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EDITORIAL

Bockarie Tommy Kallon – UK

Islam possesses a dynamic character. Muslims are duty bound to seek to persuade others about the truth of Islam and of the beneficent values it advocates. This is because the message of Islam is universal. While some religions have set territorial or racial limits to participation in their communion, Islam brooks no such limitation. Claiming to be based on truth, it invites the whole of mankind to its fold and naturally warns, constantly and extensively, of the dire moral and spiritual consequences that would follow from the rejection or even neglect of the values that it propounds. Importantly, however, it grants everyone the freedom to exercise his or her volition in choosing to subscribe to it or not. Belief is a matter of conscience and the conscience cannot be compelled.

Islam, therefore, stands for the freedom of conscience which it

considers indispensable to the achievement of the object of man's life on earth. This includes the freedom to profess, practise, propagate and, should his conscience so impel him, to abjure his religion. This freedom is repeatedly and emphatically affirmed by the Holy Qur'an so much so that there should not be a scintilla of doubt on the matter. The noble example of the Holy Prophet^(saw) also makes it clear that no coercion is to be applied in religious matters. No non-Muslim can be forcibly converted to Islam nor can any Muslim be forcibly declared a non-Muslim. The doors of ingress into Islam are open to anyone who, convinced of the truth and beauty of Islam, affirms that he is a Muslim just as the doors of egress are open to any Muslim who, for whatever ill-fated reason, chooses to disavow his faith in Islam.

Unfortunately, despite all this, a

section of the priestly classes within Islam, motivated by political factors, developed and propagated the abominable notion that a professing Muslim can recant from Islam only on the pain of death. This is a notion that is not only abhorrent to Islam but indeed to the human conscience. It renders nugatory the freedom of conscience that is so emphatically guaranteed by Islam. If this misguided notion were to be upheld, Islam would be guilty of hypocrisy by expecting adherents of other religions to give up their beliefs to embrace Islam while at the same time denying its adherents the freedom to renounce Islam should they be so inclined and would thus create barriers in the path of its own objectives.

As is argued in *Recantation Under Islam*, featured this month, freedom of conversion is in fact the litmus test of freedom of conscience. Everyone must be free to affirm his faith voluntarily or to proclaim his denial without restraint. It cannot be a one-way freedom. Hadhrat Mirza Tahir

Ahmad^(ru) bases his arguments on the Holy Qur'an, the practice and the traditions of the Holy Prophet^(saw) and events of the early Islamic era to divest Islam of this reprehensible appurtenance.

The development to dogma within religion, however, is not confined to the four walls of Islam. The Council of Nicaea, reproduced in this month's edition, shows how Christianity was influenced by the power of politics not only to promulgate a distorted concept of godhead but also to punish those who dared to reject it. Thus was to begin the indoctrination of the unfortunate masses which only the advent of the Holy Prophet^(saw) and Islam could reverse.

Notes & Comments

Behind the Veil: A Muslim Woman's Status in Islam

A burqah-clad woman fearing as she crosses a street in broad daylight with her child's hand in her own, the veiled head of a woman whose face cannot be seen and stories of "honour killings" – all these images of women pervade media coverage of the status of women in the Islamic world.

The media alone should not however, be blamed for such negative coverage. In some instances, it only reports what it sees and hears. Nations that claim to govern their populations by Islamically-principled law, or Shariah, are perpetuating, through their own practices, images of subjugation in relation to the status of women in Islam. One would be hard pressed to find a legitimate authority on Islamic law and practice that would find today's treatment of

women in Islamic nations in agreement with the guidelines set down in the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet^(saw). This erroneous distortion of the role of women in Muslim society has to do with the socio-economic and political factors of each respective Islamic nation – but that is a separate issue altogether. The fundamental tenets of Islam offer liberation in its truest sense to women – not by the western standards of the 21st century but by the humanitarian principles of equality and justice.

The principal right granted to women in Islam – and some would argue the most important – is that of spiritual equality to the rest of mankind. Whereas Judeo-Christian tradition recounts the creation of women from the rib of a man, the Holy

Qur'an explicitly does not talk of which gender begot which:

...Fear your Lord who created you from a single being and created therefrom its mate, and from the two spread many men and women.

(Ch.4:V.2)

As a direct parallel to previous monotheistic religions, the Holy Qur'an could not be clearer in telling us that there exists no inferiority in the status of women. Yet in another account, the Bible relates the story of Adam and Eve and holds Eve culpable as a temptress and persuader of evil. The Holy Qur'an tells the same story without any isolated blame on Eve:

But Satan caused them both [Adam and Eve] to slip by means of it and drove them out of the state in which they were...

(Ch.2:V.37)

With the absence of particular blame held over Eve, it is clear

that women are not perceived as harbingers of evil and temptation in Islam.

Some would argue that Islam dictates that women are inherent sources of temptation for men – and that donning the veil counteracts this temptation. Some go so far as to say that the veil is worn for the sole purpose of keeping men's temptations at bay. Again, this is a grievous misconception. The veil is utilised as a means of protection for women; it is a physically manifested barrier between herself and the harm that may befall her. It is widely known that incorporating the veil into one's external appearance effectively instils confidence in one's persona. No longer must a woman completely rely on her physical beauty to achieve her goals and be successful in society. This proves to be especially true in western countries.

The rights granted by Islam in the seventh century were revolutionary and incredibly

progressive for the time. In a period when female infanticide was prevalent and women were bartered like livestock, Islam broke the chain of social norms and elevated women to new heights. The roles of women as mothers and wives are highly revered in Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad^(saw) elevated the status of women through his own example of the treatment of women in his life. Not once did he abuse his wives physically or mistreat them in any manner. Rather, he is reported to have said, ‘The best among you is he who treats his wife the best.’ Concerning respect for mothers, the Prophet Muhammad^(saw) has established that they are due three times over the respect that is due to fathers. In light of these precedents, how can Islam be thought unjust in its treatment of women? When certain rights such as voting, inheritance, initiating divorce, alimony, child support, property ownership and the like were given to women in the West in the 20th century, how can Islam

be barbaric and backward in its granting of these same rights in the early seventh century? In addition to these particular rights, the duties and responsibilities of a woman are defined according to her capacity. Contrary to popular opinion in the West, Islam does not deprive women of their rights and elevated status in society but provides for women in a way that is not wholly recognised by the cultural norms of western society.

Khullat Munir, New York, USA.

Steadfastness of the Holy Prophet^(saw) - Part 8

This series sets out, in the words of the Promised Messiah^(as), Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, a summary of his exposition of four outstanding topics: ISLAM; ALLAH, THE EXALTED; THE HOLY PROPHET^(saw) and THE HOLY QUR'AN. The original compilation, in Urdu, from which these extracts have been translated into English, was collated with great care and diligence by Syed Daud Ahmad Sahib, Allah have mercy on him and reward him graciously for his great labour of love. Amin. The English rendering is by the late Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, may Allah be pleased with him, and is quoted from *The Essence of Islam*, Volume 1. All references throughout, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, are from the Holy Qur'an.

That Prophet is superior to all other Prophets who is the great Instructor of the world, that is to say, he at whose hands the great corruption of the world was reformed and who re-established on the earth the Unity of God which had been lost and had disappeared. He overcame all false religions by proof and argument and removed the doubts of every misguided one. He provided the true means of salvation by teaching the right principles for which it was not necessary to crucify an innocent person, or to remove God from

His true and eternal station and to put Him in the womb of a woman. Thus, his beneficence and his grace exceed those of everyone else and his rank is higher than all. History points out, and the heavenly Book is a witness, and those who have eyes are able to observe, that the Prophet who is thus established as superior to all other Prophets is Muhammad, the chosen one^(saw).

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol.1, p.97, footnote 6)

It is worthy of note how stead-

fastly the Holy Prophet^(saw) adhered to his claim of Prophethood right till the end, despite thousands of dangers and hundreds of thousands of opponents and obstructers and threateners. For years, he endured misfortunes and hardships which increased daily and rendered success apparently hopeless, and by enduring which patiently he had not in mind the achievement of any worldly purpose. On the contrary, by putting forward his claim of Prophethood, he lost what he had and purchased a hundred thousand contentions and invited a thousand calamities to overtake him. He was expelled from his home, was pursued by slayers, lost his home and all it contained and was poisoned several times. Those who were his well-wishers began to wish him ill and those who were his friends turned into enemies. For a long period, he had to bear hardships, to be steadfast under which was not possible for a cunning impostor.

When after a long time Islam

became supreme, the Holy Prophet^(saw) collected no wealth for himself, nor did he raise any structure, nor did he seek any means of comfort or luxury, nor did he derive any personal benefit from anything. Whatever came to hand was spent in taking care of the poor, the orphans, the widows and those burdened with debt. He never ate his fill. He was so straightforward that by his plain speaking and his preaching of the Unity of God, he made enemies of all the peoples of the world who were sunk in paganism. He converted his own people into enemies first of all, by forbidding them idol worship. He upset the Jews for he stopped them from indulging in diverse types of creature worship and exaltation of their divines and from misconduct. He stopped them from denying and insulting Jesus^(as) which caused them great heart burning, and they became his bitter enemies, and began to cast about for means of destroying him. In the same way, he annoyed the Christians for he denied the godhead of Jesus^(as) and his being

the son of God, and denied his being the crucified saviour. The fire worshippers and the star worshippers were also annoyed with him for they were also forbidden to worship their deities. The Unity of God was proclaimed as the sole means of attaining salvation. Were these the ways of winning the world? (*Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 1 pp. 108-109*)

The Holy Prophet^(SAW) was straightforward and was ready to lay down his life for God, and turned wholly away from any hope or fear of people, and put his trust wholly in God, and being devoted to the will and pleasure of God, he cared not what calamities he would have to endure through preaching the Unity of God and what hardships might be inflicted upon him by the pagans. He endured every hardship and carried out the commandments of his Lord, and fulfilled all the conditions called for by his preaching and admonition, and attached no importance to any threat that was held out to him. I say truly that of



The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(AS).

The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(AS). In 1891, he claimed, on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths. His claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

all the Prophets there was none who put his full trust in God on all occasions of danger and went on preaching against paganism and creature worship despite all his enemies and was so steadfast and persevering as the Holy

Prophet^(saw).

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 1 pp. 111-112)

The calamities and hardships that the Holy Prophet^(saw) had to endure during the thirteen years of his Makkan life cannot be imagined. My heart trembles when I think of them. They demonstrate his high resolve, his generosity, his perseverance and his steadfastness. What a mountain of steadfastness he was that no difficulty could shake him in the least. He did not slacken for a moment in the discharge of his duty, nor was he sorrowful. No difficulty could weaken his resolve. Some people out of misunderstanding enquire: why did he have to encounter all these misfortunes and difficulties when he was the loved one of God and His chosen one? I would say to them that water is not discovered till one digs in the earth and splits it through several feet. It is only then that agreeable water is found which is the basis of life. In the same way, delight in the cause of God Almighty can be procured only by stead-

fastness and firmness under difficulties and misfortunes. How can those who are unaware of this spiritual experience ever taste and feel the delight of facing hardship? How on earth can they imagine that whenever the Holy Prophet^(saw) faced trouble, a spring of felicity and delight welled up in his heart, reinforcing his faith in God and in His love and succour.

[Malfuzat, Vol. II, p. 307-308]

Divine Support for the Holy Prophet^(saw)

Is it not a matter for wonder that a poor, powerless, helpless, and unlearned orphan who was alone at a time when every people possessed a plenitude of financial, military and intellectual means, brought such a bright teaching that he silenced everyone with his conclusive arguments and clear proofs? He pointed out the mistakes of those who were claimed as great philosophers. He exhibited such power that he pulled down rulers from their thrones and put poor people on them in their place. If this was not Divine support, then

He exhibited such power that he pulled down rulers from their thrones and put poor people on them in their place. If this was not Divine support, then what was it?

what was it? Can anyone overcome the whole world in reason, knowledge, strength and force without Divine support?

Who was with the Holy Prophet^(SAW) when he first announced to the people that he was a Prophet? Did he possess the treasury of any king relying on which he took on the whole world as his opponents, or had he at his disposal a force relying on which he had become secure against the attacks of kings? Our opponents know that the Holy Prophet^(SAW) was at that time alone and helpless and without any means. It was only God, Who had created him for a great purpose, Who was with him and was his sure support.

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 1 pp. 119-120)

On five occasions, the life of the

Holy Prophet^(SAW) was in serious danger and had he not been a true Prophet of God, he would certainly have been destroyed. One was the occasion when the disbelieving Quraish had surrounded his house and had sworn that they would kill him that night. The second occasion was when pursuers had arrived with a large body of men at the entrance to the cave in which he had taken shelter along with Hadhrat Abu Bakr^(RA). The third occasion was when he had been left alone in the battle of Uhud and the Quraish had surrounded him and attacked him in a body but were foiled in their purpose. The fourth occasion was when a Jewish woman gave him meat to eat which had been saturated with a fatal poison. The fifth occasion was when Khusro Pervaiz, Emperor of Persia, had made up his mind to destroy him

and had sent his emissaries to arrest him. His delivery on all these dangerous occasions and his ultimate triumph over all his enemies is conclusive proof that he was righteous and God was with him.

(Chashma-e-Ma'rifat, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 23, pp. 263-264, footnote)

Perfect Morals of the Holy Prophet^(saw) in Adversity and Victory

Prophets and saints are raised so that people should follow them in all their moral qualities and that all seekers after truth should tread the path along which God has made them steadfast. It is obvious that high moral qualities are proved by their exercise on the proper occasion and it is only then that they are most effective. For instance, forgiveness is praiseworthy when the wronged one has the power to take revenge, and piety is trustworthy when it is exercised at a time when means of self-indulgence are at hand. God's design with regard to Prophets and saints is that every type of high moral

quality should be manifested by them and should be clearly established.

To fulfil this design God Almighty divides their lives into two parts. One part is passed in hardships and under calamities, in which they are tormented and persecuted so that those of their high moral qualities might be manifested which can only be manifested during great hardship. If they are not subjected to great hardship, it cannot be affirmed that they were faithful to their Lord in the face of all calamities and pressed further forward in the face of hardships. They are grateful to God Almighty that He chose them for His favours and considered them worthy that they should be persecuted in His cause. God Almighty afflicts them with misfortunes so that their endurance and steadfastness and fidelity might be manifested and they might illustrate the proverb that:

'Steadfastness is higher than a miracle.'

Perfect steadfastness is not manifested in the absence of great hardships, and is appreciated when a person is greatly shaken. These calamities are spiritual bounties in the case of Prophets and saints, through which their high qualities, in which they are matchless and peerless, are manifested and their ranks are promoted in the hereafter. If they were not subjected to severe trials, they would not be awarded these bounties, nor would their sterling qualities be demonstrated to the common people. Their high resolve, fidelity and bravery would not be universally acknowledged. They became matchless, peerless, unique, unreachable, and so perfect and brave as if each of them were a thousand lions in one body and a thousand leopards in one frame. Thus, their power and strength held high in everyone's estimation and they arrived at high ranks of nearness to God.

The second part of the lives of Prophets and saints is perfected in victory, prestige and riches, so

that such of their high qualities might be demonstrated for which it is necessary to be victorious, to possess prestige, riches, authority and power. To forgive one's tormentors, and to forbear from one's persecutors, and to love one's enemies, and to wish well to one's ill-wishers, not to love riches nor to be proud of them, and not to be miserly and to open wide the gates of beneficence and generosity, and not to make riches the means of self-indulgence, and not to make power an instrument of tyranny and transgression, are all qualities for the demonstration of which it is necessary to possess riches and power. These qualities are demonstrated when a person possesses both wealth and authority.

As without passing through a time of trial and misfortune, and also a time of prosperity and authority, these two types of high qualities cannot be manifested, the Perfect Wisdom of the Divine demanded that Prophets and saints should be provided with both these types of opportunities

“ God Almighty bestowed great treasures upon the Holy Prophet^(saw) and he spent them all in the cause of God and did not spend a penny on self-indulgence. He raised no structures and built no mansions, but spent the whole of his life in a mud hut, which was no different from the dwelling of the poorest person. ”

which comprise thousands of bounties. But the sequence of both these conditions is not the same for everyone. Divine Wisdom ordains in the case of some that the period of peace and comfort should precede the time of troubles, and in the case of others, troubles precede Divine help. In some these conditions are not apparent and in others they are manifested to a perfect degree. In this respect the foremost was the Holy Prophet^(saw) for both these conditions were imposed upon him in their perfection in such order that his high qualities were illumined like the sun and thus was fulfilled the verse:

Thou dost surely possess high moral excellences.
(Ch.68:V.5)

The Holy Prophet^(saw), having been proved to be perfect in both types of high qualities, thus proved the high qualities of all the Prophets, inasmuch as he confirmed their Prophethood and their Books and manifested their being the favourites of God. This repels the objection that the moral qualities of Jesus^(as) in respect of both these types were not established to a perfect degree, and indeed they were not established even with regard to one type. It is true that Jesus^(as) showed steadfastness under distress, but the perfection of this quality would only have been demonstrated had Jesus^(as) obtained authority and superiority over his persecutors, had forgiven them from the bottom of his heart as the Holy Prophet^(saw), having obtained complete victory over the

Makkans and others and having them at his mercy, forgave them, with the exception of a few who had been condemned by God to undergo punishment for their specific crimes. Having achieved victory, he announced to them:

‘No blame shall lie on you on this day.’

On account of this forgiveness which had appeared impossible in the estimation of his opponents, who, considering their own misdeeds, deemed themselves already condemned to death, thousands of people accepted Islam within an hour. The steadfastness of the Holy Prophet^(saw) which he had demonstrated for a long period under their severe persecution became illumined in their eyes like the sun. It is part of man’s nature that the greatness of a person’s steadfastness is illustrated perfectly when he forgives his persecutors after obtaining power over them. That is why the high qualities of Jesus^(as) in the matter of steadfastness and meekness and

endurance were not fully demonstrated and it did not become clear whether his steadfastness was by his choice or was under compulsion. Jesus^(as) did not acquire power and authority over his persecutors so that it cannot be determined whether he forgave his enemies, or would have avenged himself upon them.

As a contrast, the high qualities of the Holy Prophet^(saw) were demonstrated on hundreds of occasions and their reality shone forth like the sun. The qualities of generosity, beneficence, sacrifice, bravery, piety, contentment and withdrawal from the world were demonstrated more clearly and brilliantly in the case of the Holy Prophet^(saw) than in the case of any other Prophet. God Almighty bestowed great treasures upon the Holy Prophet^(saw) and he spent them all in the cause of God and did not spend a penny on self-indulgence. He raised no structures and built no mansions, but spent the whole of his life in a mud hut, which was no

different from the dwelling of the poorest person. He behaved benevolently towards those who had persecuted him and helped them in their distress out of his own resources. He lived in a small adobe hut and slept on the ground and ate of barley bread or went without food. He was granted abundant wealth of the world, but he did not soil his holy hands with it and always preferred poverty to wealth and meekness to power. From the day of his advent to the day when he returned to his Companion on High, he attached no importance to anything except to his Lord. He gave proof of his bravery, fidelity and steadfastness in battle against thousands of enemies, solely for the sake of God, when death appeared a certainty.

In short, God Almighty manifested such high qualities as benevolence, piety, contentment, bravery and all that pertained to the love of the Divine in the Holy Prophet^(saw) the like of which had not appeared in the world before him, nor will appear after him. In

the case of Jesus^(as), these high qualities were not clearly established for they can only be proved in a period of power and riches and these were not granted to Jesus^(as). Thus in his case, both types of qualities remained hidden as conditions for their demonstration were not present, but this objection which can be raised against the deficiency in the case of Jesus has been repelled by the perfect example of the Holy Prophet^(saw) inasmuch as his beneficent example perfects and completes the case of every Prophet, and through him whatever had remained hidden or doubtful in the case of Jesus^(as) and other Prophets shone forth brightly. Revelation and Prophethood came to an end in that holy person in the sense that all excellences reached their climax in him. *This is the grace of Allah. He bestows it upon whom He wills.*

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 1 pp. 276-292, footnote 11)

God Almighty divided the life of our Holy Prophet^(saw) into two

parts, one of pain and troubles and suffering and the other of victory, so that during the period of suffering those qualities might be manifested which belong to the period of suffering, and in the period of victory and power, those qualities might be demonstrated that cannot be established without power. Thus, both types of qualities were clearly established in his case by his passing through both these periods. By reading the history of his period of distress, which extended over thirteen years in Makkah, it becomes clear that he demonstrated those qualities which the perfectly righteous demonstrate in the period of distress, that is to say, trusting in God and abstaining from complaining and not slackening in his work and not standing in awe of anyone, in such manner that the disbelievers believed on witnessing such steadfastness and bore witness that unless a person had full trust in God, he could not endure suffering with such steadfastness.

When the stage of victory, power

and prosperity arrived the high qualities of the Holy Prophet^(saw) – his forgiveness, generosity, bravery – were demonstrated so perfectly that a large number of disbelievers observing those qualities believed in him. He forgave his persecutors and gave security to those who had expelled him from Makkah and enriched their needy ones. Having obtained authority over his principal enemies, he forgave them. Many people, observing his high qualities, testified that unless a person came from God and was truly righteous, he could not possess such qualities. That is why the old rancour of his enemies was immediately removed. The Holy Qur'an testifies to his exemplary morals in this verse:

Say, 'My Prayer and my sacrifice and my life and death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.'
(Ch.6:V.163)

This means that: Tell them that my worship and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for

God alone, that is my whole life is devoted to manifesting the glory of God and providing comfort for His creatures so that with my death they might regain spiritual life.

[Islami Usul ki Philosophy, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 10, pp. 447-448]

Greater than all honours is the honour of the Holy Prophet^(saw) which has affected the whole Islamic world. His honour revived the world. In Arabia, adultery, drinking and fighting were rife. Human rights were completely disregarded. There was no sympathy for mankind. Even the rights of God were repudiated altogether. Stones and plants and stars were invested with Divine attributes. Diverse types of *shirk* were widespread. Not only man but even human genitals were worshipped. If a person possessing a sane nature were to observe those conditions even for a short while he would behold a terrible scene of darkness, wrongdoing and tyranny. Paralysis strikes on one side, but this was a paralysis

which had struck both sides. The world had been completely corrupted. There was security neither on water nor on land.

The Holy Prophet^(saw) appeared in this age of darkness and destruction, and reformed perfectly both sides of the balance and re-established the rights of God and the rights of man on their true centre. The moral power of the Holy Prophet^(saw) can be estimated by considering the condition of the age. The persecutions to which he and his followers were subjected and the treatment that he accorded to his enemies, when he obtained power over them, demonstrate the height of his rank.

There was no torment that Abu Jahl and his companions did not inflict upon the Holy Prophet^(saw) and his devoted companions. Poor Muslim women were tied to the legs of camels which were then driven in opposite directions and their bodies were thus torn asunder; their only offence being that they believed:

‘ This great miracle of inner change, through which rank idol worshippers became sincere worshippers of God and those who were sunk in the world every moment established such strong relationship with God that they shed their blood like water in His cause, was the result of their spending their lives in full sincerity in the company of the true and perfect Prophet^(saw) ’

There is none worthy of worship except Allah.’

He endured everything with steadfastness and when Makkah fell, he forgave his enemies, reassuring them: No blame shall lie on you this day. This was the perfection of high moral qualities which is not found in any other Prophet. Send down Thy blessings O Allah on Muhammad^(saw) and his people. *(Malfuzat, Vol. II, pp. 79-80)*

True Victory of the Holy Prophet^(saw)

The community of the Holy Prophet^(saw) had developed such unity and spiritual oneness that through the spirit of Islamic brotherhood, they had all become like the limbs of one body. The rays of the light of Prophethood

had so coloured their daily lives and their overt and covert conduct, that they had become the reflections of the Holy Prophet^(saw). This great miracle of inner change, through which rank idol worshippers became sincere worshippers of God and those who were sunk in the world every moment established such strong relationship with God that they shed their blood like water in His cause, was the result of their spending their lives in full sincerity in the company of the true and perfect Prophet^(saw). *(Fath-e-Islam, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 3, pp. 21-22)*

The life of the Holy Prophet^(saw) was a life of grand success. In his high moral qualities, his spiritual power, his high resolve, the excellence and perfection of his

teaching, his perfect example and the acceptance of his prayers, in short, in every aspect of his life, he exhibited such bright signs that even a person of low intelligence, provided he is not inspired by unreasonable rancour and enmity, is forced to confess that he was the perfect example of reflecting Divine qualities and was indeed the perfect man.

[Al-Hakam, 10 April 1902, p. 5]

Have you any notion what was the strange event that occurred in the desert country of Arabia when hundreds of thousands of the dead were revived within a brief period and those who had been misguided through generations put on Divine colour, and those who were blind obtained sight, and those who had been dumb began to speak of the understanding of the Divine, and the world underwent a revolution which had never been seen or heard of before? It was the supplications during dark nights of one who had lost himself in God which raised a clamour in the world, and manifested such wonders as

appeared impossible in the case of that unlearned helpless one. Send down Thy blessings and peace, O Allah, on him and his people according to the amount of pain and anguish he felt for his Ummah, and pour down upon him the lights of Thy mercy forever.

[Barakat-ud-Du'a, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 6, pp. 10-11]

Whatever happened in the beginning of Islam was the result of the supplications of the Holy Prophet^(saw) which he had submitted to God Almighty with his tears in the streets of Makkah. All the grand victories which changed the entire aspect of the world were the result of his prayers. The weakness of his companions may be judged from the fact that in the battle of Badr, between them they possessed only three wooden swords.

[Al-Hakam, 17 September 1906, p. 4]

The reform that was carried out by our lord and master, the Holy Prophet^(saw) was very sweeping and general, and was acknow-

ledged on all hands. This degree of reform had not been achieved by any previous Prophet. If anyone studies the history of Arabia, he would come to know how bigoted the idol worshippers, Jews, and Christians of the time were, and how much their reform had been despaired of for centuries. Then the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, which were wholly opposed to them, proved so effective that they swept aside every false doctrine and every vice. Drinking was abolished, gam-

bling was discarded, infanticide was put down and everything that was opposed to compassion and justice and purity was suppressed. It is true also that offenders were suitably punished for their offences. No one can, however, deny the greatness of the reform that was carried out.

(Nur-ul-Qur'an No. 1, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 9, p. 366 footnote)

References to the Holy Qur'an item count 'Bismillah...' (In the Name of Allah...) as the first verse of each Chapter. In some non-standard texts, this is not counted and should the reader refer to such texts, the verse quoted in *The Review of Religions* will be found one verse less than the number quoted.

In this journal, for the ease of non-Muslim readers, '(saw)' or 'saw' after the words, 'Holy Prophet', or the name 'Muhammad', are used. They stand for '*Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam*' meaning 'Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him'. Likewise, the letters '(as)' or 'as' after the name of all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning 'Peace be upon him' derived from '*Alaihis salatu wassalam*' which are words that a Muslim utters out of respect whenever he or she comes across that name.

The abbreviation 'ra' or (ra) stands for '*Radhiallahu Ta'ala anhu*' and is used for Companions of a Prophet, meaning Allah be pleased with him or her (when followed by the relevant Arabic pronoun). Finally, 'ru' or (ru) for '*Rahemallahu Ta'ala*' means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him. In keeping with current universal practice, local transliterations are preferred to their anglicised versions, e.g. Makkah instead of Mecca, etc.

Establishing Peace

An address by Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community to an international audience of leading politicians and dignitaries at a reception in Sydney, Australia on 15 April 2006.



All distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Assalamu alaikum
warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu
that is, Peace and blessings of Allah be upon you.

Today I am going to say a few words about Islam with reference to the present prevailing condition in the world regarding Islam.

There are many religions in the world today. A majority of these

religions are confined to their respective countries or specific areas. A majority of the believers of such religions belong to some country or region. Some of the great religions exist in many countries of the world.

The Christians are said to top the league followed by Muslims. Then there are Hindus, Budhists and Jews. If we look around, then believers of different faiths, somewhere or another, and in some form or the other, are engaged in a battle to express

their superiority in the area of their interest. According to these religions, by and large, the struggle for rights cannot be attributed to their religion but is conceived as a struggle for freedom and liberty or the rights of that particular country.

But when Muslims struggle for these rights, the world targets Islamic teachings and condemns it as being responsible for the violence. Muslims or the religion of Islam is presented as a religion of terror. Admittedly, this may be due to the wrong actions of a few of the so-called Muslim organisations. However, the knee-jerk response of these organisations is also due to the double standards that prevail amongst the superpowers.

I do not, for a moment, condone the act of these so-called Jihadi organisations; but I will say this, that if the powerful nations understand their responsibilities and do not use double standards, then true justice can be established in the world.

If this does not happen then the result is already there to see for us all. It is nearly one hundred years since the nations agreed mutually to abolish wars and live in peace but they have not succeeded in stopping the wars. What is the reason for this? The answer, as I have just said, is that there are double standards for justice.

However, I stand here not to speak on this subject. In this brief time, I only want to speak about the teachings of love and brotherhood that are relevant for the existence of the smallest component of societies as well as for international relations.

I would like to say one thing. We can have peace in this world if the majority of the believers in this world, of whatever religion, develop in themselves the fear of their Lord.

We Ahmadis firmly believe that without turning to God, all our efforts for peace will prove fruitless. It is for this very purpose that Allah the Almighty

has sent in this age, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) of Qadian to unite people in the beautiful teachings of Islam and draw the attention of mankind towards honouring and discharging the rights of man. In light of this beautiful teaching of Islam, Ahmadis are conveying it to the world.

I would like to present to you some of the excellent teachings from the Holy Qur'an so that you can realise that Islam is not a religion of terrorism but gives a message of peace.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

You are the best people raised for the good of mankind; you enjoin what is good and forbid evil...

(Ch.3:V.111)

This is the fundamental lesson that has been given to Muslims to create high moral standards and peace in the world. It says that you are the best people or will become the best people only when you are beneficial to God's

creatures, when you promote goodness and prevent evil.

Then, the Almighty Allah says:

...And help one another in righteousness and piety; but help not one another in sin and transgression...

(Ch.5:V.3)

Now, those who are ordered neither to transgress nor help anyone in transgression are cautioned. Every sensible person knows the definition of transgression. Everyone who indulges in violating the rights of his neighbour is guilty of transgression. Everyone who breaks the law of the land is guilty of transgression. Anyone who indulges in any vice is also guilty of transgression.

After enjoining to help each other in good works and to desist from sin and excess, the Holy Qur'an has pointed out what the good works are. As Allah says:

And the servants of the Gracious God are those who

walk on earth in a dignified manner, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!"
(Ch.25:V.64)

In other words, these truly pious people walk on earth without any arrogance. They are recognised by their humility. They do their utmost to avoid being involved in any disorder. How can one expect that a home of such a person would have any disputes or that his neighbours would be upset with him or that he would commit an illegal act? Surely, he would never do that.

Then, again, Islam teaches that if you develop such excellent morals, you will be the recipients of the love of the Almighty Allah.

As Allah says:

Those [meaning the God-fearing] who spend in prosperity and adversity, and those who suppress anger and pardon men; and Allah loves those who do good.
(Ch.3:V.135)

Muslims are enjoined to spend in the way of Allah. It has been explained in another place that it is important to help the poor and the needy and to spread the true word of Islam. This is important for everyone who wishes to create peace on this earth.

Suppression of anger is also part of human nature. When someone is oppressed or is exceedingly mistreated, the reaction is anger. In this verse, one is enjoined to suppress anger and to develop a habit of forgiveness, because if you suppress your anger and forgive, you will be doing good and Allah likes those who do good to others.

It may cross someone's mind that given such teachings of forgiveness, why do we see so many battles in the early history of Islam? Why were these battles fought in the time of the Holy Prophet^(saw)?

Before I discuss this, I must mention that the teachings of the Holy Qur'an are entirely in accord with human nature. All

the commandments are focused on developing peace and discipline in the society. Now, if criminals are also forgiven, the whole society will be full of crimes. Therefore, Islam enjoins that the real purpose is to eliminate evil. If reformation can take place by forgiveness and by doing good, then that is fine; but if it cannot, then the matter should be submitted to law and the one who commits evil deeds should be punished.

However, there should be no excess because the real purpose of punishment is reformation and not petty vengeance. This is the beautiful teaching of Islam.

Now, let us see how and under what circumstances the battles were fought by the Muslims. When the Founder of Islam, the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw), claimed that he had been sent as a Prophet of God, his message was to worship one God and to give up the worship of many idols. These idols were placed in the Ka'aba and because they were man-made they could not

grant anything. When the Prophet^(saw) invited his people to come to the one God Who grants every need of human beings, he and those who believed in his teachings were mercilessly persecuted and some were massacred in the most brutal manner. It was so cruel that amid excruciating cries, they were tied between two camels and the camels made to run in opposite direction leaving the victim split into two parts.

As a result of this torture and persecution, the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) and his Muslim companions migrated to Madinah. Even here, the Muslims were not left in peace and the disbelieving Makkans made preparations and attacked the Muslims in Madinah. Allah the Almighty considered that to be the last straw that broke the camel's back and granted permission to Muslims to fight back the disbelievers. As Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is

made because they have been wronged – and Allah indeed has power to help them – those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, “Our Lord is Allah” – And if Allah did not repel some men by means of others, there would surely have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft commemorated. And Allah will surely help one who helps Him. Allah is indeed Powerful, Mighty.
(Ch.22:Vs.40-41)

It was in this condition that the Muslims were permitted to respond to the infidels. Because they had been victimised, Allah the Almighty promised them that He would aid and assist them. Just over three hundred men, many of whom were weak and poorly equipped for the battle, came out to face and ultimately overcame more than a thousand well-armed and equipped infidels.

Allah Almighty clearly states

that ‘If I do not help you then one religion will start attacking another religion and thus destroy peace.’ Religion is a matter of the heart. Force is not permitted in religion. If one does not like a particular religion, one does not have to follow it. By declaring that there is no compulsion in the matter of religion, Islam has given religious freedom to everyone to adopt whatever religion one likes.

In short, what I mean to say is that wherever permission is granted for battle, it is only for the sake of defence, to maintain peace and to stop terrorism. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) always followed the way of forgiveness and doing good works as Allah the Almighty has commanded.

I have already mentioned the cruelty and persecution that were carried out against the Muslims in Makkah and various armed attacks that were carried out against them afterwards. We must keep that scenario in mind when we look at the time the

Muslims gained the final victory of Makkah about eight years after migration.

A majority of the persecuted Muslims many of whom were still alive remembered what had been done to them, their wives and descendents who had been cruelly persecuted.

A ten thousand strong Muslim army finally entered Makkah but the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) declared, 'I am a Messenger of peace to the world, I love humanity and I am an enemy of tyranny and persecution. Therefore, O Makkans! You will not be punished today, provided you do not fight. You can do what you like. You can practise whatever religion you like. No one will question you today.' His magnanimity and forgiveness extended even to Ikrama, who was the worst enemy of Islam and had even attacked the Muslims that day of amnesty.

When Ikrama fled after being defeated, upon the plea of his wife, the Holy Prophet

Muhammad^(saw) forgave him. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) advised all his Muslim companions to forgive with open hearts their erstwhile enemies who had persecuted them and had subjected them to various kinds of tortures. Therefore, they all forgave their enemies. These were the high moral standards of forgiveness that were displayed by the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) and his Companions. They not only forgave but showed grace because their real purpose was to establish peace and not take an eye for an eye. In view of this beautiful revenge that they took from their enemies, the enemies themselves fell in love with them and started gathering under their banner.

All this forgiveness and good deeds that were performed were only because the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) and his Companions wanted to gain the pleasure of Allah the Almighty. They had neither personal interest in mind nor any desire to show any superiority. Their only wish was that the world should

recognise their God and establish His Kingdom on earth.

Therefore, instead of blaming Islam or any other religion, peace can only be established if we come together for the sake of betterment of humanity and for the sake of gaining the pleasure of our Creator.

Alas! Were the world to understand this principle and give up its false ego so that this beautiful world of God Almighty can become a paradise for His creatures.

Finally, I am most grateful to all the guests who have come here today and listened to me. This is also an expression of love that you have shown. It is a living proof that you possess the patience to listen so that the world can develop a climate of peace, amity and brotherliness.

Thank you and may Allah bless you all and let you work for the cause of peace and let you, those who are MPs and other officials, work for the cause of your

country and nation and create a peaceful atmosphere in this country.

Thank you very much.

RECONTANTION UNDER ISLAM— *Part 6*

This is the sixth extract from the ‘Murder in the Name of Allah’ by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, dealing with Jama’at Islami’s founder, Maulana Maududi’s misinterpretation of the Islamic concept of Jihad.

‘Write down for me the name of everyone who calls himself a Muslim.’

Muhammad^(saw)

The concept of apostasy, as it existed in medieval Christianity and as expounded by Maulana Maududi, is alien to Islam. There is not even a word for it in the Arabic language. There is no doubt that some early Muslim scholars of law considered recantation from Islam to be a capital offence, but their definition of ‘Muslim’ was so broad that no one calling himself a Muslim could be called a recanter. The Prophet^(saw) gave us two definitions of a Muslim. At the time of the first census of Madinah, the Prophet^(saw) said: ‘Write down for me the name of everyone who calls himself a Muslim.’¹ On another occasion

the Prophet^(saw) said: ‘Whoever prays as we pray and turns to our *Qiblah* and eats what we ritually slaughter is a Muslim; he is *dhimmat-Allah* and *dhimmat al-rasul*. So do not put Allah in contravention of his *dhimmah* [responsibility].’²

But Maulana Maududi and the *ulema*, supporting dictatorships and autocracies in Muslim countries, have added various qualifications to the Prophet’s^(saw) simple definition. In the words of Al-Ghazali (450-505AH/AD1058-1113) they have limited: ‘The vast Mercy of God to make paradise the preserve of a small clique of theologians.’³ The result of their effort has been summed up by the former chief justice of Pakistan, Muhammad Munir, who presided over the Court of Inquiry into the Punjab

(Pakistan) Disturbances in 1953. He said:

‘Keeping in view the several definitions given by the *ulema*, need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental? If we attempt our own definition, as each learned divine has, and that definition differs from all others, we all leave Islam’s fold. If we adopt the definition given by anyone of the *ulema*, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim*, but *kafirs* according to everyone else’s definition.’⁴

Justice Munir’s observation must be read with reference to the Prophet’s^(saw) reprimand to Usama b. Zayd. In the raid of Ghalib b. Abdullah al-Kalbi, according to Ibn Ishaq, a man was killed by Usama b. Zayd and another. Reporting this incident, Usama b. Zayd said:

‘When I and a man of Ansar overtook him and attacked

him with our weapons he pronounced the *Shahadah*, but we did not stay our hands and killed him. When we came to the Prophet^(sa) and told him what had happened, he said: “Who will absolve you, Usama, from ignoring the confession of faith?” I told him that the man had pronounced the words merely to escape death, but he repeated his question and continued to do so until I wished that I had never been a Muslim before that day and that I had never killed the man. I asked him to forgive me and promised that I would never kill a man who pronounced the *Shahadah*. The Prophet^(saw) said: “You will say it after me (after my death), Usama?” and I said that I would.’⁵

The Prophet^(saw) knew that despite his concern for the lives of *Shahadah*-pronouncing Muslims, they would still be killed by misguided people under Islam’s name. According to the report in the *Musnad Imam Ahmad ibn*

Hanbal, the Prophet^(saw) also asked Usama whether he had opened his victim's heart to check the authenticity of his faith.⁶ And yet the power-hungry and politically orientated *ulema* continue to incite ignorant Muslims to kill their Muslim brothers – Muslims whose viewpoint differed slightly from their own – as if, on opening their hearts, they had discovered the faith of such Muslims was false.

Regarding recantation, the Qur'an uses the word *irtadda*, which means that no one has the right to declare any other Muslim *murtadd*. As Imam Raghīb Isfahan⁷ explains, the word *irtidad* means to retrace one's steps back to the point from where one came. The word is especially associated with recantation – returning to *kufir* (disbelief) from Islam, e.g. 'Surely those who turn their backs after the guidance hath been manifested unto them'; (Ch.47:V.26) and 'whoso of you becometh renegade from his religion'. (Ch.5:V.55)

The Holy Qur'an has used the word 'rida' in the intransitive measure (i.e. *ifti'al*) which means that everyone has an option but no one has been given the right to declare another an apostate. It is a voluntary action and no outside agency can play any part in it. It is this aspect of free will which distinguishes *irtidad* from the Christian and Maududian concept of apostasy, which we discussed in the last chapter. Apostasy and its punishment requires an external authority, the church or state. It is like execution or, rather, murder. *Irtidad* is like suicide. One can execute or murder, but no one can 'suicide' someone.

Surah Al-Kafirun, revealed in the early period of the Prophet's^(saw) ministry, is a direct statement of policy on the subject of freedom of conscience. The Prophet^(saw) was asked to tell unbelievers there was absolutely no meeting-point between their way of life and his. As they were in complete disagreement, not only with regard to the basic concepts of religion, but also with regard

to its details and other aspects, there could not possibly be any compromise between them. Hence, *‘For you, your religion, for me, my religion’*. (Ch.109:V.7)

The Prophet^(saw) was also repeatedly told not to worry if unbelievers were not ready to accept his message. He was not their *wakil* (guardian). God says: *‘Thy people have rejected (the message that We have sent through thee), though it is the truth. Say: “I am not appointed a wakil over you.”’*⁸ This statement was made in the Makkan period, when the Prophet^(saw) and his followers were persecuted. Yet on his arrival in Madinah, the statement was exactly the same, even though he now had power. It was, in fact, made even more explicit.

The first Madinite *surah* in which the subject of freedom of conscience was discussed was *Al-Baqarah*. The 257th verse of the *surah* contains the clearest pronouncement on the subject:

There shall be no compulsion in religion. Surely guidance has become distinct from error; whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress and believes in Allah has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.
(Ch.2:V.257)

This is the confident declaration of a prophet who has organised an *umma* in a town where his power is supreme. Lest the subject of *jihad* be misunderstood, Muslims are told that true virtue lies in good works and good faith (Ch.2:Vs. 255-258) and the Majesty of God is called to mind in the Throne verse (Ch.2:V.256). The commandment of *‘no compulsion in religion’* comes immediately after the Throne verse. Readers of the Qur’an might have thought God wanted Muslims to spread Islam by force, because of its call to fight the *umma’s* enemies and to offer special sacrifices to Allah. So the verse tells Muslims in no

‘ Religious belief is a personal matter. It is God alone – not the state or the religious authorities – who knows what one reveals to God or what one hides. ’

uncertain terms not to resort to violence in the name of conversion. The importance of this verse can be gauged from a *hadith* quoted in *Jami*’ of *Tirmidhi*. He said that the peak of the Qur’an is *Al-Baqarah* and that Satan shall not enter the house of anyone who recites ten verses of this chapter (i.e. the first four verses, the Throne verse, the two verses which follow it – 257-258 – and the last three verses).

This principle of no compulsion was reiterated after the victory of Badr (Ch.3:V.21) and again in *Al-Ma’idah*, which is the last revealed *surah*. Now that Muhammad’s^(saw) authority was fully established, not only in Madinah but also in Makkah, it was vital to emphasise that the Prophet’s^(saw) only role was to convey the word of Allah. ‘*Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard, but if you*

turn away, then remember that the duty of Our Messenger is only to convey the message clearly.’ (Ch.5:V.93) And finally: ‘*The Messenger’s duty is only to convey the message. And Allah knows what you reveal and what you hide.*’ (Ch.5:V.100) Religious belief is a personal matter. It is God alone – not the state or the religious authorities – who knows what one reveals to God or what one hides.

This verse leads to the subject of *munafiqun* – the hypocrites. The term *munafiqun* describes those inhabitants of Madinah who had outwardly accepted Islam, but whose belief was suspect for various reasons. There are many references to them in the Qur’an, but in four passages they are defined as *murtadd* (recanters). The first reference is in *Surah Muhammad*. This is a Madinite *surah* which briefly describes the aims of war according to Islam. It

says that while believers welcome a revelation calling on them to fight for Allah, *munafiqun* feel as if they are being led to their slaughter. In this way, true believers are separated from those whose faith is shallow or false. It goes on to say:

Surely those who turn their backs [irtaddu] after guidance has become manifest to them, Satan has seduced them, and holds out false hopes to them. That is because they said to those who hate what Allah has revealed, 'We will obey you in some matters' and Allah knows their secrets.
(Ch.47:Vs.26-27)

The verses quoted above mention no punishment for these people.

The next reference to the *munafiqun* is in the *Surah Al-Munafiqun*, which was revealed towards the end of 6AH/AD628. The *surah* exposes the infidelity and dishonesty of the *munafiqun* and condemns their open

profession of faith as false and treacherous. This was a public reprimand:

Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are liars. Their faith is a pretext so that they may turn people away from the way of Allah. Evil is that which they practise. That is because they first believed and thereafter disbelieved; so a seal was set upon their hearts and they have no understanding... They are the enemy, so beware!... it is the same for them whether thou ask for forgiveness for them or not. Allah will never forgive them, surely Allah guides not a rebellious people.
(Ch.63:Vs.2-7)

The last two references to the *munafiqun* are in one of the last revealed *surahs*, *Al-Taubah*: 'Offer no excuse, you have certainly disbelieved after having believed. If We forgive a group of you, a group shall We punish, for they have been guilty.' (Ch.9:V.66) Those to be

Freedom of conversion is the acid test of ‘no compulsion in religion’. It cannot be a one-way freedom – the freedom to enter Islam, but not to leave it.

forgiven are obviously such of the *munafiqun* who repented and became sincere Muslims. As regards those who are to be punished, one verse further down we read: *‘Allah promises the hypocrites – both men and women – and the disbelievers the fire of hell, wherein they shall abide. It will suffice them. And they shall have everlasting punishment.’* (Ch.9.V.68) And, finally:

They swear by Allah that they said nothing, but they did say the word of disbelief and did disbelieve after they had embraced Islam... So if they repent, it will be better for them, but if they turn away, Allah will punish them with a grievous punishment in this world and the hereafter. And they shall have neither friend nor helper in the earth.
(Ch.9.V.74)⁹

The Prophet^(saw) knew that Abdullah b. Ubayy b. Salul was the leader of the *munafiqun*, but he took no action against him. On the contrary, the Prophet^(saw) prayed for him when he died. Umar b. al-Khattab^(ra) is reported to have said:

‘When the Prophets^(saw) went and stood by the dead body of Abdullah b. Ubayy and was about to pray, I asked him: “Are you going to pray over God’s enemy?” The Prophet^(saw) smiled and said: “Get behind me, Umar. I have been given a choice and I have chosen. It was said to me: ‘Ask pardon for them or ask it not. Even if you ask pardon for them seventy times God will not pardon them’. If I knew that by asking pardon more than seventy times he would be

forgiven, I would do it.” Then he prayed over him and walked with his dead body and stayed at his grave until he was buried.’¹⁰

Freedom of conversion is the acid test of ‘*no compulsion in religion*’. It cannot be a one-way freedom – the freedom to enter Islam, but not to leave it. There are ten direct references to recantation in the Qur’an: one in the *Makkan surah* of *Al-Nahl* and the remaining nine in the *Madinite surahs*. In none of these verses is there the slightest hint of capital punishment for those who recant.

One of the Qur’an’s most explicit statements on recantation is the 143rd verse of *Al-Baqarah*. The *Qiblah* was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah in the second year of *Hijrah*. Ibn Ishaq reports:

‘And when the *Qiblah* was changed from Syria to the Kabah, Rifaa b. Qays, Qardam b. Amr, Kab b. al-Ashraf, Rafib Abu Rafi, al-

Hajjaj b. Amr and an ally of Kab’s, al-Rabi b. al-Rabi b. Abul-Huqayq and Kinana b. al-Rabi b. Abul Huqayq came to the Prophet^(saw) and asked: ‘Why have you turned your back on the *Qiblah* you used to face when you claimed to follow the religion of Abraham? If you returned to the *Qiblah* in Jerusalem we would follow you and declare you to be true.’ Their sole intention was to seduce him from his religion. So God said: ‘We appointed the *Qiblah*, which you formerly observed, only to distinguish between he who will follow the Messenger and those who will not – to test and fetch them out. In truth, it was a hard test except for those whom Allah guided.’¹¹

The Qur’an prescribes no punishment for these recanters. And history records the punishment of no one who recanted after the change of the *Qiblah*.

Surah Al-Imran, which was

revealed after the victory of Badr, 2AH/AD624, contains the following two verses which mention the recantation of some of the Jews of Madinah:

O People of the Scripture: why do you confound the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth?
(Ch.3:V.72)

And a party of the People of the Scripture says: 'Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe at sunrise and disbelieve at sunset, in order that they may return.'
(Ch.3:V.73)

Ibn Ishaq has given the names of those who hatched this plot:

‘Abdullah b. Sayf and Adiy b. Zayd and Al-Harith b. Auf agreed to pretend to believe in the message of Muhammad^(saw) and his Companions at one time, deny it another to confuse them. The object was to get them to follow their example and give up their religion.’¹²

None of these three Jews was punished.

Another reference is in *Al-Nisa*. It says: ‘*Those who believe then disbelieve, then believe again, then disbelieve and then increase in their disbelief will never be forgiven by Allah, nor will He guide them to the way.*’ (Ch.4:V.138) A recanter cannot enjoy the repeated luxury of believing and disbelieving if the punishment is death. A dead man has no further chance of again believing and disbelieving.

The *sunnah*, the divinely inspired behaviour of the Holy Prophet^(saw), is the second source of the *sharia*. And there is no penalty for conversion from Islam in the *sunnah* either. The names of those who were executed by the Prophet^(saw) are preserved in the *sirah* and the *hadith* and the names of people who recanted and rejected Islam in his life are also preserved. A Bedouin Arab was converted to Islam by the Prophet^(saw) and soon after suffered a fever while in Madinah. He asked the

Prophet^(saw) to release him from his pledge. He made this request three times and was refused three times. He left Madinah unmolested. The Prophet^(saw) on hearing of his departure, observed: ‘Madinah is like a furnace which separates the dross from what is pure.’¹³

Ibn Ishaq reports that the Prophet^(saw) had instructed his commanders when they entered Makkah to fight only those who resisted them. The only exceptions were the following criminals who were to be killed even if they were found wrapped within the curtains of the Ka’abah.¹⁴

1. Abdullah b. Sad b. Abi Sarah.
- 2,3,4. Abdullah b. Khatal of B. Tayam b. Ghalib and his two dancing girls, who used to sing satirical songs about Islam. One of them was Fartana, the name of the other is not given by Ibn Ishaq.
5. Al-Huwayrith b. Nuqaydh b. Wahb b. Abd b. Qusayy.
6. Maqees b. Subabah.
7. Sarah, freed slave of one of the

B. Abdul Muttalib.

8. Ikrama b. Abu Jahl.¹⁵

Abdullah b. Sad was one of the Prophet’s^(saw) scribes in Madinah. He recanted and defected to the Makkan unbelievers. Since he wrote down the revelation, dictated by the Prophet^(saw), and enjoyed a position of trust, his defection was bound to create confusion among the Quraish of Makkah about the authenticity of the revelation itself. After peace returned to Makkah, his foster brother, Uthman b. Man, interceded with the Prophet^(saw) on his behalf and he was pardoned.¹⁶ Had there been a Qur’anic penalty for recantation, the Prophet^(saw) could not have done so. The Prophet’s^(saw) policy on intercession in respect of *hadd* punishment is well illustrated by the incident of the *Makhzumi* woman who was found guilty of theft. When Usamah b. Zayd pleaded for her, the Prophet^(saw) rebuked him and said: ‘Do you intercede in respect of a punishment prescribed by Allah? Witness this: that if Fatima, daughter of Muhammad, were

ever guilty of theft, I would certainly cut off her hand.’

Abdullah b. Khatal was sent by the Prophet^(saw) to collect *zakat*, accompanied by an Ansar who served him. When they stopped, he ordered his companion to kill a goat for him and prepare some food before going to sleep. When he awoke the man had done nothing, so he killed him in anger and then recanted and defected to the Makkan Quraish.¹⁷ He was executed for the murder of an Ansari Muslim by Said b. Hurayth al-Makhzumi and Abu Barzah al-Aslami.¹⁸

One of Ibn Khatal’s two singing girls was killed for creating unrest by singing satirical songs; the other was pardoned.¹⁹

Al-Huwayrith b. Nuqaydh was in the party of Habbar b. al-Aswad b. al-Muttalib b. Asad who overtook the Prophet’s^(saw) daughter, Zaynab, when she was travelling from Makkah to Madinah. Al-Huwayrith goaded Zaynab’s camel. Zaynab was pregnant and had a miscarriage

because of the attack and had to return to Makkah. The Prophet^(saw) sent a number of people with orders that if they found Habbar b. al-Aswad or Al-Huwayrith they should kill them,²⁰ but Al-Huwayrith escaped. In another report, Hisham says that Al-Abbas b. Abd al-Muttalib put Fatima and Umm Kulthum, the two daughters of the Prophet^(saw) on a camel to take them from Makkah to Madinah. Al-Huwayrith goaded the beast so it threw the two women.²¹ Finally, Ali^(ra) killed him in Makkah.²²

Maqees b. Subabah came to Madinah from Makkah and said: ‘I come to you as a Muslim seeking recompense for my brother, who was wrongly killed.’ The Prophet^(saw) ordered that he should be paid for his brother Hisham. Having received recompense, Maqees stayed with the Prophet^(saw) for a while. But, as soon as he got an opportunity he killed his brother’s slayer, recanted and defected to Makkah.²³ Maqees was executed by Numaylah b. Abdullah for

killing an Ansar, on whose behalf the payment for killing his brother had already been paid.²⁴

Sarah, who was accused of creating disorder, was not killed during the Prophet's(saw) lifetime.

Ikrama b. Abu Jahl fled to the Yemen. His wife, Umm Hakim, became a Muslim and asked immunity for him and this was granted by the Prophet(saw).²⁵

There appears to be no evidence to show that the Prophet(saw) punished anyone for recantation from Islam.

The death of the Prophet(saw) in 11AH/AD632 confronted the young Muslim administration with a major crisis. Disorder broke out in parts of the peninsula and many tribes detached themselves from Madinah by refusing to pay *zakat*. This movement is known as *Al-Riddah*. The main task of the Prophet's(saw) successor, Abu Bakr(ra), was to put down this unrest. His first job, however, was to send the expedition the

Holy Prophet(saw) had ordered before his death. So an army under the command of Usamah b. Zayd b. Harith was sent to the Syrian border on the second day after the proclamation of his caliphate.

After Usamah and his army had departed, most of the tribes fell away from Madinah. Only Makkah, Madinah and their surroundings remained loyal to the central administration. Muslim agents appointed to the rebel tribes by the Prophet(saw) just before his death were forced to flee their posts and to return to Madinah. It was a full-fledged revolt.

Having decided to fight the rebels, Abu Bakr(ra) sent messengers to some loyal tribes calling them to come to his aid. While Abu Bakr(ra) was waiting for reinforcements, Kharjah b. Hism, led by Unaynah b. Hism al-Fazari and Al-Aqra b. Habis al-Tamimi, staged a surprise attack on the Muslims. The Muslims fled in confusion, but they re-assembled and counter-

attacked Kharjah's men, who were defeated.

Before the skirmish at Dhu al-Qassa, a delegation of Arab tribes went to Madinah to negotiate with Abu Bakr^(ra) over the question of *zakat*, but Abu Bakr^(ra) refused. Some early and prominent *muhajirun* disagreed with Abu Bakr's^(ra) decision to fight those who withheld the *zakat*. That these tribes were anxious to negotiate showed they had not recanted, and did not want to sever their relations with Madinah, yet were not prepared to accept Madinah's control over them. The issue was not belief in Allah and His Prophet^(saw), but the *zakat* (tax). A group of well-known friends led by Umar^(ra) objected to Abu Bakr's^(ra) decision to fight the rebels. Umar^(ra) is reported to have said to Abu Bakr^(ra): 'What right do you have to fight these people? The Prophet^(saw) has said, 'I was ordered to fight people until they say there is no God but Allah. If they say this, they safeguard themselves and their property from me.'²⁶

After the departure of the delegation from Madinah, Abu Bakr^(ra) gathered the Muslims of Madinah and addressed them as follows:

'The delegation has observed just how few of you there are in Madinah. You do not know whether they will attack you by day or night. Their vanguard is only a stone's throw from Madinah. They wanted us to accept their proposals and make an agreement with them, but we have rejected their request. So make ready for their attack.' Within three days they attacked Madinah.'²⁷

The war of *Riddah* caused a great deal of bloodshed. It was inexplicable to the subsequent historians of the Arabian state that after the death of Muhammad^(saw) so many wars were necessary on Arabian soil; they accounted for this fact by a *Ridda*,²⁸ a religious movement against Islam. The jurists, who had failed to find Qur'anic or *sunnah* authority for the

execution of Muslims accused of *kufir* or war, against opposing Muslim political powers, accepted the assumption without more ado.

Discussing the legality of Abu Bakr's^(ra) war against Muslim rebels, Imam Al-Shafi'i says: '*Riddah* is falling back from a previously adopted religion into disbelief and refusing to fulfil previously accepted responsibility.'²⁹ Recantation is not enough. It must be aggravated by allegations of the breach of an agreement. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, a scholar of a very different school, in his commentary of the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, clarified the matter when he said: 'The tribes which refused to pay *zakat* were not recanters. They were called so, metaphorically, by the Companions of the Prophet^(saw).'³⁰

According to Wellhausen, *Riddah* was a break with the leadership in Madinah and not with Islam itself. Most of the tribes wanted to continue worshipping Allah, but without paying tax. Caetani agrees with

Wellhausen and says the *Riddah* was not a movement of recantation and that these wars were purely about politics. Becker, following Wellhausen and Caetani, concludes:

'The sudden death of Mahomet gave new support to the centrifugal tendencies. The character of the whole movement, as it forces itself on the notice of the historian, was of course hidden from contemporaries. Arabia would have sunk into particularism if the necessity caused by the secession of *Al-Riddah* had not developed in the State of Madinah an energy which carried all before it. The fight against the *Ridda* was not a fight against apostates, the objection was not to Islam, *per se*, but to the tribute which had to be paid to Madinah; the fight was for political supremacy over Arabia.'³¹

Bernard Lewis makes it quite clear that *Riddah* 'represents a distortion of the real significance

of events by the theologically coloured outlook of later historians'. He goes on to say:

'The refusal of the tribes to recognise the succession of Abu Bakr was, in effect, not a relapse by converted Muslims to their previous paganism, but the simple and automatic termination of a political contract by the death of one of the parties. The tribes nearest to Madinah had in fact been converted and their interests were so closely identified with those of the *umma* that their separate history has not been recorded. For the rest, the death of Muhammad automatically severed their bonds with Madinah, and the parties resumed their liberty of action. They felt in no way bound by the election of Abu Bakr in which they had taken no part, and at once suspended both tribute and treaty relations. In order to re-establish the hegemony of Madinah, Abu Bakr had to make new treaties.'³²

Ali^(ra) was assassinated in 661. With him went the concept of a Muslim ruler who combined the functions of head of state and of religion. The dynastic reign of the Ummayyads (661-750), the political rulers of Islam, began with Muawiyah. They had none of the religious outlook of the pious caliphs and were regarded more or less as secular kings. As guardians of the *sharia* the *ulema* came to occupy a position comparable in many ways to that of the clergy after the conversion of Constantine. Like the clergy in medieval Europe, they were respected for learning and piety and their support was sought to legalise the political power of a despot or unpopular ruler. They also acted as the leaders of the opposition and tried to influence political power rather than assume it themselves.

Political and social revolts were now justified in religious terms and dynastic struggles over political power soon hardened into deep rifts in religious doctrine. Kharijism and Shiism, the two main movements that

split off from the main body after the assassination of the third caliph, Uthman^(ra) (644), originated during a struggle for succession. Kharijites were the first Muslims to suggest that a grave sinner no longer remained Muslim. They were also the first to proclaim *jihad* against Muslims who, according to them, were not true believers, and originally belonged to Ali's^(ra) party; they left him, however, over a disagreement about arbitration between him and Muawiyah, intended to settle their differences arising out of Uthman's^(ra) murder. They said: 'judgement belongs to Allah alone' and not to human tribunals. Kharijites were key figures in the development of dogma. They were particular about a Muslim's qualifications and his attitude towards his fellow men, Muslim or non-Muslim. This group was the first distinct sect to appear in Islam, and was also the first to reject the principle of justification by faith. They maintained that a grave sinner no longer remained a Muslim and could not re-enter

the faith; instead, he should be killed with his family. They considered all non-Kharijites to be outlaws and non-Muslim. As we saw earlier, the Prophet^(saw) knew the *munafiqun* of Madinah and their leader, Abdullah b. Ubayy, and yet he took no action against him. He did not judge the quality of a Muslim's faith.

The Kharijites conflicted directly with the teaching of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet^(saw). Their declaration that 'judgement belongs to Allah alone' (*la hukma illa lillah*)³³ was in total contradiction to the *sunnah*. The Prophet^(saw) appointed Sad b. Muadh as *hakam* to decide the fate of the Jewish tribe of B. Qurayzah and his sentence was carried out.³⁴ Commenting on the *Sahih Muslim* report of Sad's judgement, Al-Nawawi (d. AH127/AD676) said: 'In their disputes Muslims are allowed to resort to *tahkim*'.³⁵ In fact, if two Muslim groups are at war, it is the duty of other Muslims to make peace between them. The Qur'an says:

Surely, all believers are brothers, so make peace between brothers, and be mindful of your duty to Allah that you may be shown mercy.
(Ch.49:V.11)

Declaring Muslims to be ‘disbelievers’ and then punishing them just because their standards are different from the standards of a certain religious authority – *takfir* – is alien to Islam. The Prophet^(saw) himself defined a Muslim as one who declares faith in the Unity of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad^(saw)³⁶. This is the only definition by which a Muslim can be judged. Discussing the subject of *takfir*, Bernard Lewis says:

‘Even open rebellion did not automatically involve *takfir*. In 923 the chief Qadi ibn Buhār refused to denounce the Carmathian rebels as unbelievers since they began their letters with invocations to God and the Prophet and were therefore, on the face of it, Muslims. The Shafi’i law insists that the sectarian, even

in revolt, is entitled to be treated as a Muslim; that is to say, his family and property are respected, and that he cannot be summarily despatched or sold into slavery once he becomes a prisoner.’³⁷

*Takfir*³⁸ was, however, founded by jurists. As we saw earlier, it was a Kharijite excuse for denouncing Ali^(ra). But having adopted this Kharijite innovation, the jurists could not arrive at an agreed definition of a Muslim.

To comb 1300 years of Islamic history to find the number of Muslims executed because of their conversion from Islam would prove futile. There were unsuccessful attempts to execute Maimonides in Cairo,³⁹ the Maronite Amir Yunis in Lebanon,⁴⁰ and to persecute Rashid-ud-Din in Tabriz,⁴¹ but such instances were very rare. In Mughal India, there is only one recorded case. A Portuguese friar had embraced Islam and then reverted to his former faith. He

‘ The Prophet^(saw) himself defined a Muslim as one who declares faith in the Unity of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad^(saw). This is the only definition by which a Muslim can be judged. ’

was executed at Aurangabad.⁴² The reasons for his execution were political, not religious. The friar was under strong suspicion of spying for the Portuguese under the cover of Islam.

Jadd ibn Dirham was put to death on the orders of Hisham b. Abd al-Malik in Kufa or Wasit in 124 or 125AH/AD746 or 747. He was accused of having advanced the Mutazili doctrines of the created Qur’an and of freewill. In 167 or 168AH/AD788 the Iraqi poet Bashir b. Burd was accused of *zandaqah*, beaten and thrown into a swamp in Batiha. Al-Husain b. Mansur al-Hallaj was executed in 309AH/AD930 for blasphemy because he claimed to have substantial union with God (*hulul*). Shihab-ul-Din Yahya al-Suhrawardi was put to death on the orders of Al-Malik al-Zahir (578AH/AD1199). His crime was to regard all that lives,

moves or has its being as truth and he even based his proof of God upon the symbol of light.

The seventeenth-century martyr was Muhammad Said Sarmad. Born of Jewish parents at Kashan, Sarmad was a rabbi before embracing Islam. A great Persian poet, he was a monist and denied the existence of matter. He was executed in the reign of Aurangzib (reigned 1658-1707). His *mazar* (tomb) which is opposite the Jami Masjid in Delhi, attracts daily hundreds of Muslims, offering flowers and *Fatihah*.

In Afghanistan, two Ahmadis were executed for accepting the claim of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) of Qadian to be the Promised Messiah, Sahibzadah Abdul Latif, who performed the coronation ceremony of Amir Habib Ullah Khan, was stoned to

death in 1903 and Maulwi N’imat Ullah in 1924. Both were given the chance of renouncing the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as), but they refused.

Muhammad Mahmud Taha was executed in the Sudan in 1985. He believed the Madinite part of the Qur’anic law was no longer applicable.

Significantly, the Ottoman sultan, though the head of a religious empire and caliph of all Muslims, did not order the execution of Baha Ullah (1817-92) for *irtidad*. Baha Ullah declared himself to be the Promised One, foretold by Bab,⁴³ and founded Bahaism as a religion. Bahaism was and is totally different from Islam. It declares that the arrival of Baha Ullah makes the Qur’an and the teachings of Muhammad – may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him – out of date. Baha Ullah was jailed in Akka (Acre) near Haifa, then in Palestine, now Israel. But when Sabbatai Zevi (1627-76), a Jewish mystic, proclaimed himself the Messiah

in 1648, the Shaykh-ul-Islam of the Ottoman Empire ordered his execution. He was arrested, recanted from his claim simply to escape death, and embraced Islam. Baha Ullah claimed to be a new manifestation of God and left Islam, but was not executed despite his apostasy because he was not a danger to law and order in the Ottoman Empire.

As we have already seen, the concept of apostasy is alien to Islam and there is no punishment in this world for recanting. But the *ulema* who appeared before the Court of Inquiry, constituted under the Punjab Act II of 1954 to inquire into the Punjab disturbances of 1953, asserted that ‘apostasy in an Islamic state is punishable by death’. They were:

Maulana Abul Hasanat Sayyad Muhammad Ahmad Qadri, President, Jamiat-ul-Ulamai-Pakistan, Punjab; Maulana Ahmad Ali, Sadr Jamiatul-Ulama-e-Islam, West Pakistan; Maulana-Abul Ala Maududi, founder and

ex-Amir-i-Jamaati Islami, Pakistan; Mufti Muhammad Idris, Jami Ashrafia, Lahore, and member, Jamiat-ul-Ulamai-Pakistan; Maulana Daud Ghaznavi, President, Jamaati-i-Ahl-i-Hadith, West Pakistan; Maulana Abdul Haleem Qasimi, Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam, Punjab; and Mr Ibrahim Ali Chishti.⁴⁴

Commenting on this assertion, the Court of Inquiry observed:

‘According to this doctrine, Chaudhri Zafrullah Khan must be executed if he has not inherited his present religious beliefs, but has elected of his own free will to be an Ahmadi. And the same fate should befall Deobandis and Wahabis, (including Maulana Muhammad Shafi Deobandi, member, Board of Talimat-i-Islami attached to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, and Maulana Daud Ghaznavi) if anyone of the *ulema* shown perched on every leaf of a beautiful tree in the *fatwa* (Ex. D.E. 14)

were the head of such an Islamic state. And if Maulana Muhammad Shafi Deobandi were the head of the state, he would exclude those who have been pronounced by Deobandis to be *kafirs* from Islam. He would then execute them, if they came within the definition of *murtadd*, namely, if they had changed and not inherited their religious views.

The genuineness of the *fatwa* (Ex. D.E. 13) by the Deobandis (which says that Ithnashri Shias are *kafirs* and *murtadds*) was questioned in the course of our inquiry. But Maulana Muhammad Shafi examined the subject from Deoband and received from the records of that institution the copy of a *fatwa* signed by all the teachers of the Darul Ulloom, including Maulana Muhammad Shafi himself. The records say, in effect, that those who do not believe in the *sahabiyyat* of Hazrat Siddiq Akbar and who are *qazif* of Hazrat Aisha Siddiqa

and have been guilty of *tehrif* of the Qur'an, are *kafirs*. This opinion is also shared by Mr Ibrahim Ali Chishti who knows and has studied this subject. He thinks the Shias are *kafirs* because they believe that Hadhrat Ali shared the prophethood with our Holy Prophet(saw). He refused to answer the question of whether a Sunni who changed his views and agrees with the Shias is guilty of *irtidad*, thus deserving death. According to the Shias, all Sunnis are *kafirs* and Ahl-i-Qur'an – persons who consider *hadith* unreliable and therefore not binding – are also *kafirs*. So are all independent thinkers. The net result is that neither Shias nor Sunnis nor Deobandis nor Ahl-i-Hadith nor Brelvis are Muslims. And that, if the government of the state is run by a party which considers the other party to be *kafirs*, then any change from one view to another must result in the death penalty.

It does not take much imagination to judge the consequences of this doctrine when it is remembered that no two *ulema* have ever agreed before us on the correct definition of a Muslim. Indeed, if all their definitions are taken in total, the grounds on which someone may be indicted for apostasy would be too numerous even to count.⁴⁵

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The Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea summoned by the Emperor Constantine, the Great in 325 AD,, was the first ecumenical council to be assembled primarily to the deal with the Arian controversy which threatened the unity of the Church. A study of this event shows how, with the accession of Constantine to power, in addition to gaining resources and freedom to propagate their religion, the early Christians compromised some of the most basic tenets of their faith, many of which served to alienate Christianity from its Jewish origins. In what follows, we examine the emergence of Constantine through to the Council of Nicaea and its ramifications, so that in our review of events we may take in our stride the radical effects the faith enunciated at Nicaea had on the future development of the Church.

By Bockarie Tommy Kallon – UK (first published in *The Review of Religions*, May 1994)

Constantine Becomes Emperor

By 312 AD, Constantine had been at war with Maxentius for six years and was eager for something to lend his cause extra support. Lactantius, a Christian observer who produced accounts of the event a few years later in his book *On the death of the Persecutors* claimed that Constantine saw a Chi-Rho monogram in a vision on the eve of the battle of the Milvian bridge, accompanied by the words:

'Hoc signo victor eris!' [By this sign, you shall be the victor]

Whether this vision was actual or dictated by anxiety remains questionable. In any case, he had crosses painted on his army's shields and won the battle, becoming the Emperor of Rome. This inspired his conversion to Christianity though he was not baptised then. In Milan 313 AD, he issued an Edict of Toleration to all religions. But believing his battleground success to be won with Divine providence, he

sympathised more with the Christians, who hitherto had suffered sporadic persecution. The Emperor lavished huge sums of money to build Basilicas and other Churches for them, coupled with preferential treatments of Christian candidates for administrative posts. In this way, Constantine closed one era and opened another.

Constantine's motives are beyond reconstruction but it is clear he still needed to bind the Empire – East and West – together and exercise influence over the whole of the Mediterranean. His conversion had not divorced him from his pagan past. The Emperor was happy with the collection of heavenly patrons. He believed reverence for deity to be indispensable for the tranquillity of the commonwealth and may well have regarded the Christian God as just another heavenly patron, not incompatible with others although perhaps more powerful. He maintained ties with the *Sol Invictus* cult even after his conversion. It was not

until he was on his death bed that he was finally baptised, just in case. The *Sol Invictus* cult worshipped the Sun god but was also acceptable to the followers of Orpheus, the priest of the Sun, Mithras, or the Sun god, Apollo. The response was for Christians to begin representing Jesus^(as) in the guise of Apollo to maintain favour while the Jews rejected the fashioning of the Divine through cultus images, thereby sowing the seeds of division between Christians and Jews.

The Arian Controversy

In the Christian world at the time, there was doctrinal pluralism *vis-a-vis* the nature and role of Jesus^(as). In particular, there were strong views on either side of the Arian controversy, which was splitting the Church and threatened the unity of the Empire. Arianism was originated by Arius who had been a student of the celebrated Christian philosopher, Lucian of Antioch. Arius put forward a theory which negated the eternity and full divinity of Jesus^(as), just as the Jewish-Christian groups such as

Constantine regarded the religious question exclusively from the angle of political expedience.

the Ebionites had stated. He was prepared to say that ‘the Son had a beginning’, that ‘prior to his generation he did not exist’ and that ‘there was when he was not’, so that consequently ‘he is called God in name only.’¹

On the other side of the controversy scholars such as Athanasius of Alexandria felt that Jesus^(as) would have been too divine to need to eat, drink or require any other bodily function. Arius was excommunicated from the Church for his views but there was growing support for Arianism which culminated in the Council of Nicaea 325 AD.

The Council

The Council was to have taken place at Ancyra but on the orders of Constantine who had his residence at Nicaea the venue was changed so that he could personally control the proceedings. The Synod took place

between June 19th and August 25th². The Emperor summoned all Church leaders with the aim of reaching a consensus over the status of Jesus^(as).

The number of bishops who attended is not known. The traditional figure is 318, which goes back to the late writings of Athanasius of Alexandria; possibly a symbolic figure based on the number of Abraham’s servants [Genesis 14:14]. The correct figure is still probably around 300. In the version of events presented in the New Catholic Encyclopaedia³, almost all were from the Eastern half of the Empire; more than 100 from Asia Minor, about 30 from Syria-Phoenecia and less than 20 from Palestine and Egypt.

Constantine regarded the religious question exclusively from the angle of political expedience. His interest was to secure peace rather than any

‘ The delegates that gave assent to the Creedal statement were to be invited to stay on at Nicaea as Constantine’s guests for his 20th anniversary celebrations, while those who rejected the Creed would be banished. ’

theological verdict. He had already adopted the *Sol Invictus* as the state deity, so if Jesus^(as) could somehow be deified he would be more easily compatible with the *Sol Invictus*. As the parties were in conflict, the task of deciding the fate of Jesus^(as) was deferred to Constantine who was theologically incompetent and was inclined to making decisions on inadequate grounds. To him the deification of a man would not have seemed important. He had his father Constantius deified on his death and expected to be granted the same honour on his demise.

He ruled in favour of Jesus^(as) deification and demanded that the delegates should sign acceptance to what became known as the Nicene Creed. This Creed is the first dogmatic definition of the Church and has

served as a tessera of Christian orthodoxy through the ages. It defined the relations of Jesus^(as) to the Father within the Godhead as *homoousion tot patri* (of one substance with the Father) designed specifically to exclude Arianism. Eusebius of Caesarea writing later is explicit that the Emperor himself proposed this term. The delegates that gave assent to the Creedal statement were to be invited to stay on at Nicaea as Constantine’s guests for his 20th anniversary celebrations, while those who rejected the Creed would be banished.

Now here was an opportunity for Christians, some of whom still bore the marks of persecution, who could still vividly recall the days of suffering, to be conducted into the imperial chambers and be showered with

gifts and dine with the Emperor in the same palace from whence were issued decrees of persecution. Little wonder then that all but two (Theonas of Marmarica and Secundus of Ptolemais) of the staunchest supporters of Arianism signed the new Creed. The two 'dissidents' were exiled to Illyricum. Little did those who signed the Creed know that their actions were to put the Church in chains, albeit in chains of gold.

Some scholars have argued that the crucial terms of the Creed were not commonly understood by all signatories. 'Of one substance' (*homousious*) was ambiguous, in that to some it meant a personal identity, while to others it meant a much wider generic identity. Whether or not this was a fortuity enabling Constantine to secure the signature of almost every bishop, it is clear that many of the delegates were uneasy about the decision they had made. They had signed the Creed under pressure from Constantine and from fear of being banished.

Eusebius of Caesarea, was previously one of the most die-hard Arians, but strangely, following the Council session, he was willing to accept the Creed. In a letter home, however, he indicated the extent of the compromise that had taken place against the fundamental principles of his knowledge of Jesus^(as).

Relating this A.H.M. Jones⁴ writes:

'How profoundly distressing these changes were to Eusebius of Caesarea can be seen from a letter which he hastened to write to his Church. It is a pathetic document, equivocal up to the point of dishonesty.'

Some of the other delegates such as Maris of Chalcedron, Theogonis of Nicaea and Eusebius of Nicomedia were deeply unhappy about the outcome. They wrote to the Emperor⁵ saying:

'We committed an impious

act, O Prince, by subscribing to a blasphemy from fear of you.”

Eusebius of Caesarea became a friend of Constantine and was keen to make good use of his patronage. He later wrote the *Life of Constantine* in which he greatly flattered the Emperor. In his own book, *The History of the Church*, he built up the line from the Apostolic fathers to the 4th century and devoted an entire chapter (one of ten in the book) to the deliverance of Christianity from persecution by the Christian Emperor. In his book on Constantine, he gave expression to a theology of the place of the Emperor in the Christian Empire which, according to some modern historians, seemed rather a betrayal of the essential nature of the Gospel.

Commenting on the role of Constantine, A.N. Whitehead⁶ wrote:

‘When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received

text of western theology was edited by his lawyers... In the official formulation of the religion, it has assumed the trivial form of the mere attribution to the Jews and that they cherished a misconception about their Messiah but the deeper idolatry, of fashioning God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God, the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.’

This was to have profound implications on the future philosophy of the Church. Ian Wilson⁵ summarises the situation by suggesting that, ‘not a few people felt that something of the original Jesus and the spirit of his teaching had been fatally compromised.’

After Shocks

The repercussions of the Nicene creed are immeasurable as Ian Wilson writes:

‘Merely to enumerate the

ways in which the original concepts of Jesus and his teachings were adulterated as result of Constantine's actions and the consequences of the Council of Nicaea would take a book in itself."

Rome became the official centre of Christian orthodoxy, Trinity the accepted doctrine and deviation from this view was now considered not as a different opinion, but as punishable heresy.

Next came the deification of Mary. Even though, in Mark 6:3, mention is made of Jesus'^(as) brothers and sisters, Hilary of Poitiers and Didymus the Blind of Alexandria bestowed the title of '*Ever Virgin*' upon Mary. The logical consequence of this was the Council of Ephesus in Asia Minor in summer of 431 AD which became known as the third ecumenical council, where, in spite of resistance from Nestorius, then Bishop of Constantinople, a formula of faith was agreed which acknowledged Mary as the

Theotokos (Mother of God). In 1854, Pope Pius IX made it a Catholic article of faith to proclaim Mary as incapable of sin.

After Nicaea, the fate of the Jews took a distinct turn for the worse. Following the deification of Jesus^(as), they were considered as having murdered God! Constantine's tolerance no longer extended to the Jews who were stripped of many of their rights as Roman citizens. With astonishing rapidity, Christians forgot the days of penury and persecution. The Church greeted Constantine's orders not only as permissible but praiseworthy. Meanwhile Christians, such as agnostics, with slightly unorthodox views, were also denied the freedom that was granted to pagans. They had their literature burnt, property confiscated and turned over to Christians, and were terrorised by the Church. Within a generation, hardly a trace of their existence remained. Some agnostics managed to conceal documents and hence the discovery intact of the Nag

‘ The memory of the Jewish prophet whose name the new religion had taken was to be lost forever and with it the very context in which the message was intended. ’

Hammadi haul of scrolls in modern times. This, however, provides only a partial picture of the theological thought of the time. The memory of the Jewish prophet whose name the new religion had taken was to be lost forever and with it the very context in which the message was intended.

There had been earlier instances of compromise. After Constantine’s edict of tolerance, Christians, with their newfound freedom and scope and association with Constantine, were willing to compromise themselves to maintain that position. In 321 AD, Constantine, in honour of the Sun god, enacted that on ‘the venerable day of the Sun’, the law courts and all workshops were to be closed, so Christianity, which had previously observed the Sabbath on Saturday, took on Sunday as its day of rest.

Similarly, Jesus’ birthday used to be observed on January 6th, as it still is in parts of Eastern Europe. However, for both *Sol Invictus* and *Mithraism*, the religious day or *Natalis Invictus* was celebrated on the midwinter solstice, December 25th, so the Western Church adopted this day also. The aureole of light crowning the Sun god’s head also became the Christian halo.

With so much of the original faith given away, Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln⁷ write:

‘Christian doctrine as promulgated by Rome at the time, had much in common with the cult of *Sol Invictus* anyway; and thus it was able to flourish unmolested under the sun cult’s umbrella of tolerance. Christianity, as we know it, is in many respects actually closer to those pagan

systems of belief than it is to its own Judean origin.’

The distorted formula of faith promulgated at Nicaea laid the ground work for the classical development of Christian Trinitarian theology, disseminating far and wide the seeds of ignorance and error.

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5. *Jesus: The Evidence*. (Pan Books), Ian Wilson.

BOOK REVIEW

The Truth About the Alleged Punishment for Apostasy in Islam

By Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^(ru)

From the earliest days till now Islam and the world of Islam have not been harmed so severely by any external enemy as by some simple-minded Muslim *ulema* themselves. In fact, the enemies of Islam have utilised the unwise religious edicts of these naïve *ulema* as a basis to attack Islam.

The wrong trend among the *ulema* took place when, under the influence of the changing socio-political environment, they preferred to adopt some politically coloured Islamic interpretations and ignored the clear teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the noble precedent set by the Holy Prophet^(saw).

The killing of an apostate is one such erroneous trend and baseless conviction. In fact, this menacing tenet is based neither

on the Holy Qur'an nor on the practice of the Holy Prophet^(saw).

Hadhlat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^(ru), the fourth successor to the Promised Messiah^(as), in a lecture delivered at the Annual Convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK on 27th July 1986, which has subsequently been reproduced in the form of a book, analysed in depth all aspects of this heinous crime. He showed it to be an utterly false and unfounded belief and smashed once and for all the so-called arguments of the *ulema* in support of this claim. His arguments are based on the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah and Ahadith of the Holy Prophet^(saw) and the historical events that took place in the eras of the Righteous Caliphs.

Hadhlat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^(ru)

deals with the subject extensively. It should help unbiased researchers to fully understand the true teachings of Islam on the subject. It should also go a long way to creating a new spirit in which Islamic

teachings are appreciated in their real essence and true nature and prejudice against Islam is eradicated.

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