

Causes of Islamophobia – 3

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 25 February 2022

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُنِيرٌ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨١﴾ هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ
بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

“They desire to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light, though the disbelievers may be averse. He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, though those who set up partners (with Allah) are averse.” — ch. 61, v. 8–9.

At the end of last week’s *khutba*, I was talking about the development of science and technology in the Christian countries of the West, which began about 400 years ago, and led to the European domination of the whole world, including the Muslim world. I mentioned that, along with this, Christian missionaries from the West went all over the world, and in Muslim countries they attempted to convert Muslims to Christianity. They tried to show that Islam was an inferior religion, whose teachings were of a low moral standard, lacking in civilisation and proper knowledge, and its Founder, i.e., the Holy Prophet Muhammad, was a worldly man who ruled using violence and force over people. They had to justify that their view of Islam was based on an actual study of Islam and was not merely made up by themselves. As I said last week, at this stage in history, Christians in Europe published books such as English translations of the Quran and biographies of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, in which they presented their own distorted views about Islam. Unfortunately, these critics found much material in the books written by the Muslims themselves, and in certain wrong beliefs and practices of Muslims, which they could exploit and use against Islam.

I will now mention some of this literature. The first English translations of the Quran were produced by Christians here in England, long before any Muslim translated it into English. We cannot deny that these translators had a good knowledge of

Arabic, they had learnt this language sufficiently, they had studied the commentaries of the Quran written by Muslims in Arabic, and they did undertake much effort and labour in producing their translations.

The first of these translations was by a man called George Sale, published nearly 300 years ago. He writes in his preface at the very beginning that the Quran does not pose any danger to the Christian religion, the danger that Christians will turn towards Islam, because it is so obvious that the Quran is a forgery, i.e., made up by a man who pretended that it was revelation from God. He then writes that we need to study Islam because of its remarkable rise, that in less than one century it spread over most of the known world. He adds that Islam was embraced by nations to which Muslims armies never reached, and some centuries later it was even embraced by nations who defeated the Muslim rule after it had been established. But he says that his concern is that people should not develop a too favourable image of the Quran and that the Quran's falsehood should be exposed. Then he goes on to give advice to those Christians who were trying to convert Muslims to Christianity as to the best ways of doing so. He says that many Christians have used arguments against Muslims which are simply not true or are without any basis in fact, and this has just back-fired against the Christians. You may recall that I mentioned last week that, in earlier times when Christian preachers in Europe were telling their own public about Islam, and the purpose was to incite them to take part in the wars against Muslim rule in the Middle East, they could tell them anything against Islam, no matter how baseless and ridiculous and non-sensical it was, and people would accept it. But as George Sale says here, this is not going to work if you are addressing Muslims. So Sale's purpose in translating the Quran was to provide the right and powerful ammunition with which to attack Islam.

He also says that if we see something good about the Quran or the Prophet, we must not deny it but express our approval of it. Here he adds that however much "criminal Muhammad may have been in imposing a false religion on mankind, the praises due to his real virtues ought not to be denied him." Then Sale gives a list of the good qualities of the Holy Prophet, which he quotes from a previous Christian writer, and agrees that the Holy Prophet should be praised for these. The list includes:

“showing liberality to the poor, courtesy to everyone, fortitude against his enemies, a high reverence for the name of God, severe against liars, murderers, false witnesses, etc. a great preacher of patience, charity, mercy, beneficence, gratitude...” So we can see here some recognition of truth by George Sale, and a stage is reached in the history of Islamophobia where, while defaming and condemning Islam as false and a forgery, yet points of goodness in it are being acknowledged.

The next English translation of the Quran was produced around the year 1860 by a Rev. J.M. Rodwell. This again was done to assist Christian missionaries in how to argue against Islam, find faults with it and try to convert Muslims to Christianity. His assessment of the Holy Prophet was that “the evidence rather shows, that in all he did and wrote, Muhammad was actuated by a sincere desire to deliver his countrymen from the grossness of its debasing idolatries — that he was urged on by an intense desire to proclaim that great truth of the Unity of the Godhead which had taken full possession of his own soul”, but he says that his strong belief in his mission “perhaps led him, at any price as it were, and by any means, not even excluding deceit and falsehood, to endeavour to rescue his countrymen from idolatry”. Rodwell considers that the Holy Prophet convinced himself, deceived his own self, into believing that he was a prophet and messenger of God. So here we see a change from declaring the Holy Prophet as a deliberate imposter to one who managed to convince himself wrongly that he was a prophet. Rodwell goes on to write: “The more insight we obtain, from undoubted historical sources, into the actual character of Muhammad, the less reason do we find to justify the strong vituperative language poured out upon his head by...”, and here he mentions some earlier Western critics of Islam. His own opinion is: “It is nearer to the truth to say that he was a great though imperfect character, an earnest though mistaken teacher, and that many of his mistakes and imperfections were the result of circumstances, of temperament, and constitution; and that there must be elements both of truth and goodness in the system of which he was the main author, to account for the world-wide phenomenon that ... the influence of his teaching ... has now lasted for nearly thirteen centuries, and embraces more than one hundred millions of our race”.

Another book of those days which I should mention is *The Life of Muhammad* by Sir William Muir. It was first published around the year 1860. It is no doubt a scholarly and comprehensive work. Muir recognises a great many good qualities in the Holy Prophet, but he still condemns and denounces Islam. Let me quote some extracts: “A simplicity pervaded his life. His custom was to do everything for himself. If he gave charity he would place it with his own hand in that of the petitioner. He aided his wives in their household duties, mended his clothes,... He was to all easy of access ... A remarkable feature was the urbanity [i.e., refinement] and consideration with which Mohammad treated even the most insignificant of his followers. Modesty and kindness, patience, self-denial, and generosity, pervaded his conduct, and riveted the affections of all around him. He disliked to say No. If unable to answer a petitioner in the affirmative, he preferred silence”. But then Muir gives a list of so-called cruel acts of the Holy Prophet in a one-sided and biased account. According to Muir, the Holy Prophet was, while at Makkah, sincere, well-intentioned and acted with an honest purpose. But at Madinah he followed his worldly desires and had low motives. According to Muir, Islam crushed the “light and liberty” which Christianity had brought to many countries of Africa and Asia. And he ends as follows: “The sword of Mohammad, and the Koran, are the most stubborn enemies of Civilisation, Liberty, and Truth which the world has yet known.”

These were the standard books on Islam available in the West, and this was the way in which Islam was viewed in the West, at the time when Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad started his work of the defence of Islam. There was, however, another factor at work now. While Christian missionaries were trying to spread their religion all over the world, and preaching to Muslims the superiority of Jesus over the Holy Prophet and the superiority of the Bible over the Quran, something was happening in the West itself which was challenging the truth of religion itself, of any form of religion. Due to the progress of scientific knowledge in the West, the educated and thinking people in the West began to raise doubts about religion itself and have objections against it. They began to doubt the existence of God and the spiritual concepts that are the basis of all religions. Although these objections applied also to the Christian religion, but

they were directed at Islam as well. And as I have said earlier, the modern non-Christian and non-religious Western writers inherited from their Christian forefathers a distorted picture of Islam, and in addition their modern branches of knowledge created new forms of objections against Islam as a religion.

Now the time came when Allah appointed Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as *Mujaddid* and his mission was to refute all these objections against Islam. In one of his early writings, *Izala Auham*, he wrote: “It is undoubtedly true that Europe and America have a large collection of objections against Islam, inculcated through those engaged in Christian Mission work, and that their philosophy and natural sciences give rise to another sort of criticism” (p. 772). So here he mentions the two kinds of objections against Islam. He not only wrote books in response to these objections but he also made the prophecy that “the Western world which has been involved of old in the darkness of unbelief and error shall be made to shine with the sun of Truth, and those people shall have their share of Islam” (p. 515).

May Allah enable us to continue the work which he started of removing misconceptions about Islam until its light shines all over the world, ameen.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَنَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-