that the renowned Muslim theologian, Sheikh Ibn Taimiyyah, appeared. Curiously enough, the appearance of that great reformer in the East synchronized with the appearance of the great reformer Luther in the West. You will forgive me, ladies and gentlemen, for stating that, but for the differences of creed and the then scanty means of communication between Orient and Occident, one could safely say that each of these two great men was inspired by the other and was preaching a similar Gospel.

It might interest and astound you, ladies and gentlemen, to hear that while Luther was attacking the clericals, Ibn Taimiyyah was harassing the "Mullas" and "Sufis"; further, while the former was preaching the simple Gospel of the Bible and denouncing "Confession," the latter was urging a return to the simple teachings of the "Qur-án" and "Tradition" and exclusion of any medium or intermediary between man and his Creator.

Ibn Taimiyyah was, further, against all imitators, who would stick only to the methods of one of the four Muslim chiefs and he was for *Ijtihad*; understanding, in his opinion, was a common privilege, and infallibility was claimed only by the holy Prophets.

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This corresponded exactly with what Luther was preaching when he repudiated the idea that understanding the holy Gospel was a privilege reserved only to clericals.

Further, while Ibn Taimiyyah was vigorously attacking the stupid beliefs current in his days and proclaiming that repentance was open before one and all, Luther was against intercession.

In a word, both reformers were endeavouring to emancipate humanity from the clerical bondage, so long as that emancipation did not involve an abandonment of any of the sound principles laid down by religion.

But Luther was the more fortunate of the two. For by dint of excellent preparation, combined with unique favourable circumstances, his doctrines spread far and wide until they were consummated in the new Protestantism.

His contemporary in the East was, however, less fortunate. None of the Princes had supported him. It was only natural that he, in due course, should reap the fruits of the wrath brought about by his slanderous opponents at the Court of the Mameluke Sultans, which led ultimately to his imprisonment and maltreatment. Little wonder, then, that his doctrines remained dormant compared with his great contemporary's.

I hope, ladies and gentlemen, an occasion may present itself when I can deal more fully with the teaching of these two reformers. A comparative analysis would, I presume, be of absorbing interest to all students of history.

### WAHHABISM

Ladies and gentlemen, paradoxical though it may sound to you, the term "Wahhabism," notwithstanding its world-wide significance, is, literally, unknown in Nejd. Probably Turkish diplomacy was responsible for this nomenclature. It looks as if that diplomacy aimed at antagonizing Islam against the people of Nejd by representing them as the pioneers of a new form of Islam contrary to what had been taught by the four recognized leaders of that religion. But what a gross misrepresentation! For the Nejd people are, in fact, followers of the Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, the fourth of the said leaders

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of the four schools of thought of Islam, who has a tremendous following scattered all over the Mohammedan world.

But, though the term does not exist in Nejd as I have just explained, I am nevertheless going to use it, as it seems to be the recognized name by which the Nejd people are known outside their dominions.

### MOHAMMAD IBN 'ABDU 'L-WAHHĀB

Ladies and gentlemen, in 1703 Sheikh Mohammad Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb was born at Al-'Uyaina, north of Riyād, the present capital of Nejd. He received his elementary schooling from his father. Later he travelled to Al-Hasa, the Hedjaz, and Basra, seeking knowledge and learning. It was in this way that he became an authority on "Hadith"—i.e. the Prophet's Traditions—on jurisprudence, and on the Arabic language. He also became thoroughly conversant with everything connected with theology. Further, he acquainted himself with what was perpetrated in those countries which was considered contrary to the spirit of Islam. Lastly, he mastered several of the works of Sheikhu 'l-Islam Ibn Taimiyyah and his disciples, especially Ibn Al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr, etc. etc.

### NEJD IN FORMER DAYS

From a religious point of view Nejd was a battle-ground for sectarian animosities and feuds, which were one and all in opposition to the true spirit of Islam.

Take the question of the tombs, for instance, which were thought to belong to the Prophet's companions.

There was such a tomb at Al-Jubaila that was purported to belong to Zaid, son of 'Omar the second caliph. People used to flock to that tomb and there pray for amelioration of their lot and fulfilment of their needs.

Similar tombs existed at Dar'iyah, which became, later on, the seat of the Ibn Sa'ūd dynasty. They were frequented by the people for similar purposes.

But strangest of all, ladies and gentlemen, was that male genus of palm-tree at Biladata 'l-Fiddah, to which spinsters

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flocked, fervently and openly praying for a speedy matrimony before the year was out.

Then there was that mysterious cave at Dar'iyah, which was held in reverence by the people as it was thought, so the story goes, to have been the shelter of a certain "daughter of the Amīr," who, having fled from the molestation of a certain tyrant, sought shelter in a rocky mountain and made good her escape in a cave which was miraculously opened in the mountain.

These and similar stories show you the then prevalent condition of Nejd from a religious point of view.

From the administrative point of view, however, justice was administered solely according to the arbitrary rule of the Princes and their satellites.

Politically, Arabia was divided into innumerable little states, over each of which ruled a Prince who had nothing in common with his next-door neighbour. Prominent amongst those Princes were Prince Al-'Urai'ar in Al-Hasa, Al-Mu'ammār in 'Uyainah, the sheriffs in the Hedjaz, al Sa'ūd in Dar'iyah, and al Sa'adūn in the Mesopotamia tablelands. Besides these there were smaller and less important princes, who need not be discussed here.

The Arabian townsfolk were in perpetual war with the country Bedouins; the Princes were in turn waiting for the favourable opportunity to fly at one another's throat if any of them caught the other in a state of unpreparedness.

Such, in brief, ladies and gentlemen, was the condition of Arabia and Nejd when Sheikh Mohammad Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb returned home. He settled at 'Uyainah, where he resolved to spare no effort to purge Nejd of all its evils. He began to preach to the people to revert to the true and pure Islam, discarding all latter-day heresies and everything that was contrary to the spirit of Islam. Meanwhile he enjoined upon the authorities to enforce the Islamic penal code.

He gave his message in a most peaceful manner. At the same time he got into touch with the leading Muslim theologians in other lands, and to them expressed his grief at what had befallen Islam, urging upon them to rouse themselves to Islamic

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reform. All this was naturally bound to exasperate his opponents and those whose authority was jeopardized by his preaching. Ultimately he was compelled to leave 'Uyainah, which Sulaimān al-Muhammad, Chief of Beni Khalid and Al-Hasa, had threatened to attack unless it rid itself of Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb.

In 1741 he left it for Dar'iyyah, the seat of the Ibn Sa'ūd dynasty, and there met their chief Mohammad, with whom he immediately entered into an alliance, aiming at religious restoration, purging Arabia of all heresy, and preaching the true Gospel of Islam both to the townsfolk and Bedouins regardless both of the difficulties that might arise before them and the dangers to which they might be exposed from their opponents; they verily believed that by the grace of God they were mightier, and by the righteousness of their cause more firmly fortified.

Ladies and gentlemen, since Mohammad Ibn Sa'ūd entrusted Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb with the supervision of everything concerned with theology, the latter, remaining at Dar'iyyah, continued peacefully to preach the true Gospel of Islam; but no sooner did they discover that their adversaries had combined against them in the hope of suppressing the propagation of this holy gospel, than they resolved to resort to the sword; and they consequently declared *djehād* according to their modest means.

You might, indeed, ladies and gentlemen, be astounded to learn that these religious wars lasted over sixty years, and were in some respects reminiscent of the wars that lasted for generations between Catholics and Protestants in the West.

In 1765 the Amīr Mohammad Ibn Sa'ūd passed away, but his son 'Abdu 'l-Aziz followed in his footsteps in supporting Sheikh Ibn 'Abdul 'l-Wahhāb in propagating his mission all over Arabia.

Although the Sa'ūd dynasty had to wage those wars against united enemies, the aims of the latter were frustrated; indeed, the mission gained in strength and made headway as gradually and as surely as the might of Ibn Sa'ūd became dominant in Arabia.

In 1791 Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb passed away, after having

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fulfilled his life's work and laid a sound foundation for his mission. His sons succeeded him, and allied themselves more closely with Ibn Sa'ūd dynasty.

In 1805 the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, together with a great part of Yemen and Oman, was already under the sway of al Sa'ūd; the inhabitants of these vast regions actually performed their religious rites according to the method initiated by Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb.

The Turks, ladies and gentlemen, naturally became alarmed at the turn of events in Arabia, just as they had been alarmed at the rapid rise to power of Mohammad 'Alī in Egypt; they therefore thought it politic to get rid of both opponents by bringing a conflict between them, which culminated in temporarily crippling the power of the Sa'ūd dynasty.

But sheer brutal force could not, and did not, shake the faith of the people of Nejd, nor damp their ardour.

### WHAT IS WAHHABISM?

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have just stated that the term "Wahhabism" is unknown in Arabia. But it is now generally applied to any person who aims at religious reformation, even if that person be a complete stranger to Nejd. Nay, the confusion on that point was such that even Ibn Taimiyyah was mistaken for a Wahhābī, although he had appeared five centuries before Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb.

In religion, as well as in dealing with other people, the Wahhābīs differ not from the rest of Muslims; they are followers of Ibn Hanbal, one of the four Muslim Imams. They only aim at restoring Islam to what it was in the time of the holy Prophet and the great caliphs. Their teachings could be briefly summarized as follows:

First, individual interpretation from the Qur-ān and Tradition is open to one and all so long as a person, in virtue of his education and learning, can do so. A learned man is entitled to understand the Qur-ān and Tradition. Religion, in their opinion, is no monopoly of a certain class that claims to itself the sole right of interpreting the Qur-ān and the Prophet's practice.

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Secondly, everything and every action is done by God, Who is Omnipotent. No human being, however exalted, can intercede with him for a sinner. One has to rely only on what good one can do in this world, as the holy Qur-án verily says: "He who has done an atom's weight of good, he shall see it; he who has done an atom's weight of evil, he shall see it."

It follows, therefore, that intercession has no value according to Wahhābī teaching, and that the way of repentance, on the other hand, is open to all people without a medium or intermediary, for God is verily nearer to one than his life-vein.

It is likely that the idea of intercession originated from bygone centuries, when favouritism was rampant. You know, ladies and gentlemen, that a king is popular so long as he freely mixes with his own people and tries personally to redress any wrong of which they may be complaining. The same cannot be said of the king who prefers to be hedged in by a battalion of guards who render him inaccessible to his people. If that be the case, ladies and gentlemen, of ordinary kings, is it not only natural, as the Wahhābīs believe, that the King of Kings, the Creator, should be accessible to His creatures without any intermediary?

Thirdly, actions only matter in this world—i.e. one is not considered a true Muslim merely because one believes in God and His Holy Prophet without performing the practices of Islam or believing in access to God by other means than goodly actions in this world.

Fourthly, worship in its various forms should be given to God and to God alone. In other words, no offerings should be made except to Him; with Him alone should one intercede by means of right action. Access to God should not be sought through tombs, nor should these be approached for fulfilment of worldly desires.

Fifthly, God-worship must be on the lines indicated by His Holy Prophet. But dealing with people could be adjusted according to the requirements of the time subject to the general spirit of Islam.

In a word, the Wahhābīs aim at the restoration of the happy days of the caliphs, who, in virtue of their long association

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with the holy Prophet, are more conversant with the spirit of legislation and are in a better position to understand the Prophet's methods and ways.

### MODERN WAHHABISM

After the suppression of the political influence of the Wahnābis by the Turks, Wahhabism was almost confined to Nejd. But Sheikh Mohammad 'Abdu, the late Grand Mufti of Egypt, was indeed the first man in the Nile Valley to eulogize Sheikh Mohammad Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahnāb and denounce his opponents. Nay, Sheikh 'Abdu, in his lectures at Al-Azhar, was preaching the very teachings of Ibn 'Abdu 'l-Wahnāb with this difference, that the latter had behind him Ibn Sa'ūd's sword and influence while the former had only a small following amongst the enlightened Egyptians.

The disciples of the Sheikh 'Abdu are without exaggeration, ladies and gentlemen, to be considered as Wahnābis in practice, though not in name, and without the prestige of their illustrious chief.

During Sheikh 'Abdu's life a policeman was for the first time put in the Husain Mosque to prevent worshippers from rubbing their shoulders against the well-known pillar to which the people flocked for fulfilment of their wishes. Indeed, he caused to be written on it that it was but a mere pillar of stone that could do neither harm nor good. But, unfortunately, that great reformer passed away before the realization of his programme of reforms.

It is gratifying, however, ladies and gentlemen, to see many of the principles of Ibn Taimiyyah have, for the first time in the history of Egyptian legislation, been incorporated in the law dealing with personal relations. Great credit for that is due to the present Chief of Al-Azhar and his colleague the present Grand Mufti, who are amongst the senior disciples of the late Sheikh 'Abdu.

It is no exaggeration, ladies and gentlemen, if I state, categorically and publicly, that the enlightened class in every Muslim land is Wahnābī in practice, though not in name or origin, because it is this class, as is duly recognized in all the



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Muslim world, that preaches the gospel of self-reliance, suppression of hagiology, or appeal to the inmates of tombs who belong to the past and can do neither good nor evil.

Wahhabism, furthermore, preaches true democracy and exclusion of the so-called "holy influence" which the Turkish Ottomans, following the example of the Romans, assumed for themselves. The attitude of the Wahnābīs towards their king is governed by the Islamic principle, "No submission to a mortal contrary to the laws of the Creator." This same principle is applied everywhere; the tendency nowadays is towards the limitation of the ruler's influence.

Any of you who visits Nejd or the Hedjaz at the present time would see for himself how freely the chief of the Wahnābīs mixes with his people; you would indeed imagine that you were in Islam's glorious bygone days, or, on account of Ibn Sa'ūd's simplicity of life, strength of character, justice, pride, foresight, and statesmanship, you might imagine that you were in the time of Caliph 'Omar the Great.

In 1910 the present King Ibn Sa'ūd resolved to attain what his predecessor could not do. The Wahnābī's teaching was formerly preached amongst town-dwellers only. Consequently, Bedouins were responsible to a great extent for much of the upheaval that had taken place at different times. They always sided with the party whom they dreaded most or who promised them most booty. That is why they were sometimes counted as Egyptians or Turkish or Wahnābīs or Reshidites. The onus of defence fell thereby on the shoulders of town-dwellers. King Ibn Sa'ūd thought fit to tackle this Bedouin question by establishing special dwellings for them near the springs and encouraging them to follow agricultural pursuits, and by detailing to each and every village a learned sheikh to instruct them in the elements of theology and good conduct, reading and writing, and reading to them the life of the holy Prophet as well as his predecessors, of Prophets, Apostles, and holy men. They are also being warned against the evils of desert life and its accompaniments, aggression on other peoples' lives and property, etc. etc. It is eight years since the present king started this policy, but the Bedouins, after being

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a great menace to Nejd, have now become a powerful factor for good, and they certainly have a say in the administration and policy of the country; and whereas they were formerly a danger to whichever party they elected to support, they have now become staunch and reliable in the face of death itself, as might be illustrated by this humorous anecdote.

It was after the Battle of Tarba, between Ibn Sa'ūd and ex-King Hussein in 1919, which culminated in the annihilation of the latter's forces, that a Bedouin came to one of the learned sheikhs to inquire about the meaning of "hypocrisy"; on being informed of it, the Bedouin asked, "Should I be considered a hypocrite deserving God's wrath if I met the enemy not with my face but with my side?" The sheikh retorted, "Not unless you turned your back on him," to which the Bedouin replied: "I don't consider this to be a true interpretation. So I demand that you should beat my side with your stick so as to purge it of hypocrisy. For, on seeing the enemy's intense fire, I temporarily lost courage; but I soon regained it; I did not turn my back on him; I simply sprang on him, and with sword in hand I rushed on his gun and killed him. I demand, nevertheless, that you should soundly thrash this side which showed temporary wavering to purge it of hypocrisy."

### WAHHABISM AND THE CALIPHATE

Well, this is rather an interesting topic on which, I believe, you require some enlightenment from the representative of Ibn Sa'ūd.

Before the Great War, Nejd was politically and internationally regarded as a Turkish province. Nevertheless, the people of Nejd never recognized Turkish authority or the Turkish Caliphate. For the Wahhābis never considered the Turks to be the true and ardent supporters of Islam which they ought to have been as caliphs.

They had abolished the Islamic penal code, left the heart and spirit of Islam, and become the staunch supporters of the "Mullas," the "Dancing Dervishes," and other sects that were an insult to Islam.

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Rumour had it that the present king, Ibn Sa'ūd, was aiming at the caliphate. The people who are in the confidence of Ibn Sa'ūd could not imagine a more groundless fantasy. I declare, categorically and publicly, that Ibn Sa'ūd entertains nothing of the sort.

Muslims at the present time are not as they used to be in the time of the four great caliphs. They were then one centralized Government. The caliphate, therefore, was symbolized by the head of that immense and complex Government who was in a position to defend it in every corner of his far-flung dominions. The oath of fidelity was then tantamount to what is called in modern times "popular verdict by referendum."

But most of the Muslim peoples nowadays are under the sway of many Foreign Powers; a caliph could accordingly have no authority whatsoever. He could, at his best, be a mere figurehead to an institution that no longer existed. Ibn Sa'ūd most emphatically declines to be that figurehead. Furthermore, he sees that the caliphate is a burden which involves endless and useless troubles for him.

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### **Drops before the Monsoon.**

The Western world may, for convenience sake, be roughly classified into four distinct sections. There are those who are quite indifferent as to their religious beliefs and are thus either un-religious or atheists—and these constitute the majority. Secondly there are those who, though dissatisfied with the religion—dogmatized theology—of the Church, which they believe to be played out, long earnestly for a better form of religion for which they, at the present moment, do not know where to look; and they long for it because they believe that the religious instinct of mankind must be satisfied. The third section consists of the masses who look up to the religious leaders for guidance. And the fourth is the clergy, who are hard at work endeavouring to make the best of the present

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worst, in dealing with the theological situation; or, in other words, trying to mend the broken pitcher.

In this connection it is worth while taking notice of two extremely interesting booklets which have recently been published at a popular price. They are interesting because they indicate quite unmistakably the trend of thought of what we may term the intelligentsia, and also because they can safely be taken as being symptomatic of the age in which we live. One of them, entitled *Why I am not a Christian*, is by the Hon. Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, who is an avowed atheist; while the other, *The Religious Interregnum*, forms the sum-total of the impressions of Mr. Arnold Bennett, the playwright, novelist, and critic. The one feature common to both booklets is their attitude of despair of the religion of the Church.

In order to give our readers some idea of the way in which these books reveal to us the state of mind of thoughtful men of the day, we quote below a few excerpts from each of them.

Mr. Bertrand Russell, while discussing the character of Christ, raises the question whether Christ was the best and the wisest of men. "It is generally taken," he says, "for granted that he was. I do not myself." But in spite of this he, in company with Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, opines that though the sayings of Christ—which enjoin us in clear terms to get rid of private property by throwing it into the common stock, to dissociate ourselves and our work from money payments, to have done with judges and law-courts, to eschew family entanglements, and to offer the left cheek also if smitten on the right—are not to be seen in practice anywhere, yet they contain very much that is valuable and in a sense even practical! We confess to some amazement as to how such a conclusion be arrived at. For it is a fact that, should these fanciful maxims of Jesus be applied to the present-day social conditions, they must inevitably create unthinkable confusion and destroy the foundations of that very civilization which European Christians have striven to uphold and to rescue from the chaos of the Great War.

Nevertheless he makes the following answer to the question

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as to whether Jesus was the wisest and the best of men, as depicted in the Gospels:

“Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did we do not know anything about him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one. I am concerned with Christ as he appears in the Gospels, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, he certainly thought that his second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that. He says, for instance: ‘Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.’ Then he says: ‘There are some standing here who shall not taste death till the Son of Man come into his kingdom’; and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that he believed that his second coming would happen in the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of his earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of moral teaching. When he said, ‘Take no thought for the morrow,’ and things of that sort, it was very largely because he thought that the second coming was going to be very soon, and that all ordinary mundane affairs did not count. I have, as a matter of fact, known some Christians who did believe that the second coming was imminent. I knew a parson who frightened his congregation terribly by telling them that the second coming was very imminent indeed, but they were much consoled when they found that he was planting trees in his garden. The early Christians did really believe it, and they did abstain from such things as planting things in their gardens, because they did accept from Christ the belief that the second coming was imminent. In that respect clearly he was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise.

“Then you come to moral questions. There is one very serious defect, to my mind, in Christ’s moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. I do not myself believe that any person who is profoundly human can believe in everlasting

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punishment. Christ, certainly as depicted in the Gospels, did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who did not listen to his preaching—an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somehow detract from superlative excellence. You do not, for instance, find that attitude in Socrates. . . . .

“ You will find that in the Gospels, Christ said: ‘ Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.’ That was said to people who did not like his teaching. It is not really, to my mind, quite the best tone, and there are a great many of these things about hell. There is, of course, the familiar text about the sin against the Holy Ghost: ‘ Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world nor in the world to come.’ That text has caused an unspeakable amount of misery in the world, for all sorts of people have imagined that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and thought that it would not be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come. I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terror of that sort into the world.

“ Then Christ says: ‘ The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth ’; and he goes on about the wailing and gnashing of teeth. It comes in one verse after another, and it is quite manifest to the reader that there is a certain pleasure in contemplating wailing and gnashing of teeth, or it would not occur so often. Then you all, of course, remember about the sheep and the goats; how at the second coming he is going to divide the sheep from the goats and he is going to say to the goats: ‘ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.’ He continues: ‘ If thy hand offends thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.’ He repeats

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that again and again also. I must say that all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take him as his chroniclers represent him, would certainly have to be considered as partly responsible for that.

There are other less important things. There is the instance of the Gadarene swine, where it certainly is not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill to the sea. You must remember that he was omnipotent, and he could have made the devils simply go away; but he chooses to send them into the pigs. Then there is the curious story of the fig-tree, which always rather puzzled me. You remember what happened to the fig-tree. 'He was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came if haply he might find anything thereon; and when he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it: "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever" . . . and Peter . . . saith unto him: "Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away."' That is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue, Christ stands quite as high as other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above him in these respects.

. . . . .

"You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in human feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step towards the diminution of war, every step towards better treatment of the coloured races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized Churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized by its Churches, has been, and still is, the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

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“ You may think that I am going too far when I say that that is still so. I do not think that I am. Take one fact. You will bear with me if I mention it. It is not a pleasant fact, but the Churches compel one to mention facts that are not pleasant. Supposing that in this world that we live in to-day an inexperienced girl is married to a syphilitic man, in that case the Catholic Church says: ‘ This is an indissoluble sacrament. You must stay together for life,’ and no step of any sort must be taken by that woman to prevent herself from giving birth to syphilitic children. That is what the Catholic Church says. I say that that is fiendish cruelty, and nobody whose natural sympathies have not been warped by dogma, or whose moral nature was not absolutely dead to all sense of suffering, could maintain that it is right and proper that that state of things should continue. . . .”

### **Quar-ānic Conception of Hell.**

We would have gladly left the criticism of Mr. Bertrand Russell of the Christian hell, quoted in the previous note, out of consideration now. But we are afraid our silence on this much debated, much misinterpreted state of life after death may be understood to mean that the Islamic conception, if not worse, was as bad as that of Christianity. We therefore take the opportunity of quoting the words of Maulānā Muhammad ‘Alī, M.A., from his Introduction to his recent English translation of the Holy Qur-ān, Lahore, 1928, page lxvi *et seq.*, which deal with the conception of hell from the viewpoint of the Qur-ān and the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The excerpts are lengthy; but we make no apology for reproducing them; the very nature of the subject is, we believe, a sufficient justification.

The Maulānā, after describing the Islamic conception of Paradise, says:

“ Quite in accordance with the idea of paradise as a place of unending progress to higher stages of life is the idea of hell where punishment is not meant for torture but for purification, in order to make a man fit for spiritual advancement. The idea underlying hell is that those who wasted their oppor-



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tunities in this life shall, under the inevitable law which makes every man taste of what he has done, be subjected to a course of treatment of the spiritual diseases which they have brought about with their own hands. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur-án makes a difference between the abiding paradise and the abiding hell, allowing a termination in the latter case but not in the former.

“As I have already noted, punishment for evil deeds sometimes takes effect in this very life, and the Holy Qur-án lays down the principle in clear words, that every such punishment is a remedial measure:—

“‘And We did not send a prophet in a town but We overtook its people with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves’ (vii. 94).

‘And certainly We sent apostles to nations before thee, then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves’ (vi. 42).

“It is clear from this that God brings down His punishment upon a sinning people in order that they may turn to Him; in other words, that they might be awakened to the higher life. The same must therefore be the object of the punishment in hell. That this is really so is made clear in the first place by giving the utmost prominence to the quality of mercy in God, as already pointed out, and then by stating in clear words that all men have been created for mercy: ‘Except those on whom thy Lord has mercy and for this did He create them’ (xi. 119). The purpose of God must be ultimately fulfilled, and though man may bring down punishment on himself by his misdeeds, yet as God has created him for mercy, mercy is the ultimate end of the Divine scheme. And elsewhere we are told: ‘And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me’ (li. 56). They must therefore be fit ultimately for the service of God, and that is the higher life. And with all its fearfulness, hell is called a *maula* (friend) of the sinners in one place (lvii. 15) and their *umm* (mother) in another (ci. 9). Both these descriptions of hell are a clear indication that hell is only meant to purify man of the dross

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which he has produced with his own hands, just as fire purifies gold of dross. In fact it is to point to this truth that the Holy Qur-án uses the word *fitnah* (which originally meant the *assaying of gold*, or *casting it into fire to purify it of dross*), both of the persecutions which the faithful are made to suffer (ii. 191, xxix. 2, xxix. 10) and the punishment which the evil-doers shall suffer in hell (xxxvii. 63); the food which those in hell shall be given is called *fitnah*, because the object in both cases is the same, the faithful being purified through persecutions and the evil-doers by hell-fire. Therefore hell is called a friend of sinners, because through suffering it will make them fit for spiritual progress; and is called a *mother* of the sinners to show that its connection with them is that of a mother with her child, the sinners being brought up as it were in the bosom of hell. The fire is a source of torment, but it is also a purifier. The keenness of the torment of the other life is due to the keener perception of the soul, which is the necessary result of its separation from the earthly vessel. Bliss and torment therefore grow keener in that life.

“ It is in consonance with its remedial nature that we find it stated that the sinners shall ultimately be taken out of hell. It is true that the word *abad* is thrice used in the Holy Qur-án in connection with the abiding in hell (iv. 169, xxxiii. 65, lxxii. 23), but *abad* indicates *eternity* as well as *long time*, and that the latter significance must be taken in this case is made clear by the use of the word *ahqāb* (lxxviii. 23), meaning *years* or *long years* in the same connection. Besides this, limitation is placed on the abiding in hell by the addition of the words ‘except as thy Lord please,’ the exception clearly indicating the ultimate deliverance of those in hell. The following two verses may be quoted in this connection:—

‘He shall say, The fire is your abode, to abide in it, except as God please; for thy Lord is knowing, Wise’ (vi. 129).

‘So as to those who are unhappy, they shall be in the fire; for them shall be sighing and groaning in it: Abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure except as thy Lord please; for thy Lord is the mighty doer of what He intends’ (xi. 106, 107).

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Both these verses clearly show that the punishment of hell is not everlasting. To make this conclusion clearer still, the latter of these occasions may be compared with the verse that describes the abiding in paradise in the very next verse: 'And as to those who are made happy, they shall be in the garden, abiding in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please: a gift never to be cut off' (xi. 108). The two expressions are similar: those in hell and those in paradise abide in it so long as the heavens and earth endure, with an exception added in each case showing that they may be taken out of it. But the concluding statements are different. In the case of paradise, the idea that those in it may be taken out of it, if God pleases, is immediately followed by the statement that it is a gift that shall never be cut off, showing that they shall not be taken out of paradise; while in the case of hell, the idea of those in it being taken out of it is confirmed by the concluding statement: 'for the Lord is the mighty doer of what He intends.'

"The conclusion above is corroborated by the sayings of the Holy Prophet. Thus a saying reported in *The Muslim* concludes: 'Then will God say, The angels and prophets and the faithful have all in their turn interceded for the sinners, and now there remains none to intercede for them but the most Merciful of all merciful ones. So He will take out a handful from fire and bring out a people who never worked any good.' And Bukhārī records a saying to the effect that when the sinners are taken out of hell they shall be thrown into 'the river of life,' which clearly indicates that they shall be fit for the higher life. The *Kanzu 'l-Ummāl* records the following: 'Surely a day will come over hell when it will be like a field of corn that has dried up, after flourishing for a while'; 'Surely a day will come over hell when there shall not be a single human being in it.' And a saying of 'Omar is recorded as follows: 'Even if the dwellers in hell may be numberless as the sands of the desert, a day will come when they will be taken out of it.'

"Hell is described by seven different names in the Holy Qur-án, and these are supposed by some to be the seven divisions of hell. The most frequently occurring name is

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*jahannam*, which is like a proper name for *hell*. It is an Arabic word, and the root-word means *great depth*. Next in frequency of occurrence is *jahīm*, which is derived from a root meaning the *intensity of fire*. Then comes *sa'ir*, from a root meaning the *kindling of fire*. Next to it is *saqar*, signifying *scorching heat*, which occurs only in two of the earliest chapters (liv. 48; lxxiv. 26, 27, 42). *Hutamah*, which is derived from a root meaning to *crush*, occurs only twice in one early chapter (civ. 4, 5). *Lazā* (lxx. 15), meaning a *flaming fire*, and *hāwiyah* (ci. 9), meaning *abyss*, or *a deep place of which the bottom cannot be reached*, occur once each.

“Most frequently, however, the punishment of the evil-doers is spoken of as *nār*, meaning fire. It should be borne in mind that hell or the fire of hell is, according to the Holy Qur-ān, a manifestation of hidden realities (lxxxvi. 9). In other words, the spiritual torments and mental pangs that are often felt by the evil-doer in this very life assume a palpable shape in the life after death. ‘The fire kindled by God which rises above the hearts’ (civ. 6, 7) becomes the flaming or intense or scorching fire of the next life. The *ahwā* (low desires) of this life that are so often a hindrance in his awakening to a higher life and nobler deeds become the *hāwiyah* or *jahannam* (abysmal depth) to which the evil-doer makes himself to fall. Hence it is that sometimes intense regret for the evil done is described as the fire: ‘Thus will God show them their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they shall not come forth from the fire’ (ii. 167); and the day of resurrection is accordingly called ‘the day of intense regret’ (xix. 39). Sometimes it is being debarred from the Divine presence that is spoken of as hell: ‘Surely on that day they shall be debarred from their Lord, then surely they shall enter the burning fire’ (lxxxiii. 15, 16). Sometimes disgrace is described as the punishment in the next life: ‘Then on the resurrection day He will bring them to disgrace’ (xvi. 27). It should also be noted that as in paradise there is neither sun nor intense cold (lxxvi. 13), in hell there is both ‘boiling and intensely cold water’ (lxxviii. 25), a ‘requital corresponding’ to sin, is added to show the real nature of the punishment.”

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### Capability of the Church to adapt itself?

While we were reading *The Religious Interregnum* referred to above, the *Evening Standard* for June 29, 1929, published an article entitled *These Empty Pews Can be Filled*, by Mr. C. E. M. Joad. The article opens with an interesting display of statistics showing the gradual decline of church attendance. "A comparison between the records of church and chapel attendance in a typical London area, with a population of over 80,000, at three different periods during the last 50 years, shows that in 1886-87 the total number of persons attending was 12,996 and the average attendance at each service was 295. In 1902-03 the total was 10,570 and the average attendance was 184. In 1927 the equivalent figures had dropped to 3,960 and 63.

"In one district in the East End of London, 11 out of 24 Evangelical churches had been closed in the last 40 years. In 1906, 6,455,719 scholars attended the Sunday schools of the Anglican and Free churches; in 1928 the number had shrunk to 4,768,872, a loss of more than 1,500,000. In the early years of the twentieth century there were some 21,000 clergymen of all ranks at work in England; in 1928 the number had fallen to 16,000. 624 was the average number of clergymen ordained in the ten years 1907-16; in the next ten years the average number had sunk to 306."

The writer, after running through the gamut of the well-known causes of the decline of the Church, comes to the conclusion that if the Church is to perform the service of a religion in which the modern mind can believe, "the Church must be willing so to recast her teaching that the modern man has not to leave intelligence behind him every time he attends one of the church services."

Now this is a surmise which is well worth exploring. Let us by way of gloss quote the words of Mr. Arnold Bennett from his *The Religious Interregnum* on the possibility of the Church to recast her teaching. Says Mr. Bennett:

"The Church is by its very nature a conservative organism. It deals with the eternal, the changeless, the fixed. Its growth has been slow. It has had little voluntary commerce with human

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reason, and none with science. It is based on authority and nothing else. . . . It could not have foreseen the advance of science, and even had it foreseen, could not have taken effective measures to protect itself. It was unprepared and was bound to be unprepared. . . . Its situation is worse than cruel, it is impossible. In the past the finest brains were actively at its service. To-day the finest brains are either arrayed against it or keep an attitude of indifference. In the past it had vast riches. To-day it is too poor to pay a decent wage to thousands of its priests. Inevitably its social prestige wanes with its authority and its wealth."

### Our Duty.

A perusal of the above leaves us in no doubt as to where our duty lies. It can mean only one thing—we must intensify our activities. Our stay in the West has taught us that advertising, although a costly affair, is the only way of getting at the public. There is no doubt at all that our presence is being felt by the Christian world, as is made abundantly clear by this article from a Christian paper of which we took notice in our issue for March of this year. Even so, it is no disparagement of our activities, we are sure, if we add that they still are like a ripple on a vast sheet of water whose lower part remain undisturbed. The time will soon come when the ripple will develop into a mighty wave: but its advent can be hastened by the co-operation of our friends. The Woking Muslim Organization has been in existence now over fifteen years. It has succeeded in winning over to Islam both men and women from all ranks of English society. Our finances, however, do not permit us to embark on a scheme for advertising our activities; yet the time, in our opinion, is ripe for such a step. For, if ever the Muslim propaganda is to be successful, it will only be successful by the employment of the ways and means Europe is accustomed to.

In the West it is an obvious and necessary adjunct for an organization to advertise its functions. We have hitherto been handicapped in this respect. There is only one way. In plain words, it means that every reader of the *Islamic*

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*Review* should make a point of contributing a definite sum every year for the purpose of the propagation of the faith of Islam in the West. Thus not only will the Working Muslim Organization be placed on a sound footing, but also it will be furnished with better and more adequate means of gaining the ear of the public. The *Islamic Review* is doing its bit, as is clearly shown by the excerpts from some of the letters which we receive from all parts of the world. But that in itself is certainly not enough. Moreover we, as a progressing body of workers, should not remain satisfied with present achievements—and when we use the word “workers,” we include our sympathizers, supporters, and patrons. Dissatisfaction with our past is the secret of growth. Let us, then, forge ahead.

### **The British Muslim Society entertains the Hedjaz Minister.**

The British Muslim Society, London, gave an At Home on Saturday, June 22, 1929, at the London Muslim Prayer House, 111 Campden Hill Road, London, W.8, in honour of His Excellency Sheikh Hafiz Wahba, the Minister of Education of His Majesty the King of Hedjaz and Minister-designate of that Government to the Court of St. James's. The Sheikh was received at the above address by the Rt. Hon. Al-hajj Lord Headley El-Farooq, the President of the Society, and after a few remarks of welcome, British Muslims were presented to His Excellency. Unfortunately the Sheikh, owing to ill health, was unable to make any speech, but he conversed freely with the distinguished guests of the evening.

Amongst others the following were present: Mr. 'Abdu 'llah Yúsus 'Alí, I.C.S.; Sir Thomas Arnold; H.E. the Afghan Chárgé de Affaires; Professor and Madame Léon; A. Khaliq Khān, B.A.; Sirdār Ikbāl 'Alí Shāh Sahib; Comtesse Zainab Skipwith; Miss R. N. Husain, B.A., B.T., and Miss F. Nisa, M.A.

His Excellency the Persian Minister had also accepted the invitation. Many British Muslims of both sexes formed the company.

The Holy Qur-án was recited by a gifted Egyptian gentleman, Mr. Zada.

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His Excellency was overjoyed in meeting the Muslims of such distant countries as Java and Morocco. Quite a number of Indian ladies were also present. For the excellent arrangements, Mr. J. W. Habeebu 'llah Lovegrove (secretary of the Society and the Committee) and Mr. A. Majid (Imam of the Mosque, Woking) were profoundly thanked by His Excellency and the visitors. After expressing appreciation of the excellent work of the Society, His Excellency left at 6.30 p.m., after a stay of a very enjoyable time of two hours and a half.

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