

The Muslim Critique of the West

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Introduction

The relationship between the world of Islam and the West is a long and complex one, with many different aspects and dimensions. Since the world of Islam first established itself in the Middle East, North Africa and Spain in the seventh and eighth centuries AD there have been a number of different phases of conflict and rivalry, usually combined with mutual mistrust and caricature, interspersed with periods of relative harmony and a willingness to co-exist. During these latter periods one of the partners has often had a considerable influence upon the other, socially, economically, intellectually, and even religiously. Examples of this would be the ninth century AD when the Christian population of the Middle East, under Islamic rule, played a vital role in the transmission of Greek scientific and philosophical knowledge to their Muslim masters, and thus made a considerable contribution to the emergence of Islamic theology, philosophy and science, and the twelfth century AD when the influence of Islamic thought was one of the major factors which stimulated the revival of learning in Europe, this renaissance being one of the intellectual movements which prepared the ground for the far more important renaissance in Europe in the fifteenth century.

Another example of Muslim cultural influence on Christian Europe is seen in the writings of the Spanish mystical writers of the Counter-Reformation in Spain in the sixteenth century, when such influential figures as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila were influenced, at least to some extent, in their poetry by the language and ideas of Muslim Sufi mystical writers.

In more recent times, however, as a result of the expansion of European power throughout the world, in political, economic, social, and intellectual terms, the tide of influence in the relationship between the West and the Muslim world has been very much from the former to the latter. This, in turn, has produced a huge variety of responses to the West in the Muslim world and, while many have been positive, there has evolved alongside this a substantial stream of criticism of the West, and it is to the major elements of this critique that this paper will address itself.

As an example of the content and tone of this critique, the following quotation is instructive, and fairly representative. Its author is Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, a Lebanese Shi'i Muslim:

What renders the ideas of Modern Civilization particularly dangerous are the efficient and scientific methods with which they are diffused . . . The common man in this day and age is the constant object of a brainwashing which intends to market specific commodities or ideas. It induces in him, through untiring repetition, hopes and fears, and elicits identification with things or thoughts, organizations or trends. Worse than the direct approach is indirect advertising, for it attacks you unawares; mind, feelings, and nerves are subliminally invaded. Unconscious convictions thus develop in us when we are least alert and hence unable to locate the danger and grapple with it. The incessant barrage of ads and slogans pounding upon one's ears and eyes enfeebles the critical faculties and one's freedom of choice becomes very effectively circumscribed indeed.¹

This quotation, with its apparent allusion to the famous work of Vance Packard about the advertising industry,² illustrates the tone as well as the content of much Muslim writing in this area. It indicates the extent to which this whole area is an extremely controversial one, and one in which any commentator has to tread a careful path between the sensationalism of much media presentation, which sees the issue simply as being one of Islam *versus* the West, and the cynicism of some of the more extreme detractors of western academic commentators about the Islamic world, who argue that any comment by a westerner about Islam, simply because it is by a westerner, is inevitably prejudiced and therefore worthless. In trying to tread this middle path, I want to suggest that there are essentially three main themes in the Muslim critique of the West, a moral one, a political one, and a religious one, and to go on to discuss each of these in turn. First of all, though, it is necessary to add the inevitable caveat that there are a great number of different Muslim opinions in each of these fields, and that there will therefore inevitably be an element of oversimplification in any attempt to categorize Muslim views so simply. In addition, there is among Muslims, as among the members of almost any religious tradition, a tension between those who are basically conservative and those who are more progressive, liberal, or whatever antithesis to conservative is preferred, and the nature of the subject of this paper inevitably means that, at least initially, there will be a concentration upon the views of those who are more conservative, since it is they who are most vociferous in their criticism of the West.

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- 1 From *al-'Almaniyya*, (Secularism), Beirut 1980, pp 119-120, cited by E. Sivan, *Radical Islam*, Yale UP, New Haven 1985, p 63.
 - 2 *The Hidden Persuaders*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1957.

(a) Moral

Some of the areas in which Muslim writers are critical of the West in this field are obvious. It is argued that the West is morally decadent because of, for example, its materialism, its sexual immorality and its rampant individualism. All of these things, it is argued, are contributing factors in the process of moral decline which the West is inexorably undergoing.

This is one area in which both conservative and progressive Muslims seem to share a common concern. The moral condition of the West is something that evidently worries liberal Muslims as much as conservative ones.

One example of a more conservative writer in this mould is the Iranian writer Sayid Musawi Lari, who in his book *Western Civilisation Through Muslim Eyes*¹, lists materialism, and moral decline as two of the major causes of concern about the West. 'The West's moral capital has been removed from the Bank of Faith where it belongs',² he says. Sexual permissiveness is singled out for particular examination; the facts 'demonstrate modern civilized man's enslavement to his sexual instincts'.³ Religious leaders have themselves fallen victims to the prevailing fashion of permissiveness.⁴ Alcoholism is another cause for concern. And Lari's final criticism of western civilization is its inverted sense of priorities, as displayed in the western love of animals. He quotes from an American magazine which undertook a survey of the attitude of dog lovers, mostly women:

(1) Do you like your dog or your spouse best?

Answer: two thirds loved their husbands when the husband loved the dog!

(2) If you and your dog were both hungry, with insufficient food even for one, would you give it to the dog or eat it yourself?

Answer: eighty per cent said that they would give it to the dog.

(3) Does your dog sleep in the bedroom?

Answer: two thirds had their dog sleeping in the bedroom.

(4) If your dog died would you shed tears?

Answer: two thirds would shed tears, and they would also give the dog a funeral ceremony.

(5) Do you credit your dog with a personality above animal level?

Answer: nearly all respondents regarded their dog as more than an animal, and thought that it had a spiritual personality.

(6) If your dog bit your child and your child hit the dog with a stone and both were howling, which would you rush to comfort?

Answer: (thankfully!) 'We would try to comfort both'.

1 ET by F. J. Goulding, Privately Published, Guildford 1977.

2 Ibid., p 25.

3 Ibid., p 28.

4 Ibid., p 31.

(7) If your dog and your husband both fell sick simultaneously, which would you call the doctor to first?

Answer: 'First the vet, then the doctor'.

(8) Does your mind frequently wander to thoughts of your dog while you are working at your office?

Answer: 'Of course . . . the dog plays too important a part in life for anyone not to keep on thinking of it'.¹

This is, perhaps, an extreme example, and one where there is some cultural distance between those of us on this side on the Atlantic and our transatlantic cousins, yet alone between America and the Muslim world, but Lari goes on to note the amount of money spent on feeding dogs in the West – \$300,000,000 spent annually on pets in the USA, on beauty goods and garments as well as food – and it is hard not to take his point about some kind of inversion or confusion of priorities, especially when Britain's first funeral parlour for dogs was opened, in Bradford, in 1986.

A second example of a Muslim writer who expresses concern about the moral state of the West in these terms is Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali Nadvi, of Lucknow in India. Since the death of A. A. Mawdudi, the influential leader of the Jama'at-i-islami (The Islamic Association) in Pakistan, in 1979, Nadvi is seen by some Muslim commentators as being, among leaders who are not in positions of political power, the most influential among Muslims today, and his views are therefore perhaps particularly significant.

In his book², published in 1983, Nadvi addresses himself to the predicament of the West. In fact the whole of the first part of the book is devoted to this theme, and consists of a series of addresses to Muslims in Britain and North America. The second part then goes on to address itself to the mission of the Muslim communities which find themselves in the West.

Nadvi accuses the West, in a number of his addresses, of materialism, of slavery to machines, which dehumanize people, and of arrogance. Interestingly, there are few references to the sexual immorality which so concerns Lari, but the overall message is clear: morally the West is hollow and bankrupt, and the need therefore is for Muslims who find themselves living in the West to put forward their faith as the solution to this problem.

It is worth noting immediately that, with reference to the less extreme of Lari's examples at least, there are important similarities between the Muslim moral critique of the West and the critique of the West that is put forward by a number of Christian commentators, particularly some of those of a more conservative point-of-view. Just to take a few examples, the books of Francis Schaeffer, such as *Death in the City*³ and *Escape from Reason*,⁴ and the books of Os Guinness, such as *The Dust of Death*⁵ and *The*

1 Ibid., pp 45-46.

2 *Muslims in the West: Message and the Mission*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester 1983.

3 IVP, Leicester 1969.

4 IVP, Leicester 1973.

5 IVP, Leicester 1968.

*Grave-Digger File*¹, adopt arguments that are in some respects remarkably similar to those of Muslim authors, in particular seeing materialism, individualism and sexual immorality as being signs of decadence. It is liberal Christian authors who do not share this sense of concern about the moral condition of the West, and so on this matter conservative Christians and conservative Muslims seem to have some ground in common. The prescription of the two sets of authors is of course different, namely the adoption of Islam and the restoration of a 'Biblical, God-centred world-view' respectively, but we may note the similarities in the critique if not in the prescription.

(b) Political

In this area the main planks in the Muslim critique of the West are, if anything, even more obvious, and they relate essentially to the unjust and even iniquitous dominance of the West in the sphere of politics, economics and culture. Muslim commentators point to the European imperial dominance of the Muslim World in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the continuing economic and cultural influence of the West, through North American as much as European channels, in the latter part of the twentieth century. These things are regarded as evil, essentially because they involve dominance and subjection, and the use, and more particularly abuse, of power over those who come under European influence.

Perhaps the most dramatic instance of this argument comes in the work of the Iranian writer, Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, written in 1961 and entitled *Gharbzadegi*. It has been translated into English by a number of different people and the variety of the English titles gives some indication of the difficulty of finding an English equivalent for the title, let alone some of the contents: 'Occidentosis' is one, which is expressive, but needs clarification by another, which is 'Plagued by the West'.² The main thesis of the book is that the Iran of the time was West-smitten, West-mesmerised, and was therefore undone. The West is portrayed in the book as the curse and disease of the Islamic world. Its cultural bacteria and its unholy germs combine to subvert the economic and political life of the Muslim world, and in particular its cultural life. The destructive power of the West is thus seen in almost apocalyptic terms, and the book is certainly one of the most powerful indictments of the influence of the West from any corner of the earth.

Many of the themes in this critique of the West are shared with left-wing politicians, both inside and outside the West, who point, again in similar terms, to the evils of each of the phenomena highlighted by Muslim writers. Left-wingers do not, of course, relate their comments to the Muslim world in particular, but rather to the whole of the developing world, and indeed in some cases the Muslim world seems to be almost

1 IVP, Leicester 1983.

2 These titles are used respectively in the English translations by R. Campbell (Nizan Press, Berkeley 1984), and P. Sprachman (Brill, Leiden 1982).

totally excluded from the considerations of western left-wingers, but the main themes of the arguments are closely similar.

In many parts of the Islamic world there is one factor above all other that contributes to the persistence of the view that the West is still a powerful influence on the internal affairs of the Islamic world, and that it uses its power for sinister purposes and thus continues to exploit and take advantage of the Islamic world, and this is the state of Israel. This state, created in a part of the world in which the Jewish population a century ago made up only seven per cent of the total, is seen as a direct result of the policies initially of the British, who first encouraged and protected Jewish settlement in the first half of the twentieth century, and then of the Americans, who since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 have consistently supported, encouraged and provided for its people. However this may be viewed in the West, there is no denying that in the Islamic world it is seen as evidence of the continuing abuse of power by the West in the affairs of the Muslim world. Israel is the living testimony that western political influence did not cease after the second world war, despite the fact that most of the countries of the Muslim world then achieved their independence from direct European rule or tutelage.

In seeking to comment on this strand of the Muslim critique of the West, there are a number of points which may be made. First, it is worth remembering that despite the virulence of the criticism of the West in this field, by no means all Muslim countries are dominated by this view at an official level, even if only in terms of their rhetoric. The best example here is Turkey, which was, of course, never colonized, and successfully fought off the efforts of a number of European powers to reduce it to that status after the First World War. Not only the Greeks and the Italians, but also the French were seen off by the Turks, under Mustafa Kemal, and as a result the Turks have never lost control of their own destiny. Today, therefore, in Turkey the West is seen as a model still, and democracy and an independent judiciary, for example, are seen as important features of the civilization towards which the Turks aspire, even if, as yet, the goal is not fully reached.

It is indeed remarkable how different Turkey is from many of the Muslim countries which are most often reported in the news: the story, a true one, is told of how in one European Turkish town, the imams (leaders of public worship) decided that they would refuse to conduct a funeral for anyone who was known to have consumed alcohol. The response was not, as one might have expected, a drastic decrease in the sales of those grocers who sold alcohol, but rather a reply in kind: the taxi drivers of the town declared that they would refuse to drive an imam who took part in this scheme, but would give free transport to any imam who refused to take part in the boycott. The imams' scheme collapsed within a fortnight.¹

1 G. Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1974, p 233.

This Turkish attitude towards the West is, of course, not unique, for there are important elements in Muslim countries that were colonized for some time, such as Pakistan, and also in others that were only briefly colonized, such as Egypt and Iran, which adopt a similar attitude towards western ideas and institutions, but their influence is much more limited than that of their like-minded colleagues in Turkey.

Secondly, it is worth noting by way of comment that, even at the heyday of imperialism in the nineteenth century, not all Europeans were imperialists. This is something of a truism to students of European politics of the time, for in Britain, for example, it was the Conservative Party that was the architect and enthusiastic supporter of the Imperial idea, while the Liberals were much more critical, and even actively opposed the vast expansion of the Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. This fact, however, is often forgotten in the heat of the debate about the evils of imperialism, and all Europeans are thus often tarred with the same brush, even if not all were actually involved.

Thirdly, there is an important distinction which needs to be drawn between European cultural influence, and direct European political and economic control. It is true that in many areas of the world, particularly in the Muslim world, the first led on to the second, where local political forces were too weak to resist, but the development from the one to the other was by no means inevitable. This distinction is one that is usefully drawn by 'Ali Merad, Professor of Islamic Studies in the University of Lyons in France, in his recent book on modern Islamic thought.¹ European influence in the Muslim world, he suggests, came in two waves: the first was in the realm of ideas, and the result was a useful stimulus to Islamic thought that helped in the task of reforming and reformulating the Islamic faith and moving it away from its medieval stagnation. The initial reception of European ideas was thus enthusiastic, and its effects were positive and beneficial. It was the second phase of European influence, Merad suggests, that changed all this, for direct European rule obliterated the credit that European values had acquired in the minds of numerous thinkers in the Muslim world, and transformed the earlier enthusiasm into a bitter resentment.

Merad may have overstated his case, but the distinction that he draws is an important one, for it makes clear the point that while Muslims may have been absolutely right and justified to seek to rid themselves of European rule, that does not necessarily involve the wholesale abandonment and rejection of all European ideas and values. Rather the achievement of political freedom simply restores the situation to that which existed before the coming of the imperialists, namely one where Muslims were free to learn from, gain from and interact freely with European ideas. European cultural influence, therefore, should be kept separate from European political dominance.

1 *L'islam contemporain*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1984.

If there is a Christian parallel to these arguments about the iniquities of European political, economic and social influence throughout the world, but particularly in the last two centuries or so, it comes, surely, in the works of the Liberation theologians of South America. It would not be right, however, to restrict concern about these issues to them, for there are a number of Christian writers in other Continents who share the Liberationists' concern about the influences of the West in the developing world, even if they do not share their analysis of the causes of that dominance or their prescription of what to do about it.

(c) Religious

Here we enter the most controversial realm of all, and the most difficult, firstly because it is hard to disentangle religious elements in the Muslim critique of the West from those that may be expressed in religious terms even though they are in fact more related to one or other of our other categories, and secondly because we here enter a realm where there is a further complication, namely the fact that any Muslim critique of the West in religious terms may in fact be a critique of Christianity, and these two may be almost inseparable in the minds of some Muslim writers.

There seem to be two main criticisms that are levelled at the West on what we may call general religious, rather than specifically Christian questions, though given the dominant role of the Christian tradition in the religious history of the West, even that distinction may be quite hard to sustain.

The first criticism levelled by Muslim writers against the West on general religious grounds is that of godlessness. God is ignored, and Western man is therefore spiritually empty and barren. This clearly has certain consequences, particularly in the moral realm, but the main criticism seems to be of godlessness *per se*. An example of a Muslim writer who makes use of this kind of argument would be Sayyid Hussain Nasr, the Iranian author now resident in the United States, who sees the West's spiritual barrenness as a sign of its decadence, and one of the major indications of the wretched spiritual plight of modern man.

Writing from the perspective of a traditional Shi'i Muslim, before the impact of the more recent revolutionary Shi'i ideas, and therefore from within the context of a Shi'i system of thought that was highly influenced by Sufism of the more esoteric kind, as for example the ideas of the Spanish mystic Ibn 'Arabi, Nasr sees the plight of modern man, to quote the title of one of his books, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*,¹ as being the result of a mistaken cosmology. He uses the analogy of the rim and the axis, the wheel and the hub in everyday terms, and argues that unless man is correctly oriented towards the axis, the hub, that is God, all sorts of problems, both spiritual and practical, follow. Western man, he suggests elsewhere, is Promethean, in the sense of seeking knowledge for its own sake, regardless

1 Longmans, London, 1975.

of the consequences, and with no questioning of the motivation; like the Prometheus of Greek myth who sought and found fire, previously known only to the gods, modern man thus produces a number of consequences, not all of which are beneficial.

It is quite permissible here, I think, to observe that in this argument we see a modern rephrasing of the saying of St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, that there is a god-shaped blank in the heart of every man, and that every man is therefore restless till he finds his rest in God. Nasr never actually quotes Augustine, so there is no direct link between the thought of the two men, but there is a common influence upon them because the tradition of Sufi thought upon which Nasr draws derives in part at least from the same source that was so influential on Augustine himself, namely neo-Platonism, and the result is a remarkably similar line of argument. Man is theocentric, God-centred, by nature, and recognition of this fact is the key to man's contentment and happiness, and Nasr may well therefore be quite justified in pointing to western man's forgetfulness of this fact.

The second religious critique put forward by Muslims about the West is directed towards its secularism. This is a complex issue, and one which is undoubtedly bound up with the religious history of the West since the Reformation, with its somewhat lamentable history of religious wars and persecutions. Most Muslims, though, see secularism as a sign of religious decay in the West. It is not only secularism as the separation of religion and the state which concerns Muslims, but also its wider implications in terms of the confining of religion to the private sphere, for this results in a private spirituality which ceases to have any impact on public behaviour, and this is abhorrent to most Muslim writers in this area. Once again, Augustine is sometimes quoted in this connection, though this time unfavourably, as his statement 'Love God and do what you like' can appear to be a perfect justification for a private spirituality, though, this was hardly what he meant.

There are important exceptions to this statement, of course. On the level of national policy, the Turks are again exceptional in that secularism is enshrined in the constitution, and is seen as a vital plank in the programme of successive governments for modernisation and progress. Other governments of Muslim countries do not make their intentions so plain and evident for all to see, but nevertheless proceed in a similar manner; in Algeria, for example, the state organizes the appointment of imams to mosques and pays their salaries, and although this may not appear to be a very secular measure, it could be interpreted as being a type of control over religion by the state, which by absorbing religion into the state leaves the state free to pursue policies independently of the religious establishment.

On the level of individual thinkers, again there are Muslim writers who have expressed opinions favouring the separation of religion and the state, notably 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq in Egypt, in his book *Islam and the Principles of Government*¹, in which he argued that the link which developed in the

1 Cairo 1924.

Islamic community between the faith and the state was a later development which was neither envisaged nor encouraged by Muhammad himself. The ideal, 'Abd al-Raziq argued, was a spiritual Muslim community along the lines of that which existed in Mecca before Muhammad's migration to Medina in 622, for it was only after that event that Muhammad's career developed a political dimension, with the establishment of the Islamic state. His arguments have not been widely accepted and certainly current trends in Egypt have moved Islamic thought away from rather than towards his view, so that even writers who have in the past espoused a secular point-of-view, such as Khalid Muhammad Khalid in Egypt, have more recently returned to a position where they see the link between Islam and the state as being essential, and indeed the only possible foundation for a workable state institution.¹

These seem to me to be the two most specific criticisms that are raised by Muslim writers with reference to the West in the field of religion in general. Alongside this, however, there are some of the traditional antipathies towards Christianity in particular. For example, Sayyid Qutb, executed in 1966, and the intellectual figurehead of the more extreme groups of the revivalist movement in Egypt, such as that which assassinated President Sadat in 1981, commented on the West in these terms as long ago as 1964. In describing his time in the USA in the late 1940's, Qutb tells of how a number of his fellow-Muslims became extremely defensive about their faith in the face of western civilization. He, however, resolved to adopt a different approach, namely to attack:

I took an offensive position, excoriating the Western 'jahiliyya', (ignorance, particularly of a spiritual kind), be it in its much-acclaimed religious beliefs or in its depraved and dissolute socioeconomic and moral conditions: this Christian idolatry of the Trinity and its notions of sin and redemption which make no sense at all; this Capitalism, predicated as it is on monopoly and interest-taking, money-grubbing, and exploitation; this Individualism which lacks any sense of solidarity and social responsibility other than that laid down by law; that crass and vacuous materialistic perception of life, that animal freedom which is called permissiveness, that slave market dubbed 'women's liberation'.²

These are strong words, which include a number of the themes which we have discussed already – the materialism, the individualism and the sexual looseness of the West, for example – but alongside these we suddenly have a reference to the nonsensical Christian idolatry of the Trinity, and the notions of sin and redemption. These seem to be all part of the same package in Qutb's mind, and indicate that for him at least, a Muslim critique of the West includes a specific critique of Christianity.

1 See E. Sivan, *op. cit.*, p 132.

2 *Ibid.*, p 68.

The lines of this critique are essentially this: the original message of the prophet Jesus, given to him by God, was subsequently lost and distorted by his disciples, either deliberately or involuntarily. Christianity thus became corrupted, and the main instances of this corruption are the introduction of innovations such as the Incarnation, the Trinity and Redemption through the death of Christ, all of which were taken over, according to this Muslim argument, from pagan, or at best Greek philosophical sources. Christianity today, therefore, has little to do with the original message of Jesus, which is better preserved among Muslims than among Christians.

Since the West is Christian, so the argument goes, Christianity is at least partly responsible for the evils to which the West has succumbed, and any critique of the West will involve some element of criticism of Christianity too. Whether explicitly or not, therefore, one element in many of the Muslim critiques of the West that we have examined is the traditional Muslim antipathy to Christianity.

Now at some points the Muslim critique of Christianity relates closely to some of the areas that we have already examined. For example, a number of Muslim writers about the West see Christian missions as being integrally bound up with western imperialism, not only sympathizing with it but, in many instances, actually supporting and furthering it; and other Muslim writers see Christian writers about Islam as another element of subversion and infiltration, seeking to undermine the tenets of Islam by a number of different means. These views are sufficiently widespread to deserve some comment here.

With respect to the question of the extent to which Christian missionaries were bound up with the expansion of European imperialism, what needs to be said is that initially there was very little link beyond the purely practical one of facilities for transport etc. If we think, for example, of someone like Henry Martyn in India at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is hard to accuse him of being in any kind of cahouts with British imperialism. Authorities in London were not keen on his going to India, and those who were in India actively opposed his desire to serve as a missionary. A chaplain's job was the best that he could arrange initially.

Martyn therefore was vulnerable, in that when he began to travel outside areas of British influence, he was on his own, and he was in no sense seeking to further British influence. Others of the earliest generation of missionaries actively opposed imperialist designs, and so it is fair to suggest that in the initial phase of Protestant mission, there was little link with imperialism.

As time went on, however, it does seem that the links between the two became somewhat closer. Many nineteenth and early twentieth century missionary endeavours seem to display at the very least a certain inability to distinguish missionary and diplomatic concerns. One such episode was the saga of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem, the attempt of the Prussian King Frederick William IV to persuade the archbishop of Canterbury

and the British government in 1841 to establish a joint bishopric in order to protect Protestant interests in the Ottoman Empire. The theological implications of this move, attempting as it did to combine the episcopal system of the Church of England with the non-episcopal system of the Prussian church, were one of the factors that drove John Henry Newman out of the Anglican Church and into the church of Rome, but, for our purposes, the episode serves to illustrate the extent to which Christian mission and diplomatic considerations had coalesced in the minds of many.

In addition, later nineteenth century Christian missionaries were not vulnerable in the way that Martyn had been; it is hard to conceive, for example, of C. G. Pfander saying in public some of the things that he did about Islam, such as his outright attack on Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islam in general, without the knowledge of a British protecting power behind him, in India at least, and some diplomatic protection in Istanbul later.¹

It would be wrong, however, to press even this argument too far, for there have always been exceptions which undermine any too firm link between mission and imperialism in their heyday. In this century, it is possible to cite the late secretary of the North Africa Mission, Robert Brown, working in Tunisia in the late 1930's, as an example. He initially left his post in the south of the country in the face of the German advance at the outbreak of World War II, but it was not long before he became convinced that his action was a direct contradiction of the words that he had said about the nature of the Christian gospel, and he therefore returned to his post, and when the Germans arrived he was arrested and spent the rest of the war in prison. So there was no link between mission and British imperialism there. But then, slightly later, in the time of the Suez crisis in 1956, the Anglican bishop in Egypt was expelled by the government despite being the head of a church that was not then a largely expatriate one, in part because he was known to spend a long time in the British embassy.

The question is obviously a complex one, but it is one that has developed its own variety of myths and oversimplifications and so it does seem important to introduce a view that contains more nuances and takes more account of the variety of practice that undoubtedly took place.

With respect to the second argument, that there are a number of Christian writers who deliberately seek to distort Islam in their writings in order to further Christian influence, again the case has sometimes been overstated. The background to this issue is the wider debate about 'Orientalism', that venture of western academics over the course of the last two centuries or so, seeking to understand and explain the Orient. Muslim suspicions of this venture have been aroused by the extent to which Orientalists have been content to use their expertise to advise governments in the

1 Cf. *The Balance of Truth* first published in Persian in 1835. Revised English edition (Religious Tract Society, London 1910) recently reissued by the Evangelical Missionary Alliance.

formulation of their policies in the Orient, and in the Muslim world in particular, and thus to become implicated in imperialist designs and policies in the Muslim world.¹ Christian writers have been tarred with the same brush because of the charge that some Christian scholars have sought to emphasize aspects of Islam that are most sympathetic to Christianity, such as Sufism, or indeed interpretations of the Qur'an that are most amenable to Christian views. This is seen by some Muslim scholars as being a kind of spiritual, or even academic imperialism, yet another arrow in the West's quiver in its attack on the world of Islam, since it is interpreted as being an attempt to introduce Christian ideas and teaching in a more subtle way than traditional Christian mission, yet with much the same intention.

It is writers such as Kenneth Cragg who are most often mentioned in this connection. Cragg's attempts to argue, for example, that even on Islamic presuppositions, the idea that God could have a son is not actually inconceivable, or his observations that a number of important commentators on the Qur'an in the Muslim community itself have not actually taken the Qur'an to be denying that Jesus was crucified, as it is assumed to do by the vast majority of Sunni Muslims to-day, are regarded as being some kind of subtle Christian plot to undermine the Muslim faith from within.

In reality, writers such as Cragg undoubtedly draw their readers' attention to aspects of the teaching of the Qur'an and of Islam which are not widely known even among Muslims to-day, and this can be, and undoubtedly is, threatening to many. This does not mean that there is some kind of devious conspiracy behind the venture, however. The Queen of Sheba asked Solomon 'hard questions', but it was not necessarily part of an attempt to subvert and overthrow his rule!

These two arguments, about the role of Christian missions and about the work of Christian scholars of Islam, once again serve as illustrations of the extent to which the Muslim critique of the West on religious grounds is firstly to some extent a criticism of Christianity in particular, and secondly is closely related to the critique on moral and also political grounds too.

Conclusion

The relationship between the West and the Muslim world is thus a complex one, and today there are many elements in the Muslim critique of the West. The moral, political and religious ones that have been outlined in this paper are probably only three out of many more. In conclusion, however, there are two points relevant to the whole field of discussion which deserve a few comments.

First, there is a question: why is the Muslim critique of the West so strong and persistent? Plainly one possible answer is that the Muslim critique is right and quite justified: we have seen how some Christians share some aspects of the critique. But there is also the wider context of the

1 See E. Said, *Orientalism*, RKP, London 1978.

whole relationship between the West and the world of Islam, a relationship in which power is not equally distributed, and where there is dependence and interaction on many levels. And while the West may fear Islam and the Islamic world, as a result of mythology or caricature, it is clear that there is a larger element of fear in the Muslim attitude to the West. Western ways of doing things are a challenge, if not a threat, and the almost inevitable response to this is a kind of assertive critique of the challenge.

Much the same thing happens to many individual Christians when confronted with the idea of dialogue with Muslims. Their reaction is well described by Alastair Hunter¹ when he highlights the dissonance which occurs when people meet those who not only believe something quite different but also suppose that they themselves believe something quite different from what they do. Many Muslims seem to be in a similar situation with reference to the West, and so it is not surprising if the critique is quite harsh as a result. And going back further into history, our medieval Christian forebears' critique of Islam when it was also perceived as a challenge and threat are a further parallel which may usefully be kept in mind.

Secondly, there is an important observation which has been made earlier but is worth repeating here: alongside all the negative criticism of the West that exists in the Muslim world today, there is another more positive strain of thought. The title of this paper has meant that the views of this school have not been emphasized, but they are widespread in certain government circles and among the intelligentsia. Western ideas, or at least some of them, are here admitted and commended, so that, for example, Parliamentary government is seen as an ideal towards which Muslims should strive. This stream of thought is not restricted to Turkey, the one country where it has been discussed in this paper, for it extends far further afield, and is perhaps particularly influential in Pakistan.

In addition, it is worth emphasizing that as well as the existence of a liberal stream of thought which has been influenced by the West, there is within the Islamic tradition itself, quite independently of western influence, a more liberal stream of thinking, as for example in the thought of Shah Waliullah (d 1764) in the Indian Sub-continent, and it is important that this aspect of modern Islamic thought is not overlooked.

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1 *Christianity and Other Faiths in Britain*, SCM, London 1985.