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Islam vs Marxism

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"My Lord! I ask You for beneficial knowledge, and I seek refuge with You from non-beneficial knowledge."

Islam Versus Marxism

Being an Essay Written for the
Muslim-Christian Convention
held in Lebanon in 1954

By

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THE PREAMBLE

The Marxist menace has been growing in the Muslim world, the political measures lately adopted by certain Muslim states notwithstanding. It has been growing and it must continue to grow so long as the social and political conditions remain what they are—so long as poverty, ignorance disease, exploitation and tyranny hold their sway in Muslim lands and die-hard imperialists like the French continue to keep large Muslim populations under their heels.

That is, however, the political aspect of the menace, with which persons of academic sphere can hardly interfere with any tangible result. But the academic aspect also has suffered considerably. For instance, there has been no organized international move on behalf of the Muslim world which could pool all its intellectual resources and give it a specialised lead in this regard. Certain religious organizations have been doing some valuable literary work, for which every Muslim should feel grateful. But nothing substantial has been done to build up a genuine international movement which could undertake to fight the Marxist menace at least academically.

The present essay was written for the World Convention sponsored by the "American Friends of the Middle East" and held in Lebanon in 1954. The following four fundamental problems were laid down for exposition:

The spiritual assets in Islam and their significance for the individual, the family and society;

Social work based on religious concepts like Zakat;

The social challenge of Communism and Islam's answer to it;

How can Islam transmit its spiritual values to the younger generation? Hence the following line of discussion.

THE BASIC POINT OF DIFFERENCE:

It is a truism, as the Holy Prophet Jesus (Allah's blessings be upon him!) is reported to have said: "Man does not live by bread alone". It is this fact which is vital to every religion,—in fact, to Religion as such,— and it is this which distinguishes and separates Religion from Marxism for all time.

Marxism negates the belief in the existence of God, denies all the higher values of life and challenges the dignity of man. Grounded as it is in a Mechanistic Philosophy and a Behaviouristic Psychology, it refuses to regard Man as anything more than an automaton, — a vanishing speck on the firmament of matter, or a mere plaything on the social chessboard. It refuses to recognise Man's higher yearnings—his yearnings for communion with God, his

yearnings for Truth, Love and Beauty, his yearnings for spiritual perfection, moral earnestness and social refinement—except as aberrations and sublimations of his economic wants, thus raising Psychological Perversion to the dignity of a Moral Principle. It recognises only the validity of the economic value and of naked Materialism; and its Dialectic, though it appears to be endowed with what might only paradoxically be called self-consciousness, is, in the final analysis, actually a blind process. Thus Marxism stands poles apart from Islam. In fact, it is its very anti-thesis.

THE SPIRITUAL ASSETS OF ISLAM:

As regards the spiritual assets of Islam, they can be particularised only academically, because, practically speaking, the entire super-structure of Islam is spiritual in the sense of being God-conscious. The word "Islam" means "submission to the Will of God", or in other words, living a life for the sake of God. Thus a Muslim is he every aspect of whose behaviour and every cross-section of whose activity—without any such distinction as that of "secular" and "religious"—is for the sake of God and in obedience to His Will and Commands. This is what we read in the Holy Qur'an:

"Say (O Muhammad!) : Truly, my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds: no partner hath He: This I am commanded and I am the first of those who bow to Allah's Will". (VI: 162, 163).

However, from the point of view of the problems before us, certain spiritual assets of Islam might be stressed: —

(a) In the first instance Islam regards the basis of all life as spiritual, and, though its approach to the problem of Mind and Matter is non-dualistic, i.e., unitary, in the realm of values it gives primacy to the spiritual, thus standing in violent opposition to Marxist Dialectical Materialism.

(b) While Marxism conceives life only in respect of its un-folding from the lower to the higher forms—just as, in the case of the individual, it gives primacy to Hunger and Sex and makes the entire life revolve round them— Islam stresses the fundamental diffusion of life from the higher to the lower values. Thus, it regards God not only the Ultimate Reality but the Really Real and orientates entire life in the concept of Love for Him. In the realm of human values, Islam conceives the economic value emerging from the moral and the moral from the spiritual.

(c) This necessitates a belief in the Universe as a Moral Order, which Islam affirms with all the emphasis possible. According to Islam, the contradictions which exist on the material plane of existence harmonise themselves on the spiritual plane; and in its teachings concerning life-after-death and moral retribution in the form of Heaven and Hell, it proclaims that Virtue must ultimately triumph.

(d) The universe being a Moral Order, Man cannot but be a Moral Being primarily and essentially,— and that he is in Islam. Far from being a blind atom whirling in the storm of cosmic confusion or an impersonal mark on the unfolding tape of the cruel Dialectic, he is the possessor of an Individuality and a Personality, basically built up on the elements of Goodness, Truth and

Beauty, as the Holy Qur'an says:

"We have indeed created man in the best make" (XCV: 4).

Essentially, he is not the slave of the instincts of Hunger and Sex but a being to whom the angels were ordered by God Almighty to pay homage, as we are told in the Holy Qur'an:

"And behold, We said to the angels: 'Bow to Adam', and they bowed down". (II :34).

He is the apex of Creation and the master of all around him. So says thy Holy Qur'an:

"Do you not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are men who dispute Allah, without knowledge and without Guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them!" (XXXI : 20).

And, again:

"And certainly We have honoured the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure: and conferred on them special favours above a great part of Our Creation." (XVII : 70).

Islam has indeed raised Man to the highest pinnacle of greatness in Creation by calling him the Vicegerent of God on earth, to which the Holy Qur'an refers in these words:

"Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will creat a vicegerent on earth'." (11:30).

(e) This being the dignity of Man, Islam gives him the ideal of harmonising himself with the Divine Life. Thus we have been told by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (God's choicest blessings be upon him!): —

"Imbue yourselves with Divine Attributes."

(f) Islam is the religion of Balance, Proportion and Harmony, to which numerous verses of the Holy Qur'an bear testimony, as for instance:

"Glorify the name of thy Lord Most High, Who hath created and, further, given order and proportion; Who hath ordained laws and granted guidance". (LXXXVII:1-3).

And, again:

"God Most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qur'an. He has created man: He has taught him speech (with intelligence). The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed and the herbs and the trees do adore (Him). And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance, in order that ye may not transgress the Balance." (LV: 1-8).

Thus Islam commands Man to affirm all the values of life—Spiritual, Moral, Intellectual, Aesthetic and Physical— and to pursue them in a balanced way, aiding finally at Harmonious Development.

(g) The principle of Harmony at the highest social level transforms itself into the well-known Islamic doctrine of Human Brotherhood, which, in its turn, throws into broad relief the principle of Co-operation in contradistinction to the Marxist ideology of Class-War.

These, in brief, are the spiritual assets of Islam from the point of view of the present discussion, and they reveal the utter incompatibility which exists between Islam and Marxism.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY:

As regards the relations of the Individual and the Society, Islam gives to the Individual what belongs to the Individual and to the Society what belongs to the Society. The Individual and the Society have been conceived in it not as antithetic but as complimentary, the former realising himself through the latter and the latter through the former. Indeed, in its unique

system, Islam has steered clear of the shortcomings of both, cruel Individualism and brutal Collectivism, giving us a synthesis which is natural and rational.

Marxism is Collectivism in its brute form, with an iron regimentation bordering on slavery. As a theory of Social Atomism, it regards the Individual as the primary unit of the Social Whole. But very soon it absorbs him in the concept of class-war and filially drowns his identity in the whirlpool of Social Expediency where the loyalty to the Politbureau over-rides all other loyalties, including that to the family-ties.

In Islam, the Individual is the spiritual unit of the Society, while the family forms the social unit. Thus the Individual has been regarded as basically a free being with a permanent identity and his moral struggle has been conceived as directed to the enrichment of his own Personality as well as that of other individuals, contributing, in the final analysis, to the enrichment of the human Society as a whole. As regards the Family, it occupies, in the elaborate code of Islamic ethics, a privileged position above all challenge, and Marriage, which forms the corner-stone in the superstructure of family life, has been declared to be a vital means, not only as regards the individual's social self-realisation but also in connection with his spiritual perfection. Thus, for instance, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him!) says:

"Marriage is of my ways, and whoever turns away from my ways is not from me, i.e., is not a Muslim!"

Also:

"Marriage is half the Faith."

The teachings of Islam concerning the Individual and the Family are directly and logically related to the principles stated in connection with spiritual assets. Islam stresses the principle of Co-operation in contrast to the Marxist philosophy of Conflict, and genuine Co-operation cannot be possible except between free beings. Again, there can be no better training ground and no better nucleus for Cooperation than the Family. Hence the assurance of the basic freedom of the Individual and the sanctity of the institution of the Family in Islam.

SOCIAL SERVICE BASED ON RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS:

As already stressed, Islam is not merely a Religion but an elaborate Social Order, a self-contained Culture and a full-fledged Civilisation. Consequently, the entire Islamic system of faith and practice ensures "Social Service based on Religious Concepts" by assimilating all the three basic concepts, namely, Man, Society, God into a harmonious Whole, in contradistinction to Marxism which confines itself purely to the problem of "Man and Society" and also in sharp contrast to the general religious thought which confines itself to the problem of "Man and God." Indeed, even the purely devotional practices in Islam, like Prayers and Fasting and the Pilgrimage to Mecca, are social institutions and serve social ends.

Besides this basic characteristic of Islam, there is also a specific Social Code in which social service has been raised to the dignity of the highest form of virtue, just as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him!) says:

"The best of you is he who is best to God's family, i.e., mankind."

Thus, while, besides the "Duties to God," "Duties to Self," "Duties to the Creation in General," we find a magnificent elaboration of "Duties to Others" (Individual as well as Collective) in the Islamic Moral Code, we also come across among the basic "Five Pillars" themselves an institution like the "Zakat," enthroned there as the very essence of Islam.

Zakat is the obligatory "Social Betterment Tax"— obligatory to the extent that its denial turns a person out of the fold of Islam—and it gives to Islam the distinction of giving to the world a system of "Organised Well-doing" in contrast to the haphazard form of Charity found generally in the practice of religious people. Comprising 2½% on all hoarded and productive wealth, it is essentially a state-institution and is meant solely for the benefit of the poor and for the general weal, as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may his memory be ever green!) says:

"(It is) taken from their well-to-do persons and given to their poor people."

Unfortunately, during the present age of Muslim disorganisation (due to various causes which may not be recounted at the present occasion), the institution of Zakat has become a private affair and is being practised by very few Muslims. But, during the glorious period of Muslim history, it existed with all the splendour of its revolutionary glory. Indeed, as all students of Islamic history know, it succeeded even in the earliest stages of its establishment in transforming a veritable desert of poverty, destitution and suffering into a paradise of plenty for all. And it can be said without the least shadow of doubt that it can perform the same miracle even today if it is organised properly by the Muslim governments.

Zakat is not, however, the sole institution which Islam has given to us for the eradication of social evils. Rather, there is a whole set of laws which aim at the establishment of a healthy economic adjustment in society.

ISLAM'S ANSWER TO THE SOCIAL

CHALLENGE OF COMMUNISM

And this brings us to "Islam's answer to the Social Challenge of Communism." Let it be said at the very outset that the challenge of Communism was born and has maintained itself upto this day solely because of the existence of the maladjustment of economic relations. The situation has been rife with unlimited exploitation and unbridled oppression of man by man, leading to wide-spread misery and helplessness and frustration, and finally giving birth to the fire of vengeance and revolt. The more fortunate among us have worshipped wealth, instead of worshipping God and serving the higher values, until the science of Economics itself has become virtually divorced from morals and other higher considerations. This is what indeed the majority of Economists of the modern world (excluding, of course, the protagonists of Welfare Economics) themselves admit. For instance, according to Marshall: "Economics is neutral between ends; the ends may be noble or ignoble, an economist is not concerned with it."

Islam's answer to the challenge of Communism may be conceived in a two-fold perspective. Firstly, Islam stands for linking up economics with the moral and spiritual values. It does not believe that economic maladjustment can be genuinely resolved without taming the brute in man, namely, without bringing about a general moral and spiritual reformation. It holds that economics must be guided by such moral principles which are grounded in the highest Spiritual Truths.

Secondly, Islam regards 'Destitution' as a positive vice, and this is what the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him) says:

"Destitution is conducive to infidelity (i.e., the suppression of higher values").

This being the case, Islam directs its entire spiritual and moral force into the economic sphere with a view to eradicate the economic miseries of man through the widest possible distribution of wealth. The Holy Qur'an lays down the principle:

"Wealth should not be permitted to circulate among the wealthy only." (LIX: 7).

It is this principle, and the economic structure built upon it, which alone can be regarded capable of providing the answer to the challenge of Communism on the social plane,—of course practised in the light of Islam's spiritual and moral outlook.

ISLAM, CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM:

The unfortunate conditions obtaining in the Muslim world today have misguided some to regard the Islamic economic system as a form of "Capitalism." Nothing can be farther from truth. Exactly speaking, Islam is a class by itself. But if it can be likened to any of the modern ideologies, that is Socialism. A brief analysis of the economic teachings of Islam in the light of this fact may, therefore, be given, in order to bring into broad relief the role which Islam can play in defeating the challenge of Communism.

(1) Islam is not "Capitalism" because, although it allows private property and gives the scope for personal initiative, it is definitely opposed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Islam achieves that end by different means, the most important among which are:—

(a) Islam stands for the state-ownership of such "means of production" as the mineral wealth, thus eliminating from its society the steel-barons and the oil-magnates.

(b) Islam prohibits usury and interest in all forms. All students of economics know that the greatest impetus which Capitalism receives today is from the modern system of Banking which functions on the basis of interest. Islam does not permit the rate of interest to rise above zero and conceives the Bank primarily as the medium of commercial transactions.

(c) In the field of Agriculture, Islam does not favour feudal absentee landlordism. Its ideal is the creation of a society of peasant-proprietors.

(d) Among all the systems of Law, the Islamic law of inheritance is the most anti-capitalistic. It stands for the distribution of inherited wealth among the largest number of persons on the basis of the widest margin of relationship.

(e) Islam condemns the hoarding of capital in very strong terms. It imposes a fairly heavy tax on all capital, above a certain minimum standard, for the benefit of the less fortunates.

(2) The Islamic economic system is "socialistic" because:—

(a) From the ultimate point of view, Islam regards the interest of the society above the interest of the individual.

(b) Islam makes it an obligation of the Islamic state to provide for the basic necessities of life, including such 'modern necessities' as health services and free education, for all of its citizens. With that end in view Islam levies a Social Insurance Tax on all persons possessing more than a certain minimum of wealth.

(c) Islam stands for free trade. It is averse to monopolies and favours the participation of the largest number of people in commerce, for which it advocates the creation of Mutual Alliance Societies—Islam's substitute for Capitalistic Banking.

(d) In the field of industry, Islam's ideal is the creation of the "Co-operative Guilds of Workers" where all forms of exploitation as well as unrest and bad blood are eliminated.

(e) Islam, however, does allow private enterprise in industry even as it allows private trade. But then it propounds a socialistic principle of wages. In that connection: (i) It gives freedom to the wage-earner to fix his wages at whatever reasonable level he desires. Simultaneously with this prerogative it safeguards the wage-earner against all possible harm which the 'capitalist' might do to him by closing the doors of livelihood, and for that purpose it creates a

fund for the maintenance by the state of all unemployed wage-earners; (ii) The standard of wages which Islam has ordered all the Muslim employers to adhere to is that in which the employee gets the "same to eat" which the employer eats and the "same to wear" which the employer wears. That means equalisation of economic status between the employer and the employee in the basic necessities of life.

(f) Islam does not only demarcate clearly the legitimate (socially good) and the illegitimate (socially evil) means and methods of income but it also limits the legitimate items of expenditure in such a way that in a truly Islamic society it must become (and it did become in actual fact in the glorious period of Muslim history) impossible to find glaring inequalities in the basic manifestations of economic life. It is in the field of luxuries that most of the social heart-burning is to be found, and Islam sets healthy limits to them. For instance, household articles made of gold and silver have always formed an integral part of aristocratic life. Islam prohibits them definitely. Similarly, Islam prohibits the use of certain types of aristocratic clothes by men. Islam has permitted the Muslims to spend only on such things which have some real utility for the development of human life and it lays down the comprehensive principle that all spare money which one has, after spending on the basic and healthy necessities of life, is a trust of God meant for the improvement of the social health.

(g) As all students of Islam know, Islam establishes "spiritual democracy," "social democracy" and "political democracy" of the most perfect type. The teachings of Islam relating to these three aspects of human life, combined with its economic teachings, if followed in letter and spirit, guarantee the establishment of a classless society where all social conflicts must remain in abeyance.

Only one question pertaining to the present discussion now remains to be answered: How can Islam transmit its spiritual values to the younger generation?

PROBLEM OF THE TRANSMISSION

OF ISLAM'S SPIRITUAL VALUES

TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Practically speaking, there can be only two media for transmission besides the home, the pulpit and the press, namely: the State and the Educational Institutions. Therefore, on the one hand, the entire system of popular education prevalent in the Muslim countries should be reformed and reconstituted in such a way as to make every Muslim educational institution a vehicle for the transmission of, mainly, the theoretical aspect, and partially, the practical aspect of the Islamic Philosophy of Life; while, on the other hand, every Muslim State should reform itself and its Constitution in such a manner as to become capable of fulfilling all the obligations which Islam places on its shoulders and of establishing the practical model of Islamic political, economic and social teachings. Unless these two media are reformed, the obstacles in the way of the transmission of Islamic values shall continue to remain so overwhelming as to render virtually futile all the influence that might be engendered from the home, the pulpit and the press. This is a truism which hardly needs any proof beyond the examination of the present sad state of affairs obtaining in the Muslim world, where the plant of Islamic values is drying up for want of organic nourishment from the educational and political side.