

Mohammedanism and its Educational and Philosophical Implications

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A. THE COMING OF ALLAH

At the time when the Byzantine Christians and the Zoroastrians of Persia were exhausting each other's civilizations in a series of disastrous wars, the seeds of one of the most influential religious and military movements in history were being planted in the sands of the Arabian desert. Until this time the Arabs had been nomads of the desert, moving from place to place without any sense of national pride. No Arabic nation existed then and each tribe had its own customs and its own gods.

In the year 571 A. D. Mohammed, the founder of Islamism, was born of poor parents in Mecca. He was by birth a member of the tribe of the Noreish. After the early death of his parents, the young boy was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib. During these years he was trained for commerce and travelled widely through Arabia and Syria. At the age of twenty-five he was recommended by his uncle as agent to a rich widow named Cuadidja. She was so satisfied with the young man that even though he was fifteen years her junior, she married him. The marriage seemed to work well and Mohammed was happy during these years.

Mohammed proved to have a great propensity toward religious contemplation since his youth and every year, in the month of Ramadhan, he would retire to a cave in Mount Hara, near Mecca. He dwelt there in solitude, dedicated to prayers and meditation. At the age of forty he began his mission by announcing his apostleship to his family. Among the first to believe in him were his wife and his cousin Ali, the son of Abu Talib. His servant Zaid was also one of his early followers.

It was fortunate that by this time Abu Bekr, a man of great prestige and estimable character had come to power. After he heard the teachings of the new apostle, he persuaded ten of the most respectable citizens of Mecca to join the new religious movement. These early followers of Mohammed, known as the prophet "Companions," are to the faith of Islam what the twelve disciples are to Christianity.

During the following three years the prophet made public announcements of his doctrine but his followers were few. Shortly afterwards his wife and his friend Abu Bekr died. Mohammed was then compelled to move to Taif, where he stayed for some time. He was able to make many followers during this time among the people of the neighborhood and the pilgrims who visited the Kaaba. The visionary returned once more to Mecca but a plot to murder him was discovered and he had to flee from the city. In the year 622 he was invited by the citizens of Medina to rule their city in the name of Allah. His flight from hostile Mecca to Medina is known as the Hegira and the Moslems date their era from this event.

In Medina Mohammed was received with a great reception and the number of his followers increased greatly. He declared his resolution to propagate his doctrines with the sword, and in the first of a series of battles he defeated Abu Sofian, the chief of the Koreishites. After a defeat at the hands of Ohod a truce of ten years was agreed on. Mohammed fought the Jews and various Arabian tribes and by the year 630 took possession of Mecca as its prince and prophet. Shortly afterwards, the whole of Arabia was conquered by his forces.

At the time Mohammed became prince of Mecca, he destroyed

the idols of the Kaaba, but the sacred touch of the prophet made the black stone again the object of the deepest veneration and the magnet that attracts hosts of pilgrims to the holy city of Mecca.

As soon as the conquest of Arabia was finished Mohammed sent summonses to Emperor Heraclius at Constantinople, the King of Persia, and the King of Abyssinia. Preparations for the conquest of Syria and for war with the Roman Empire were begun when said monarchs failed to embrace the new religion. At this time Mohammed died at Medina, in the year 632. He was buried in the house of Ayesha, where he had died. He was survived by Fatima, the daughter of his first wife.

Mohammed was indeed an extraordinary man of great insight. Though he had no formal schooling, he was familiar with Bible narratives and Eastern legends and possessed a grasp of the eternal grounds of all religions, though tinged and modified by his vivid and poetic imagination.

Under the first four successors of Mohammed, the Caliphs, the zeal of the Moslems carried them across Iran to the Indus River in the east. From the 9th to the 11th Century their expansion was slowed but further conquests were made with the accession of the Seljuks under Trugul Bey. Under Suleiman the Magnificent the Moslems stormed the very gates of Vienna.

B. THE NEW RELIGION

The Koran, or Al Koran, which meant originally "the reading" or "that which is to be read," is the book that contains all the religious and moral codes of the Moslems and therefore, regulates all their civil, legal, military, and the other activities. The book is said to have been written on a gigantic tablet at the beginning of the world and that the angel Gabriel communicated portions of it to Mohammed. The leading doctrine of the Koran is the Oneness of God, clearly laid in the saying of Islam-Allah is God and Mohammed is his prophet."¹ Christ is assigned a place in the

1. Logan Marshall, ed., *The National Encyclopedia*, XX, 180 s.

seventh heaven in the immediate presence of God but he is considered as merely one of the prophets. The Koran states that God revealed himself to man through the prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, and Mohammed. The doctrines of good and bad angels and the resurrection and final judgement are included in this book of prayers. Emphasis is given to God's mercy and to the fact that heaven can be won by good deeds and not simply by words. Idolatry and deification are prohibited, and Mohammed introduced the doctrine of predestination to infuse his followers with undaunted courage.

Mohammed preached the brotherhood of Mohammedans against that of all the rest of humanity. It was this spirit of antagonism that made possible the expansion of Islamism through the world. Nevertheless, certain passages in the Koran seem to be taken directly from the Bible and other religious books.

The faith of Islam is more definite and practical and less mystical than Christianity. Mohammed improved the position of women and slaves in Arab society. Celibacy was considered sinful and polygamy was permissible to balance the high death rate. Severe penalties were prescribed in the Koran against adultery, theft, and fraud. Even though it admits that people of other faiths may find salvation, the Koran discourages intermarriage with other people, either Christians or Jews.² The religion of Islam considers the most humble of the believers as equal to the Caliph. Regardless of its defects, the Koran gave the Arabs a set of laws, a culture, a code of ethics, and a national unity that was responsible for the development of one of the most powerful nations in human history.

The creed of the Moslems follows five major laws: 1) The worship of Allah; 2) The repeating of five prayers five times each day; 3) A strict fast observed during a definite period each month; 4) The giving of alms to the poor, and 5) A pilgrimage, once in every lifetime if possible, to Mecca.

The Moslems believe in Allah as the one and only one true

2. Sir William Muir. *The Caliphate: Its Rise and Decline*, (Atlanta: The G. P. Hoover Company, 1922), p. 138.

God of which Mohammed was a prophet. The Koran indicates that those that participate in the *jihad* or holy war fighting for Islam will be compensated with a lifetime in Paradise. The Moslems Caliphs could call any and every man to fight against the Infidels, a fact that accounts for the great expansion of the Islamic empire.

Islamic believers worship five times a day facing Mecca, regardless of where they are. Every mosque has a *mibrab* or niche to indicate the *quibla* or direction of Mecca. Prayers are said wherever the Moslem is found at the moment but thousands go during the day to worship in the Mosques. Before entering the mosque the worshiper removes his shoes and washes his feet and hands in the pool or fountain. Inside the mosque he kneels on straw mats or rugs for praying. On Sabbath Day, Friday, the mosques are overfilled with worshipers.

During the month of Ramadhan Moslems keep a total fast of food and drink from sunrise until sunset. During this fast they are also not allowed to smoke.

The giving of alms is compulsory for all Moslems within their means. Islamic law states that 2 1/2 percent of personal income must be given away to care for the needs of the poor. Many sociologists claim that this Oriental custom is responsible for the large number of beggars in the Far East.

All Moslems look forward to the pilgrimage to Mecca and make all sorts of sacrifices in order to make this trip. The Moslem calendar has a month known as the "month of pilgrimage", and during this time certain special ceremonies are celebrated. These ceremonies culminate with the Ka'bah and the kissing of the Black Stone. This stone is an oval stone with a diameter of seven inches, located in the north eastern part of the Kaaba.

C. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

It can not be unequivocally stated that Mohammedanism has had a direct implication in Western education. However, it has had a great implication in Oriental thought and Oriental education.

Among the Orientals "religious science" has been the core of their education; therefore, it is of importance that its true sources be understood.

The first source of dogma, morals, and jurisprudence among the Moslems is the Koran. This book is the supreme body of law, or *shar*; it is the *alfurqan* or "the distinction between good and evil".³ The second source consists of the corpus of *hadith* or the sayings and actions of Mohammed as preserved by his transmitters. The third source of Moslim law is the *qiyas* or text which deals with a similar situation and that formulates a judgement by analogy. One more source is the *ijma* or concensus of the wise men of a given period, provided their findings have the Koran as their basis.

Religious studies were to be pursued by research and the individual's effort. He would study the books and scrutinize the sources but eventually contradictory interpretations would arise. To eliminate this, schools of thought were organized since the third century A. D. Canon law was later made fixed in the manuals of jurisprudence.

The religious studies of the Moslems have different branches or socalled "religious sciences" that are studied carefully by the faithfull. The first of these religious sciences is "exegesis" or the interpretation of the Koran. The Koranic exegesis is based on the notion that revelation was not inspired in the Christian way but that it was revealed by God to Mohammed through an angelic messenger. In the study of exegesis, the Moslem tries to discover in the Koran the true message of God. There have been some theologians that have recurred reason in their interpretations of the Koran.

The second religious science is *hadith* or the study of the Sunna of the Prophet. This is not a simple commentary on the traditions of Islam but deals only with the external critique of the chains of transmitters. The study of *figh* is the study of what Christians know as Canon law. It has two sources: the religious and the legal. The two other religious sciences are the Kalam, the

3. Louis Gardet. *Mohammedanism* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1961)

science of the Oneness of God, and the *Talsafa* which is a study of the historical evolution of the Arab Moslem philosophy of Hellenistic inspiration.⁴ In this last science one can discover the great influence of the Greek philosophers, particularly that of Plato and Aristotle.

The fact that lack of religion and immorality are synonymous to the Moslem, accounts for the great inter-relation between religion and education. Man is promised a Paradise or a Hell as a reward for his living acts; therefore, the religious education of the Moslem is guided toward the attainment of Heaven or Paradise. The Moslem ethics call for pity, understanding, love and understanding but the most cruel acts maybe committed by the Moslems for political reasons. The inconsistency between words and acts is something seldom observed in other religions.

It can be concluded that Mohammedanism has had a great impact in the education of the Moslem people. The keeping of the traditional laws has handicapped the advancement of these people as a nation. Religious education constitutes the core of education in these Moslem areas but efforts toward secularization can be observed at the present time.

D. PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The core of Islamic philosophy is very similar to that of the Christian world. All the Moslem schools acknowledge the Koran as the criterion of morality. Good consists in observing the Commandments of God; evil consists in disobeying such laws. The evil act, *masiyya* or prevarication, is essentially disobedience. God cannot be affected by sin as he is immutable and unaccessible but whoever disobeys the law violates the pact which God granted to Adam's race and which the community, by God's command, must promote on earth.

Contrary to Christian philosophy, Moslem morality does not turn around the theological virtue of chastity and interior penance.

4. Louis Gardet, *Mohammedanism* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1961), p. 94.

What makes a thing morally good or bad is determined by the Moslem in terms of obedience to the divine law. Repentance is only valid if it is "in the face of God." From this point of view, the criterion of morality is first of all a appetitive law in the hands of the inscrutable divine will.

According to Moslem philosophy, faith alone saves. This is a jealous and exclusive faith, which is the only gift that man can present to God. When grave faults are committed, faults which are not against faith, they are considered at the social level of the community. In regard to the salvation of the individual, they are left to the decree of God's pleasure. The only thing that counts is predetermination of faith, the supreme mercy of Islam. Louis Gardet clearly states that to the Moslem, "Salvation is not a participation in divine life; it is witness given to the One God and his Utterance, to which the believer makes a total abandonment of himself."

E. CONCLUSION

Mohammedanism is a religion that was born out of the teaching of Mohammed, a man who was familiar with the Christian philosophy as well as with a number of oriental sects. It is not surprising that there is little influence of Mohammedanism in the Occidental world. The core of the Moslem philosophy is the belief in the One and Only True God, Allah. This belief must be accompanied by the belief in Mohammed as his last and true prophet. Man's knowledge of God was not acquired through divine revelation as the Christians believe, but it was directly transmitted through Mohammed the Prophet, after the visitation of an angelic creature.

The religion of the Moslems has had no direct influence in oriental education. However, it must be accepted that it is the core of the life of the Moslem people. The insistence of man to identify himself with God has made the Moslem ignore the many pleasures of the world in exchange for life in paradise. This lack of interest in mundane things, in the Christian materialism, is reflected not only in Islamic education but also in its daily life.

The relation between God and man is not the same among the Moslem and the Christian. To both, God is immutable but to the Christian prayer and deeds are essential to reach God. To the Mohammedan eternal life is to be achieved at God's will. Man must obey and observe the commandments but it is God who decides the attainment of paradise according to his pleasure. Man is not responsible only to God for his behavior but to the community as well. To fail the community by breaking laws is to fail both man and God. Society can then take the necessary measures concerning the social aspects of the failure, while God will take the necessary measure concerning the individual's right to paradise.

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