

PROOFS OF ISLAM*

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By proof, I do not mean logical proof, but a fact which establishes a state of certainty in the soul. The facts which will be mentioned here may not all have occurred to everyone who is present as proofs of Islam. But they are all known I think, to each one of you. Nonetheless, repetition of a known fact is justified, if it can lead to a deepening of knowledge; and it is sometimes good, as it were, to take stock of our treasures, to count up some of our reasons for saying *al-Hamdu li 'Llah*.

God never sends a new religion without proofs that it comes from Him; and a man has a right to these proofs, since without them he would have every excuse for following a false religion. In the modern world, false religions flourish largely because people today are increasingly subjective. When faced with some-thing that claims to be a new form of worship they ask them-selves: 'Does this suit my personality?' If the answer is yes, they are in danger of accepting it. Our ancestors were much more objective. Their attitude was: 'Does this message come from God?' If so, I will adapt my personality to it.' When we read the Holy Qur'an, we learn from it that the contemporaries of the Prophets were desperately anxious to know whether it was truly a Revelation. Many of them would have liked proofs of the kind they were familiar with from previous religions. Man tends to be 'tidy-minded'; he is inclined to think that it would be better if the proofs were always the same. If a book could make the dead speak, then we would know it was from God: if it could not, then we would know it was the invention of a false prophet. But Providence is mysterious, and there are countless factors which escape man's understanding. Certain kinds of proofs may not be in

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accordance with the part to be played by this or that religion in what might be called the economy of the universe. Nonetheless God recognizes man's right to proofs by always placing his own imprint on every message that comes from Him, the imprint of the Absolute, In other words, a true religion is never mediocre, whereas the mediocrity of a false religion betrays it at once, to anyone who looks at it objectively.

Every true religion may be said to have two kinds of proofs—proofs for those who first receive it, and proofs for later generations. These partially overlap and basically the greatest proofs always remain the same; but a religion's initial magnetism may come now from one proofs now from another, according to the individual and the circumstances.

What proofs had the companions of the Prophet? We could say, in answer, that they had two proofs only, but they had them at an overwhelming degree of concentration, In considering the first of these proofs, namely the Holy Qur'an itself, we must remember the nature of those souls which were the first to recognize the word of God, Too much is said against the pre-Islamic Arabs. We must not forget that Providence chose them to receive the Revelation, and some of the reasons for this choice are evident; they had a marvelous language and they were intensely language conscious. To have a poet in the family was, to their way of thinking, an even higher honour than that of being related to a great warrior. Such sensitivity to language has nothing to do with literacy – or rather paradoxically from the modern point of view, it often goes with illiteracy. We today acquire a certain language-consciousness gradually by reading the Qur'an. They had it already in their nature. Sayyidna 'Umar, on his way to kill the Holy Prophet, was changed from violent hostility to fervent belief in a few minutes by some verses from the Qur'an, and there were other comparable cases. The special sensitivity of the Arabs was necessary in order that the Revelation could become recognized, and its authority established, within a very short space of time.

Their second proof was the Holy Prophet himself. At first, superficially speaking, he was at a disadvantage. Many considered him too normal to be a Prophet. It is true that during that period of his mission he performed many miracles, but unlike the miracles of Moses and Jesus which held, as it were, the centre of the stage, the miracles of our Prophet were in the background. In the foreground was, the Quranic reminder that the world itself was a miracle. What greater miracle do we need than the marvels of creation? Islam is Din al-Fitrah, the religion of primordial man. The Qur'an teaches man to look about him in wonder, and to give perpetual thanks to God. This perspective had first to take hold of the Arabs of Mecca and Medina. The more it did so, or rather, the more it re-asserted itself (for it is already deep in man's soul), the more they came under the spell of the Prophet. For the greatest wonder of creation is man himself, and the Prophet was there to typify the plenitude of human perfection. 'Verily thou art of a tremendous nature!' the Qur'an tells him. In other words, he was there to remind his contemporaries what man can be, and to show them how to live.

For the last ten years of his life he lived as the magnetic centre of his small but ever-growing community in Medina, imitated in all that he did. It was his function to penetrate with unparalleled depth into the domain of human experience,, and thus to sanctify every legitimate possibility of life, demonstrating how it could be made acceptable to God or even, if we may say so, more than merely acceptable, for we must remember the saying that God uttered upon the tongue of His Prophet "My slave ceaseth not to draw near to Me by devotions of his free will, until I love him: and when I love him I am the hearing wherewith he beareth and the sight wherewith he seeth, and the hand wherewith he smiteth and the foot whereon he walketh". This hadith qudusi clearly applies above all to the Prophet himself; and though it is out of keeping with the Islamic perspective to speak of the Prophet as divine, yet these' words clearly show that he was a divine manifestation in the midst of his people, and they were sufficiently aware of it, for him to be able to say to them: "Not one of you believeth until I am dearer to him than his

son and his father and all men together". A sceptic might ask: "Did they really fulfil this condition of faith? Does anyone really prefer another man to his own son?" But these objections fall beside the mark, for this hadith cannot be taken to imply any dilemma of painful choice. Above and beyond this being an incarnation of everything that it is in man's nature to love and adore, the Prophet was a window opening onto the next world, and as a transcendent other worldly presence in this world. The choice lay between the Absolute and the relative—hence its connection with faith. The Prophet's presence gave man a "Taste of the infinite and the Eternal - hence the obligation to love that presence more than others.

We still live today on the results of the tremendous impact made by that presence on the first Islamic community. Its reverberations still reach us down the centuries, so that the Prophet remains with us also, and for us also this is one of the great proofs which establish certainty in our souls. It is also something that cannot fail to impress any intellectual and sensitive man who comes into contact with Islam from the outside and who sees this love for a man who died over thirteen hundred years ago so deeply rooted in millions of souls.

Nonetheless, we cannot claim to have the presence of the Prophet as the companions had during his life. Otherwise they would not have felt so bereaved, when he no longer lived in their midst. Umm Aiman spoke with the voice of her whole generation when she said, on being questioned about her tears after the death of the Prophet: Not for him do I weep. Know I not that he hath gone to that which is better for him than this world? But I weep for the tidings of Heaven which have been cut off from us".

It was as if a door had been closed, and for us who have never known it otherwise, Providence—no doubt by way of compensation—has given proofs about which the Companions knew nothing, and these proofs are not only for us, but for the whole world.

Although throughout Christendom, that is, throughout Europe and America, Sayyidna Muhammed has 'officially' been considered as a false prophet, at any rate until very recently, this official attitude by no means corresponds to what is actually thought by Christians. Their attitude is, no doubt, largely still in the balance, but it is a noticeable fact that when they speak of 'the Prophet', they mean the Prophet of Islam; and they would certainly say that if there has been a true Prophet during the last 1900 years that Prophet was Muhammed and no one else. There have been many so-called 'great men', but according to the standard set by his immense and many-aspected greatness, these other greatnesses appear exceedingly relative or one-sided. The world has no choice but to admit that Muhammed is, for the whole of this period of nearly two thousand years 'a unique and incomparable apparition'.¹

A Christian missionary recently wrote 'the rise of Islam will always be a painful puzzle to the Christian mind'. But not all Christians have such a negative reaction. Pope Pius XII said "how consoling it is to think that so many millions of men throughout the world prostrate themselves before God five times a day!" And his predecessor, Pope Pius XI, said to one of his Cardinals, whom he was sending to Libya: "Do not think you are going among infidels. Muslims attain to salvation. The ways of God are infinite". No objective intelligence can be blind to the dazzling signs of God-given truth that Islam carries with it throughout its history.

The Companions knew that in 622 A.D., the Prophet left Mecca in fear of his life, for what appeared to be an uncertain future in Medina, and they know that eight years later he had become master of Arabia. But they did not know, as the 'world now knows, that by 725, that is only 103 years later, the Empire of Islam reached the borders of China in the East, and that in the

¹ I borrow this phrase from Frithjof Schuon, the author of *Understanding Islam* (Allen & Unwin, London, and now available also in Penguin Books, Baltimore, U.S.A.) though not from this particular book, but from *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (new out of print), but shortly to be reprinted).

West its victorious armies were crossing the Pyrenees into France, having conquered the whole of North Africa and Spain Nor did they know, as the world now know, that these conquests were mostly definitive and lasting, and that the inevitable losses here and there were to be more than compensated by further gains. In this connection let me quote again from Frithjof Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* where, in dismissal of the idea that Islam was the invention of Muhammad - an Idea. which has prevailed in Europe for hundreds of years - he writes 'That God should have allowed human blindness to create heresies within traditional civilizations is in conformity with the Divine Laws which govern the whole creation ; but that God should have allowed a religion which was merely the invention of a man to conquer a part of humanity and to maintain itself for more than a thousand years in a quarter of the inhabited world, thus betraying the life, faith and hope of a multitude of sincere and fervent souls - this is contrary to the Laws of Divine Mercy... 'To suppose that God could act in such a manner flagrantly contradicts the 'nature' of God, the essence of which is Goodness and Mercy. This nature, as theology is far from being aware, can be 'terrible' but not monstrous".

It is our duty as Muslims - especially as a minority of Muslims living in a non-Islamic country - to be aware of the point of view of those who look at it from the outside. For such people the masterly argument I have just quoted is of great importance.' since it is based on facts that everyone can see, and the conclusions it draws from these facts are altogether unanswerable. The manifest success of Islam, put to the test of time, is certainly one of its great outward proofs, and it is the one which has awakened the first positive reaction towards Islam in many non-Muslim souls. As such people approach nearer they are still further struck by the plenitude of Islam ; they see before them a law, a-theology and a mysticism which constitute between them a religion of unsurpassable height and depth - a message such as could never have been brought by a false prophet.

The theme of the success of Islam, which we take for granted, obliges us to touch on a less gratifying theme, to which many of us would like to turn a blind eye; for if Islam has succeeded, we have failed. The Proofs of Islam would be even more overwhelming than they are, if it were not for the painful disparity between the religion in itself and those who represent it. One of these God-given proofs we have even thrown to the ground and trampled underfoot, and that is the great Islamic civilization, which for nearly thirteen centuries was like a prolongation of the Prophet himself, whose function was, as we have already seen, to sanctify the whole of life and to make everything a reminder of God and of man's responsibility as His representative on earth. Having thrown that civilization scorn-fully away, as we throw away rubbish, we have eagerly taken in its place the profane and meaningless civilization of the modern Western world, every aspect of which is an offence against the dignity of man and against al-Fitrah, that primordial perfection,

to which Islam summons men back. And now, when the youth of the West are in revolt against the modern way of life with which we are so infatuated, we can no longer offer them our civilization in which some of them might have found the solution to their problems. We can offer them our religion, yes: we can offer them the kernel, but we cannot offer them its protecting shell, which we have thrown away; and religion has never needed protection so much as it does in the modern world.

But, in spite of us, parts of the Islamic civilization still remain, and the most immediately striking of these remains are the monuments. Sacred art is not a human invention: it is a divinely inspired crystallization of the-ideal that its religion represents. To stand in front of one of the great mosques can be an experience that could change a man's life. Few indeed are those tongues which could achieve an eloquence for Islam comparable with the eloquent silence of the Taj Mahal. for example, or the mosques of Persia, - Turkey, Egypt and Morocco ; and when the Arabs were driven out of Spain, they left

behind them an Islam in stone which still has power to penetrate the soul to depths of which it was hitherto unconscious

Parallel to these crystallizations are the great incarnations of the Islamic ideal. If we have failed, our ancestors, relatively speaking, did not fail or rather they failed less abysmally, in part because they were held up by the Islamic civilization, and partly, no doubt, because they drew incalculable strength from the presence of spiritual giants with which almost every generation was blessed. We must not forget that those non-Muslims who have made an objective study of comparative religion are unanimous in their judgment that no religion has produced, Saints greater than the Saints of Islam: and this, for those who are capable of seeing it, is an altogether self-sufficient proof, which needs to be supplemented by no other evidence whatsoever.

It would be possible to go on much longer illustrating, from our religion the general truth that God never sends a true religion without imprinting upon it unmistakable signs that it comes from Him - signs of many different kinds, according to the different needs of souls. But time is short and before I end I must return for a moment to what is and what always will be the greatest proof of all.

The greatest proof, the Holy Qur'an, has in a sense shifted its position from the foreground to the background. Today very few of those men and women who join Islam from the outside are of Arab blood. In consequence, the Revealed Word can seldom be the initial argument but though it is difficult to imagine a conversion comparable to that of Sayyidna Umar taking place today, the Qur'an has nonetheless its outposts ; as a man approaches Islam he soon comes face to face with the Bismalah and the Hamdalah, with the Surat-al-Fatihah and the Surat al-lkhlās and first of all there is the Shahadah itself with its marvelous form, its dazzling clarity and its mystery of infinite implications. All these Qur'anic outposts bear the print of the Absolute; they are as gates, which invite and compel one to enter more

deeply into the Holy Book. And then, gradually the Revealed Word takes the central place and the other proofs recede somewhat to make way. As we read in the already mentioned *Understanding Islam*: 'The verses of the Qur'an are not merely sentences which transmit thoughts, but are in a way beings, powers or talismans. The soul of the Muslim is as it were woven of sacred formulae ; in these he works, in these he rests, in these he lives, in these he dies'.