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Islam Today

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(Comments on and Summary of the Proceedings of the International Islamic Colloquium held in Lahore, 29th December, 1957, to 8th January, 1958.)

The second International Islamic Colloquium, which was held in Lahore from 29th December, 1957, to 8th January, 1958, afforded the Government of Pakistan, under the auspices of the Punjab University, the opportunity of welcoming many eminent scholars in the field of Islamic and oriental study and offering them the generous hospitality of Lahore. Delegates from thirty-three different countries were present at the Colloquium, several of them holding responsible positions in the government of their countries and most of them being recognized scholars and leaders of thought. One looked forward to the Colloquium with anticipation as an opportunity of discovering what are the chief interests and concerns of the contemporary Muslim world.

It is obviously impossible to give in a short space an adequate account of the proceedings, but mention of one or two salient points under the various subjects may serve to give a general impression of the Colloquium, indicate the vigorous life that is to be found in the Muslim world today, and show where its chief interests lie. I shall limit myself in the main to a summary of the papers read by Muslim delegates.

The *Inaugural Address* was given by the President of Pakistan, Major-General Iskander Mirza. Quoting the philosopher poet Iqbal as saying that Islam stands between the Ancient and the Modern world, the President said that Islam is a living and dynamic force in the world today. Islam is not the name given to a personal or inner experience alone, but seeks to govern and direct the everyday life of both individuals and the entire human race. In so doing Islam has rejected the institution of an organized priesthood: but it is an irony of history that it has often fallen into the hands of priests. These priests are not the true scholars and saints which are the pride of Islam, but 'the half-baked and ill-educated mullahs who for centuries have monopolized the pulpit. The Mullah has woven into Islam a crazy network of fantasy and fanaticism' and has often made Islam 'the pliant handmaid of power politics'. But Islam is too dynamic and too eternal to be imprisoned in the requirements of

a passing age. Recognizing the need for a reorientation of ideas in the disturbed and fast-changing times in which we live, the President held that it is the human intelligence that is changeable, and not the basic and eternal propositions of Islam. New knowledge and thought should be used to throw new light upon the significance of Islam for the scholar, the scientist, the manual labourer, and the child at school so that they all may be able to 'derive guidance from their faith . . . without any conflict with the spirit of their times'. It is, in fact, Islam that can provide the principles of universality, fraternity, integrity, mercy, co-operation and goodwill which can prevent the present armament race between conflicting ideologies from ending in atomic smoke.

After the inaugural address papers were read on various subjects by Muslim scholars ; I shall note the more important points raised by these papers.

ISLAMIC CULTURE

Islamic culture is raised upon the faith of Islam and is based upon the teaching of the Quran. It may be described as the attitude of mind which arises from Islamic faith in God and in man. Since Islamic culture is inspired by this faith it is closely connected with the doctrine of *tawhīd* (Unity). Because they believe in the Unity of God, culturally Muslims form a single community, exhibiting moderation in character and a sober way of looking at life. Moreover, because of this belief in God, civilizations founded and developed by Muslims are neither purely spiritual and other-worldly, nor are they entirely materialistic. These are the two extremes that characterize other civilizations, but Islam has formed a balance between the two and has harmonized them. This harmonization is all part of *tawhīd*, for the unity of God and the Faith revealed in *one* Book is the basis not only of unity of law and religion but also of life and culture: it inspires belief in the essential unity of all mankind. There is therefore no exclusiveness in Islam, but a place for wide diversity within the common belief in the unity of God. There were said to be five criteria by which Islamic culture could be recognized and judged. These are:

- (i) Solidarity: the belief in *tawhīd* that inspires and manifests itself in all Muslim art and culture.
- (ii) Inter-relations: brotherhood is a well-known element in Islam.
- (iii) Equilibrium: Islamic culture is well balanced, covering all interests of life and is not easily overthrown by disaster.
- (iv) Respect for the freedom and dignity of man.
- (v) Dynamism and growth: it has the ability to adapt itself to changing conditions, to mould those conditions, and to hold together all that is best in the present as well as the past.

This may all be summed up by saying that one result of belief in the unity of God is a love for and interest in all creation: worship of the one God is an attitude in which cultural ideas can grow and flourish.

ISLAMIC CONCEPTION OF THE STATE

The principle of *tawhīd* also underlies the Islamic concept of state for all authority in the affairs of men (as indeed in all matters) belongs to God alone. Man is God's vicegerent upon earth. This vicegerency endues man with a dignity above all the rest of creation, but the ultimate authority rests with God. All man's activities and functions, including legislation and government, must 'lie within the limits prescribed by Allah'; failure on this score results in anarchy, war and disorder. This may be regarded as the ethical foundation of the Islamic concept of state. As to the economic foundation, God is the sole owner of all property and worldly belongings: man as His vicegerent 'is His trustee in administering and utilizing such property as may be in his possession, and is thereby bound to comply with all the duties of an honest and faithful trusteeship'. By *Zakat* (obligatory almsgiving for the benefit of the poor and needy), *Infaq* (spending in the way of Allah so as to extend social services and endow communal undertakings), and by the obligation of utilizing all one's possessions properly for one's own benefit and the good of others, Islam enjoins certain positive social obligations. As regards politics, the community is to be governed by a body that has been chosen by 'mutual consultation' and which acts for the whole community. This body has no sovereignty in the usual sense of that word, for all sovereignty is vested in God: it may only enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Since this governing body is chosen or approved by the community, in obeying its commands a Muslim 'does in fact obey the commands of the community of which he is a member, and thus indirectly obeys God's commands'.

The rights of the individual within this community, and the corresponding duties, were the subject of a paper in which these rights were stated to be:

- (a) The right of self-preservation: protection of life and property must be afforded, and suicide is forbidden.
- (b) The right of education, for Islam is an enlightened religion dispelling ignorance.
- (c) The right of independent thinking, even if in exercising honest thought one commits an error of judgement.
- (d) The rights of women in marriage, social activity and the holding of property.
- (e) The rights of childhood.
- (f) Of servants.
- (g) Of neighbours, and finally even
- (h) Of animals.

It was natural that under the consideration of the Islamic concept of state some papers were read by Pakistanis, for it is a living issue in that country. The titles of two of them were 'The Islamic concept of state in Pakistan' and 'The idea of an Islamic Constitution'. These were attempts to state briefly how the teaching of the Quran and traditional Islamic concepts could be interpreted to meet the requirements of an Islamic country in the present world. Both the speakers (and one of them is a judge of the High Court) were agreed that the Quran is not a legal code and should not be studied as a book of legal doctrine. It does admittedly contain a few strictly legal provisions, which are confined to a small category of topics, but its main purpose is to specify certain 'fundamental principles which ought to govern collective conduct in the interests of integrating Islamic ideology into a definite way of life . . . such as could provide an essential basis for an Islamic polity'. (It should be noted in passing that, in direct contradiction, other speakers considered that the Quran does contain laws which govern every aspect of life.) Further the two speakers were agreed that in a modern state *Ijmā* (the consensus of opinion among Muslims) could only be exercised through some representative assembly governing the country. One of them quoted Iqbal's words, 'The transfer of the power of *Ijtihād* (independent judgement) from the individual representative of scholars to a Muslim Legislative Assembly is the only possible form *Ijmā* can take in modern time'. The other saw in *Ijtihād* the necessary 'principle of movement in Islam' by which the eternal principles enumerated in the Quran could be interpreted so as to apply to modern conditions of life, thus providing continuity in a constantly changing world. In his opinion an Islamic state is 'a human institution which must not, however, run counter in any way to the essential basic principles of Islamic polity'. The political and constitutional structure of an Islamic state might assume various forms, but certain basic principles would underlie the structure. These he enumerated as:

- (i) Sovereignty belongs to God alone, and so there can be no human dictatorship, absolute monarchy, or rule by a priestly class claiming infallibility in their interpretation of divine injunctions.
- (ii) The doctrine of the unity of God clearly implies the equality of all mankind, without considerations of race, tribe, colour, language or profession. A democracy is clearly envisaged.
- (iii) 'Mutual consultation among those who believe' is the means whereby decisions should be reached, but it is nowhere stated what the machinery for such consultation should be. There is large scope for development in Islamic forms of government, and 'the modern representative assembly elected on universal suffrage may be one such form'.

- (iv) Each individual, man or woman, has the right to hold property subject to the payment of taxes and charity and the principles of the laws of inheritance.
- (v) 'There is no compulsion in religion' and so there must be complete freedom to 'profess any particular faith or adopt any form of worship'. Minorities must have 'full protection of their culture'.
- (vi) 'Men and women have mutual rights against one another', so that women should have a voice in the representative assembly.
- (vii) The Quran enjoins justice, and no one is above the law: the independence of the Judiciary must therefore be a principle of the Constitution.
- (viii) The welfare, moral and material, of its inhabitants should be the first concern of the State, and to fulfil its responsibilities towards the weak and disabled it should have all the incidents of a modern Welfare State.
- (ix) The privacy and integrity of family life must be assured.
- (x) In international matters an Islamic State will observe all covenants and treaties that it has entered upon freely.

In conclusion, the Quranic regulations with regard to the laws of inheritance, and the provisions that are made in the Quran against the evils of hoarding, usury and profiteering, ensure that a country governed according to these principles will steer a middle path between the extremes of capitalism and communism, of anarchy and totalitarianism, and will avoid bitter class wars. While the regime of the first four (rightly guided) Caliphs approximated most closely to the ideal envisaged in the Quran, that relatively simple and undeveloped system cannot be slavishly copied in the much more complex conditions prevailing today. The principles enumerated must be worked out according to the temporal and social environment of each Islamic community. The fact that Muslims believe that the State itself is subject to the Divine Law is the highest guarantee for ensuring the fundamental rights of mankind.

THE MODERN CHALLENGE TO ISLAM

In considering the challenge of modern ideas and social values to Muslim society four papers were read by non-Muslim delegates. One of these speakers was asked to withdraw his paper on the grounds that it dealt with political matters outside the scope of the Colloquium: this he did. A young Pakistani Muslim working in Turkey was also urged to withdraw his paper, mainly because he advocated a more critical analysis and appraisal of the life of Muhammad and the message of the Quran according to the principles of modern historical research. He

maintained that by applying an historical sense to the knowledge of the Quran and to the traditions a new understanding of their import and meaning will be acquired. In spite of his own emphasis upon the eternal nature of the Quran (which however was not 'revealed' until historical circumstances made its eternal meaning understandable) most of the Muslim delegates considered that such an approach would detract from the glory of the Holy Book. The reader refused to withdraw his paper because he is certain that the attitude which he advocated holds the key to the future and will one day be recognized and used by Muslim scholars themselves.

The attitude of the Muslim world towards Western civilization was analysed as :

- (i) Some Muslims oppose it because of its opposition, real or understood, to Islam.
- (ii) Some accept it wholeheartedly as containing nothing but good, and imitate it slavishly ; and
- (iii) Some accept the industrial and technological civilization, but believe it to be misguided in its moral and human aspect.

While accepting the benefits that accompany this civilization Muslims today tend to regard the civilization itself with fear and abhorrence : they consider that the civilization produces selfish, materialistically-minded individuals as contrasted with the Muslim individual who believes in Allah. Instead of chaste, home-loving women it produces women who neglect their husbands and children in the name of freedom and equality. Family life is thus disrupted, and crime and corruption increase in the community. The claims of justice and truth are also overlooked so that while nations and people say they want peace they are all the time preparing for war. Western civilization inculcates an unrestrained love of wealth which leads to all kinds of social and communal evils. One speaker, considering economy as the sinew of life, said that modern democracy 'has intentionally or unintentionally worked against the social ideals which it endeavoured to achieve'. He illustrated this point by saying, 'the state that controls the sinews of life has the right, when it wishes, to interfere in religion itself, which becomes dependent on the wish of the state. What other kinds of freedom are then left under democracy?' He claimed that since Islam constitutes a political as well as a spiritual unity it has laid the foundation of real democracy and preaches a social and spiritual life in which the individual can enjoy full freedom.

THE RÔLE OF *Ijtihād*

The consideration of the rôle of *Ijtihād* and the scope of legislation in Islam tended to be rather technical, but the paper of Abul Ala Maudoodi is worth summarizing. He was listened

to with rapt attention by the large crowd of visitors who were able to attend the Colloquium on Friday afternoon. Drawing attention to the need of belief in the sovereignty of God, and describing Islam as surrender to the law of God which has been communicated through the prophets, Maudoodi maintained that belief in the finality of Muhammad's prophethood was as fundamentally important in Islam as belief in the unity of God. All earlier teachings have been incorporated in those of Muhammad and no further revealed guidance is anticipated: this dispensation by Muhammad therefore constitutes the Supreme Law. This Law has been bequeathed to mankind in the Quran and through the Sunnah. Human legislation is not entirely ruled out but is restricted to the limitations prescribed by and under the Supreme Law. This Supreme Law may be applied to the varying circumstances and conditions of human affairs by means of Interpretation, Analogy, Inference, and Independent Legislation (*Ijtihād*). The purpose of *Ijtihād* is not to supersede divine Law by man-made law, but 'to understand that Supreme Law and to keep the legal system of Islam, in conformity with its fundamental directions, abreast of the conditions obtaining in the world from day to day'. He then enumerated certain qualifications requisite for law-makers engaged in this dynamic process of *Ijtihād*. These he stated to be:

- (i) Acceptance of the *Shari'a* and a 'sincere intention to follow it'.
- (ii) A proper knowledge of Arabic to enable one to understand the true meaning of the Quran and of the Sunnah.
- (iii) A knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah which will enable one to be conversant with the details and basic principles of Islamic Law.
- (iv) An acquaintance with the work of earlier Islamic jurists.
- (v) Acquaintance with the problems and conditions of life to which the *Shari'a* (law) is to be applied.
- (vi) 'Commendable character according to Islamic ethical standards.'

After a brief description of the technique of *Ijtihād* Maudoodi finished his paper with a section on how *Ijtihād* may attain the status of Law. These he enumerated as:

- (i) Consensus of opinion (*Ijmā'*).
- (ii) The adoption by a wide group of people of the verdicts of recognized jurists or groups of jurists, like the four recognized schools of law in Islam.
- (iii) The adoption by a government of any of these schools of thought.
- (iv) A State may empower an institution 'to legislate and it may pass a particular piece of *Ijtihād*'.

Apart from these four methods by which *Ijtihād* wins wide acceptance any opinion expressed by Muslim scholars remains simply a verdict (*fatwa*). There was nothing new in this paper, but it does present very clearly the viewpoint of the orthodox Muslim, and his attitude towards modernistic tendencies and the innovations of such groups and movements as the Ahmadiya.

ISLAM AND SCIENCE

None of the speakers on the attitude of Islam towards science admitted any conflict in Islam between religion and science, faith and knowledge, such as once disturbed Christianity in the West. Appealing to passages from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet (viz.: 'Consider what there is in the heavens and the earth', 'Only those of his servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah', 'O my Lord, increase me in knowledge', 'The best of prayer is the pursuit of knowledge', etc. etc.) many speakers stressed the fact that Islam commended scientific pursuits. It does not command 'blind faith' but is built upon the foundations of reason and knowledge. Following the saying that Muslims should seek knowledge even though it were in China, Muslim scholars travelled to distant lands and developed a love for geography: Muslims were the first people to use globes for teaching geography in their common schools. The love of truth and the consideration of observable facts and phenomena, which is the basis of scientific progress, is enjoined by Islam. The exact sciences, as contrasted with the speculative sciences, are the ones in which Muslims have made the greatest contribution to world knowledge. They include mathematics, astronomy, navigation, chemistry and medicine, and the beauties of architecture and design. Muslim scholars from the ninth to eleventh centuries did not unthinkingly adopt the knowledge of the Greeks and Romans, but in adopting developed them. At a time when Europe was hampered by ecclesiastical conservatism and a lack of scholarship the Muslim world was making rapid progress in the field of scientific learning. When this learning eventually reached and influenced the scholars of Europe it paved the way for the renaissance. As one speaker said, 'It is clear . . . that modern science owes its very existence to Islam. The new spirit of enquiry and the new methods of experiment, observation and measurement, on which modern science is based, are all contributions of those who followed the teaching of Islam'. Islam has therefore had a profound effect upon Western history and culture.

ISLAM AND SOCIETY

The doctrine of *tawhīd* was again mentioned as lying at the roots of Islamic social structure and laws concerning land tenure. Since God is the sovereign creator and owner of all things; no

individual can 'own' any property or belongings: he can only 'possess' them. It is incumbent upon him to put these things which he possesses, be they moveable objects, money, land or landed property, to their proper use for the good of the whole community. So long as he uses them correctly the State is obliged to uphold his possession of them. But if he neglects his duties and misuses his property the State has the right and duty to intervene so that the community at large may not suffer from his neglect.

ISLAM AND OTHER FAITHS

The attitude of Islam towards other faiths was described as one of toleration. There is 'no compulsion in religion' in Islam: the religion of Islam is not spread by the sword and there are no forced conversions. Muslims engage in *Jihād* (Holy war) not to make other people Muslims, but purely for self-defence and in order to protect the rights of those who are wrongly oppressed. Not only is the right of people belonging to other persuasions to worship according to their own tradition and beliefs recognized, but Islam was the first religion to contain references to other religions and to enjoin respect for their prophets, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. Because of the belief in 'peaceful co-existence . . . large non-Muslim communities continued to flourish even in areas of Muslim political domination', and were granted charters of liberty. This is quite in accordance with the true spirit of Islam which teaches peace with God and with other men, and stresses the basic unity of all mankind. In fact, by teaching the unity of creation, the unity of the human race, the unity of divine guidance through prophets recognized by different religions, and the unity of purpose, Islam laid the foundation for co-operation among all religions. In facing the differences that exist between Christianity and Islam one speaker named the Christian doctrines of the Divinity of Christ and of the Trinity, and also the question of whether the Gospel is something written about Jesus or God's message revealed through his words, as being the main causes of hostility between the two faiths in the past. He also mentioned the death of Jesus in this connection, and said, 'As for the crucifixion I personally feel deeply sorry that such a beautiful expression of human tragedy is not reflected in the Holy Quran. The idea of Christ's carrying his own cross is just inexpressibly sublime. I am not able to explain this matter'. But accepting the Quranic teaching as true he recognized the implication that 'Jesus being the embodiment of the Spirit from God . . . could not be killed or annihilated: he did not die because he possessed the ever-living spirit, God raised him up to himself'. There is much that is common to the two faiths, namely our belief in the one eternal and sovereign God, in the immortality of the soul, in human responsibility, in the moral and spiritual basis of life, the same guiding principles of both religions, the teaching contained at least in the synoptic

Gospels, the close connection in such theological matters as proofs for the existence of God. In view of this 'common ground' the speaker could see no reason why we should not work together in close harmony and co-operation, particularly in the face of the common danger of materialism. In this co-operation no undue concession should be made on either side in the matter of faith, but each side should attempt to understand more sympathetically the faith of the other. In our missionary work we should not attack the doctrines of the other faith, nor try to proselytize, but present the positive aspects of our own faith and study and recognize the spiritual assets of the other. Papers were also read which indicated that Muslims were glad, both as minorities and majorities, to be living peacefully alongside people of other persuasions and ideologies, particularly in Thailand and China.

ISLAM AND WORLD PEACE

The Colloquium finished with a consideration of Islam's potential contribution to world peace. The readers of some papers saw in this title an opportunity to use the floor of the Colloquium for political ends, but the view generally expressed was that the revitalized existence of Islam in countries as far distant as Morocco in the West and Java in the East itself constituted the greatest potential contribution to world peace. Islam is emerging as a power to be reckoned with, and its emergence is having a salutary effect upon the spirit of suspicion and enmity that exists between capitalism and communism. The United Nations Organization cannot by itself ensure peace, but many Islamic nations are joining it because it is the only organization at present available, and also because these nations believe that Islam alone can provide the necessary moral code to undergird its structure. Islam means peace: its doctrine of *tawhīd*, the sense of brotherhood and equality among Muslims, Islam's principles of justice, its spirit of toleration, are all substantial contributions to world peace. If anyone should remark, 'What about *Jihād*?' (Holy war), the answer is that war is not enjoined for aggressive purposes, or for the spread of Islam, but simply in self-defence and for the protection of oppressed peoples. It is for this reason, namely to help and protect oppressed people who have been driven from their homes and denied the rights of self-government, that Muslims are opposed to colonialism. It is surely not pure coincidence that the revitalization of world Islam has coincided with the establishment of several independent Muslim states who have obtained freedom from foreign rule and domination: Indonesia, Pakistan, Morocco to name only three. The hope was expressed that other countries too will soon find their independence and take their place in the world as free Islamic nations. Perhaps the time is not far distant when Africa too will become a Muslim country.

In conclusion, I should perhaps add that the above comments do not necessarily express my own views about Islam in its religious, political, historical or cultural aspects, nor in its relationship with Christianity. I have simply tried to state some of the more significant hopes, ideas and opinions that were expressed at the Colloquium.

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There is a two-fold movement in the New Testament, of which Jesus is the meeting point. One is God-manward movement, and it implies the coming of God in our midst—the Emmanuel and the Word become flesh. The other is a man-Godward movement, implying that in Christ is summed up everything, and he is subjected to God so that God be all and in all.

The task is to preserve these two aspects without doing injustice to either. Our task would be easy if we undertook to paint the picture from one angle or the other. From the divine side the coming of God in the midst of men would mean that God uses humanity only as a means of facilitating his stay here. He indeed would be masquerading in human form . . . From the human angle the moral and spiritual growth of the man Jesus would be such that at some one time there would be perfect attunement between his will and God's. So much so that he would have become divine. Divinity in this context is an appendage to humanity, and the result is some sort of deification of the man Jesus. . .

Both of these approaches, logical though they are, create a system but lose the person. The task consists in retaining the person, which implies the safeguarding of the two sides of his personality.

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The Resurrection is the point of perfect identification and unity between the divine and the human movement. It is where God and man are one. It is the point of perfect relation and communion. Standing at the vantage-point of the Resurrection, one can see the picture of a man moving Godward. Behind him follows the rest of humanity. He was with humanity as one of its members and had his conflicts, temptations and tensions. He overcame them and became one with his Father and now leads all humanity to be reconciled with him . . . But concurrently with this picture one sees the same man who faced God with humanity, now facing men as their Saviour and Lord. There is nothing between him and God. He is very God of very God. The Resurrection point reveals this strange unity which logical reason shuns as ridiculous and irrational. But the person of the Christ is the unity of these two dialectically opposed sides.