

## IS OUR HOUSE IN ORDER?<sup>1</sup>

By AL-HAJJ LORD HEADLEY

RELIGIOUS bodies, Governments, and individuals should never tire of asking themselves this question. Here are we Muslims endeavouring to show to Western nations that Islam, on account of its simplicity and freedom from priestly domination and dogmas, is the best religion to adopt. And to confirm this we point to our belief in the one and only God and beneficence to all our fellow-creatures as being practically all that is required of us. The Almighty Creator and Cherisher of the human race has asked nothing more through the mouths of His Holy Prophets, and we therefore look upon our Faith as one which is eminently *rational*—it can be readily understood and in its purest form is free from gross improbabilities. There is such ample reason for the establishment of a code such as that which is supposed to guide us, but can we as Muslims claim that our Faith, as at present preached and practised, is one which is altogether free from the drawbacks which hamper other beliefs? If not, it should be our chief care to instantly set about putting our house in order and endeavour to prove to the world that we are in earnest.

The Christianity of Jesus Christ was not the Church Christianity fabricated by priests and monks long after his time and which is now called "Christianity." Is it possible to conceive two people more unlike than Christ and Athanasius?

The Islam preached by our Holy Prophet Muhammad contains very different ethics from those advanced by puritanic fanatics and sects which have sprung into existence since his time.

Both these great Prophets of God were uneducated and illiterate men—the one a carpenter and the other a camel-driver—and this fact alone seems to me to be sufficient proof of the genuineness of their Messages : being unlearned, they

<sup>1</sup> Being the text of a lecture delivered on Sunday, July 29, 1928, before the British Muslim Society, 111, Campden Hill Road, Notting Hill Gate, London, W. 8. Mian Sir Muhammad Shafi', of Lahore, India, was in the chair.

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were incapable of fabricating. They were altogether unlike the scribes and Pharisees who followed them and artfully made capital out of their teachings to serve their own ends. Learned, and cunning, and unscrupulous, these "followers" traded on credulity and fostered ignorance, freely using the terrors of the unknown and the wrath of the angry deity to help them in the attainment of their own ends and aims.

I do not think it is going too far to say that the dogmas of modern Christianity are no more attributable to Christ than the ravings of a mad mullah in the wilds of Africa can be ascribed to Muhammad.

I cannot find any clear or convincing proof that dogmas, such as the Divinity of Christ, thinking of the Trinity in a particular way, the Sacraments, the Atonement and the Immaculate Conception, were ever sanctioned by Christ himself. Not long ago I received a letter from a devout Protestant who assured me that no prayers could possibly reach the Almighty unless the words "Through Jesus Christ our Lord" were added. This, of course, is dogmatic to the last degree, since it excludes from God's attention all the millions of earnest supplications sent to Him by human beings ever since assistance has been sought from on high.

Similarly, I am unable to obtain any satisfactory evidence, from the Qur-án or elsewhere, that many of the outward forms and ceremonies of modern Islam were ever laid down by the Holy Prophet of Arabia as essential to the Muslim Faith. Both Faiths seem to have been tampered with, and sectarianism has eaten very deeply into both the great Religions. Neither can afford to throw stones, and it is only by a full recognition of our failings that we can hope to make really satisfactory advances towards improvement.

As the poet Keats so pithily puts it:—

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave  
A paradise for a sect.

Which of the two great Faiths is in the worst condition ? Which is suffering most from this insidious internal complaint ? are questions we need not now go into. No one will deny

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that the trouble is there and that it sticks fast like some parasitic disease which affects the whole Religion in a more or less disastrous manner.

There is a story told of a good man who died and knocked for admission at the gate of Heaven. St. Peter opened the door and, having consulted a book, found his name and welcomed him in. The good man looked round and found everything very beautiful, and just as he had expected; but there was one portion shut off by a heavy curtain, which he went up to with the intention of drawing it aside. St. Peter instantly called him back, saying: "You must not touch that curtain or draw it aside on any account." He said: "Why not?" "Well," said St. Peter, "the fact of the matter is that behind that curtain are the Plymouth Brethren, and they think they are the only people here." This gives a not very much overdrawn picture of a certain kind of fanaticism prevalent in the West. I think the story would be improved by making St. Peter quote the lines of the poet which I have given above.

Many years ago, when I was visiting India for the first time, I chanced upon a violent conflict which was going on just over the central span of a bridge. The combatants were in deadly earnest and were throwing one another into the deep river on either side; on my inquiring from my boatman the cause of the tumult, he said: "O sahib, those are the Sunnis and the Shiahhs; they always fight when they meet." This is but another type of fanaticism which calls into play brute force and cruelty to enforce certain matters in no way connected with our duty to God or our neighbour. For the benefit of those of my hearers who may be unaware of the crux, I may point out that the main difference between Sunnis and Shiahhs is to be found in the fact that the Shiahhs regard Ali (the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet) as the first rightful Imam or Caliph, and reject Abu Bakr and the two other Caliphs accepted by the Sunnis, who hold that since Ali, *in his lifetime*, accepted Abu Bakr and the others, there is no reason for going against his wishes after his death. Since the successorship of the Caliphate question, which rightly or wrongly was settled over thirteen hundred years ago, can

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make no difference whatever to our duties as citizens of the world to-day, it is high time that all such disputes should be relegated to the limbo of oblivion.

Neither this country nor India, nor, indeed, any civilized quarter of the globe, can look forward with any degree of equanimity to any leaning towards a return to the hideous tortures indulged in by the educated miscreants who ran the " holy Inquisition " not so very many years ago.

Human nature has not altered much since the creation of man, and, given too much freedom, there is no saying to what extent sacerdotal chicanery might return to its own. There are, I firmly believe, fanatics who would cheerfully cut one's throat for failure to fall in with their views on quite unimportant matters, and such people would justify the murder by saying that it was done " to save your soul." It is true that we have one great safeguard in the giant strides of scientific advancement. Science is ever turning over the leaves of the great book of Nature and so discovering to our wondering senses fresh beauties, and leading us nearer the truth which, as I have often said, cannot be very far from the Throne of God. I hope that in time the folly and impropriety of fighting over matters which cannot by any stretch of imagination be regarded as essentials to the Faith will influence Muslim ethics, for it may be pointed out that such conduct is directly opposed to the Islamic teachings that *there should be no compulsion in Religion*.

Whether the Sunnis or the Shiahs are correct in their tenets respecting the Caliphate; whether the Wahabis, sometimes called the Puritans of Islam, are worthy or not of support in their strict views concerning matters of formality; whether the various other Islamic sects are necessary as branches to the parent stem, may all be debatable points, but there are few Muslims who will not realize that the existence of so many conflicting parties constitutes a great source of weakness to Islam.

During the whole of my recent tour in India, from December 16, 1927, to June 6, 1928, there was not one discordant note, and my main texts at nearly all the many big meetings

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were *The dangers of sectarianism* and *The importance of toleration*. It was, as you may imagine, a source of the greatest satisfaction to me to receive a most hearty welcome and patient hearing at places like Bombay, Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Rawal Pindi, Peshawar, Wazirabad, Sargodha, as well as many other towns and districts which I had the honour and pleasure of visiting. Then I was fortunate in arriving at Hyderabad on the birthday of His Exalted Highness the Nizam, which falls on January 26th. I was enabled to attend the banquet in his honour and later on to have several interviews with him. On one of these occasions he made the very princely donation of Rs. five lakhs towards the cost of building a suitable Mosque in London, and since then he has sanctioned a further three lakhs. I had expected this great Ruling Prince to donate handsomely, but I must confess that such a munificent gift as £60,000 came as a very agreeable surprise, and it has had two good results, one being the practical certainty of getting our Mosque—which is to be called the London Nizamiah Mosque—built in the great metropolis; and the other is the encouragement it gives to all Muslims to help us in presenting to the Western world a true version of what Islam really is. I think it also goes far towards refuting the gloomy forebodings of those pessimists who, alarmed by the apathy to be found in some quarters, jump to the conclusion that nothing can be done and that the Religion itself is on the downward path, if not actually moribund. No words are strong enough to be used in condemning those who deliberately discourage others who are trying to do good work in a good cause. If Islam is in such a bad way as we might be led to suppose, surely that in itself is sufficient proof that workers are needed and that they should receive hearty support from all good Muslims. There is plenty of vitality in Islam—Muslims are *increasing*, not *diminishing*, in numbers. I have recently been over the beautiful Mosque in Paris, and have been much struck by the elegance of the design and the thoroughly solid and artistic work which everywhere prevails. The Paris Mosque is built on about 8,000 square metres, and it is improbable that we shall be able to secure so large an area

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as that in any suitable site in London. But we must try our best, and I am not without hope that we shall receive assistance from those who wish us well in our very reasonable desire to see Islam represented by a handsome building which may compare favourably with many other beautiful places of worship in London.

It should be borne in mind that we must select the site before we attempt to design the building, because a style of architecture which might do very well in one set of surroundings would possibly be quite out of place in another. Also, we can hardly expect such a big area as they have been fortunate enough to secure in Paris in rather an out-of-the-way neighbourhood. The question of climate also has to be considered, and it may be fairly surmised that, roughly speaking, the better and more central the site the smaller will be the area. So that you will not wonder that I am rather diffident about making any definite statements upon points which are still to be settled. There are many matters, for instance, connected with the proposed hostel, the library and the lecture hall, which require very careful consideration. In the Paris Mosque—or rather immediately adjacent—there are excellent Turkish baths, tea and coffee divans, as well as displays of beautiful Moorish carving and silver, copper and brass work. This part of the Mosque is run by a capable Algerian or Tunisian gentleman who pays a big rent, and this rent helps to pay the expenses of the Mosque. What strikes one so forcibly after going over the French Mosque is this: If France with comparatively few Muslim subjects can afford a Mosque in its capital city, surely it is rather a stigma or disgrace that England, with over 110,000,000 British Muslims, should lag behind? Our King rules over about as many Muslims as there are people in the United States of America. And these Muslims have fought for us and died for us, and shown themselves good citizens and loyal subjects over and over again. There are those who advance the opinion that there are not enough evidences of the necessity of a Mosque in London; in other words, that there are too few Muslims in London to fill such a place of worship. To all such I would

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point out that the large floating Muslim population of London would be attracted for a year or two by the actual building operations and that many would attend the services for Friday prayers and Sunday lectures who do not feel drawn to either Notting Hill Gate or, on account of the distance, to the pretty little Mosque at Woking. Sir Abbas Ali Baig and myself feel our responsibility in the matter of selecting the site; until this is done we cannot attempt inviting designs. The task is rendered more difficult on account of the high values put upon land in central positions in the Metropolis.

To revert shortly to the Islamic sects. Only a few months ago I was addressing a meeting of the Central Asian Society on the occasion of a lecture entitled "Ferments in the World of Islam," and in the course of my remarks I mentioned that, in addition to the sects of early days, there had recently sprung up a new sect—the followers of the late Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who was a learned and devout Muslim and the author of a large number of publications on Islamic subjects. The branch of the Ahmadians—called Quadianis to distinguish them from the original Ahmadians of Lahore—has added very considerably to the ferments in Islam, and therefore it was impossible for me to avoid mentioning the fact and giving some account of the tenets of the new sect.

I gave it as my opinion that this Quadiani sect is doing disservice to Islam, partly on account of its intolerance and more particularly because it is fundamentally different from the simple Muslim teaching of duty to God and one's neighbour. According to Keats, whose lines I have just quoted, the Quadianis are weaving a Paradise for their own delectation in the future state, and in that Paradise there will be no room for us poor ordinary Muslims. As I do not want to be accused of making an unjust statement or complaint against these wanderers from the fold, I now give a few facts as to their actual tenets as explained in their book *Ahmad*.

To begin with, they say that an Ahmadian of the Quadiani persuasion may not say his prayers under the leadership of an Imam who is not of that Faith; that a Quadiani may not give his daughter in marriage to a Muslim who is not a Quadiani

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Ahmadian; that anyone of the Quadiani persuasion may not attend the funeral service of a deceased Muslim friend unless that friend is of the same Faith. This last rule seems particularly severe and cruel, but it is further affirmed that all those who do not acknowledge that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the "Promised Messiah" and Prophet of God are "deprived of the light of Faith," and that non-belief in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is as bad as non-belief in the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself!

It seems strange that the supporters of this latest sect should have been offended—as they undoubtedly were—at my calling attention to their tenets, since many of the "ferments" in Islam have been entirely due to them. All the conflicting sects within the world of Islam are so many sources of weakness, but they are especially so when they differ from the Muslim Faith on fundamental and essential points.

Why should this small new sect take upon itself to say that all those refusing to recognize Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Messiah should be called kafirs or infidels?

I have frequently been asked if the Quadianis are really Muslims, and my reply has always been: "Yes, they are undoubtedly Muslims, but they seem to me to have wandered somewhat far from the true path." They have, of course, no right whatever to call other Muslims kafirs for not agreeing with them. This display of intolerance on their part has led to many unfavourable comments and has given offence and pain throughout the Muslim world.

From the time I landed in India towards the end of last year, to the time I left that country in June, I made a point of emphasizing the great importance of *avoiding intolerance, and awakening to a true sense of our duty towards Islam*. For many years there have been complaints of the apathy and indifference of Muslims here and elsewhere, and it is in the hope of overcoming to some extent this lamentable state of affairs, and also checking fanaticism and intolerance, that we are looking forward to the erection of the London Mosque. This Mosque is to be entirely non-sectarian, and it will, we



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hope, fittingly memorialize a fresh awakening to the beauty of Islam.

The Jews have their synagogues, the Christian Scientists, the Roman Catholics, the Hindus, and many other religionists, their places of worship, and as yet the Muslims, who number in their ranks over 110,000,000 British subjects, are unrepresented in the heart of the great metropolis of the British Empire. There is at present no large London Mosque in a central position. It is stated, I think on good authority, that His Majesty King George actually rules over more Muslims than Christians, and on this account I for one should like to think that the many thousands of Muslims who visit England every year and form what may be called our floating Muhammadan population should be able to point with respect and gratification to the London Nizamiah Mosque as a building worthy to take its place amongst the many fine buildings devoted to the worship of God.

I feel sure that there are many people who will agree with me that in these days—when Bolshevism and Atheism are rampant and are busily engaged in leading the young into the devious paths of *unbelief in anything and contempt for the Creator*—every encouragement should be given to the true believers in Islam which so plainly spells Duty to God and one's neighbour. Islam is indeed practically the same Faith as that originally taught by Jesus Christ and revived in clearer language by the Great Prophet of Arabia some six hundred years later. It would indeed be a blessed consummation—devoutly to be wished—if we could see pure Christianity working with pure Islam in a holy struggle against Atheism and Idolatry. I fear, however, that the great obstacle to this union of forces will ever be found in the hostile attitude of religious leaders.

It is much to be regretted that those who guide the thoughts of the people on sacred matters have too often looked upon priesthood or priestcraft as a *profession* instead of—as it should be—a *calling*.

Thus it sometimes happens that those who arrogate to themselves special sacerdotal powers and influence are able to

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exercise those powers to the detriment of true religion. The pagan whisperings of the Delphic Oracle have, as it were, echoed down the aisles of the ages and dulled the clear tones which have ever marked the original utterances of the Holy Prophets of God.

I have no desire to cavil or pose as a carping critic; I am solely influenced by a keen desire to see Islam, as I and many others understand it, presented in its true colours: just as I should like to see true Christianity applied in its earliest and simplest form towards the uplifting of the world. If we Muslims wish Islam to be regarded as the exemplar of all the religions, we should lose no time in purging it of its dross so that it may appear to our opponents and all others as free from schism and those sacerdotal dogmas—a belief in which cannot fail to produce ridicule and contempt. Remember, we live in an age when science, our surest and truest ally, is daily advising us on the “Book of Knowledge fair”; let us be guided by the Qur-án and what we believe to be common sense when we are advancing our tenets in the hope of convincing the peoples of the West. To do this with any chance of pronounced success we must be particular to draw a line between what is essential and what is after all applicable to some particular time or some peculiar race requiring special training, e.g. the Children of Israel under Moses, or the Arabian savages under Muhammad. In these days we do not have to rebuke people for making golden calves or images; nor do we have to restrain people from burying alive their little girl babies at the feet of hideous idols. Also we refrain from giving educated and civilized people instructions as to matters of cleanliness and what parts of their persons they should wash.<sup>1</sup> All such instructions were valuable to the extremely dirty denizens of vermin-infected tents of the early Bedouin Arabs, but are not of much value where there is plenty of good water laid on. And there is another point not to be lost sight of, and it is this: In most parts of Arabia there

<sup>1</sup> We are afraid we have to differ from his Lordship in this matter. Our experience tells us that people in Europe as well as elsewhere still require instructions as to matters of cleanliness. (ED. I.R.)

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is a terrible dearth of water, and instructions had to be given as to how to make the most of it when the oasis was reached. The conditions are altogether different in, say, London or any big town, where there is a plentiful supply of water and people are always able to wash, and always do wash, either in their own houses, in the excellent public washhouses, or in the numerous swimming-baths which abound everywhere.

We must put our own house in order and then we shall be able to point out the defects in our neighbour's—it is the old story of the mote and the beam in the eye. But what do we find on examination? We find that dogmas and sectarianism—working through a few hundred years—have obscured the original tenets so that they are hardly recognizable. What with pious frauds, often *with good intent*, and sacerdotal trickery and humbug, often *with evil intent*, and selfish gains in view, we hardly know where we are.

At the present moment the Religions of the world seem to be undergoing a very rigorous inspection, one might almost call it an exalted competitive examination, so that men may have the opportunity of selecting the most workable Religion and that which is freest from improbabilities and fables of ancient date. All these Religions teem with beautiful thoughts and injunctions and, as a rule, the codes of morality are high and to be respected by all people. The ultimate aim is usually duty to God and to one's neighbour. But unfortunately, when you come to examine some of the forms and observances and find that these are magnified until they become of vital importance and are placed along with deadly sins or beatific virtues, you naturally begin to ask questions. Can it matter what I *think*? Surely it must be "what I *do*" that matters.

It is not my intention to go into the various dogmas which are to be found in many Religions and are held to be of vital importance; it is rather to point out that, in these days of reason, it is well to secure a belief in that Faith which presents the fewest pitfalls and what may fairly be called "aids to unbelief." Every time you tell a man some strange tale of a highly improbable character, and insist upon it that a belief

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in that tale is essential to his salvation, you are paving the way to permanent unbelief.

We have to take the world as it is, and not as we would wish it to be. Our knowledge is very limited, and when we look around and see the cruelties of Nature, the terrible sufferings of the brute creation and poor little innocent and helpless children, can we avoid wondering how it is that the All-Merciful permits such things to be? Does it not seem impossible to reconcile Love and Justice with the cruelty and unfairness we see all around us? We cannot realize what it all means. We know that daily and hourly our better and sensitive nature is harrowed by accounts of evil doings all over the world, apparently the work of the devil himself, but we must not give up our belief in God because we are at present unable to fathom the deep mysteries of the creation. We should say with all humility, "Thy Will be done," and try to recognize the fact that His ways are not our ways. I believe that ultimately the simple Faith of Islam will be the religion of the whole world, for there is in it so little that is controversial and so much that appeals to the heart as well as to the understanding.

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