

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan,

Translated by Dr. Farida Khanum, Dar ul Ishaat,

Urdu Bazar, Karachi-1. 1996, pp. 93. Rs. 45.00

Islam Creator of the Modern Age, Maulana

Wahiduddin Khan, translated by Dr. Farida

Khanum, Dar ul Ishaat, Urdu Bazar, Karachi-1.

1996, pp. 128, Rs. 51.00.

The author of both these booklets is a well-known Indian Muslim writer whose score of works on Islamic subjects has been translated from the Urdu original into Arabic and English. First published in India, his books quickly gained popularity in Pakistan. The significance of the two under review lies in the fact that the view expressed by the writer can be considered unfortunately to represent the dominant thinking of mainstream Muslim scholarship in Muslim countries today on the question of the relationship between the modern scientific outlook and Islam.

Wahiduddin's Religion and Science convincingly shows the futility of leaders of the modern scientific outlook, such as the late Alexis Carrel, Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell, to successfully construct all by themselves a godless man made scientific "religion" to replace the so-called "obsolete" traditional religions of the past. He shows why science in its present form can never discover absolute truth or ultimate Reality because its gaze, based on reductionism, is fixed in the opposite direction. Religion embraces the whole of invisible reality while science dissects matter into tiny pieces for observation and experiment. There would be no conflict between the two if only science confessed its limitations and demanded recognition as legitimate only facts discovered within its own restricted, narrow domain. Trouble arises when the modern scientific outlook claims to be the only truth and explicitly denies any worthwhile knowledge beyond sense perception.

Darwinian evolution — the pseudo-scientific theory propagated in every school, college and university has resulted in the most wide-spread disbelief and irreligion throughout the world on a massive scale. Although effectively refuted scientifically by some of the most reputable and distinguished of western scientists, their findings, -proving the fallacy of evolution, are deliberately ignored and disparaged because evolutionary progress happens to be the ideological pillar of modern western civilization without which it could not continue to exist in its present form. Wahiduddin says that, though evolution can never be proven by observation or experiment, even if accepted, it does not necessarily prove the absence of God since creation could not exist without the Creator. Much more convincingly, he could have argued that life can never be transformed from inanimate matter, no group of life has ever been known to have arisen from any other species, that quality can never arise from mere quantity nor the greater from the lesser. Mere animal instinct has never been known to become human intelligence. Darwinianism has been most eagerly accepted and propagated, not because it is scientifically proved, which is impossible, but because it offers the most attractive explanation for atheism and materialism.

Unfortunately, these merits do not apply to the second booklet under review, *Islam, Creator of the Modern Age* which can be fairly judged as no more than a mediocre apologetic tract filled with distortions and errors.

Here Wahiduddin propagates the monstrous fallacy of the whole of ancient mankind living in pitch-black darkness, his thought only a crude mass of superstition. Today, he exclaims ecstatically, we are living in the dazzling sunshine of scientific enlightenment. The key to this historic transformation was the Holy Prophet and Holy Qur'an which replaced the superstition of polytheism with the truth of monotheism. He says, polytheistic superstition invests nature and natural phenomena with misplaced sanctity and awe. As long as nature was regarded as sacred, it could not be investigated, exploited and conquered for the welfare of man. He claims that Islam, regarding nature as profane and natural phenomena as ordinary events, provided the incentive for the spectacular development of Arab science and learning under the Abbasids and especially Muslim Spain. All of this was transferred to Europe in Latin translations which eventually inspired the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the French and American democratic revolutions and the

industrial and technological revolutions which were to follow. Then he makes the sweeping claim that without Islam, there could be no “progress”: thus Islam as creator of the modern age!

All of this is an absurd ludicrous retrospection of present-day thinking into the distant past where current concepts of “progress” were conspicuous by their total absence. Even Ibn Khaldun’s concept of history was cyclic and not progressive, Muslim scholars pursued a disinterested quest for knowledge for its own sake while to modern scientists and technocrats, it is a purely utilitarian enterprise for purposes of control, domination, power and conquest. Furthermore, the natural sciences in traditional Islamic civilization were never central as they are today but peripheral status while the best minds were concentrated on the study of Shar’iat or sacred law and tassawuf (Sufism).

Any idea of the conquest of nature was foreign to pre-colonial Muslims. For example, although the principle of the steam engine was well known to them, as it was to the ancient Greeks, complex machines were restricted to toys for purposes of amusement only; it was unthinkable to employ them for industrial production. Likewise, printing was deliberately suppressed, not being accepted by Muslims until after being subjected by the West for fear that the mass printed word might desecrate Holy Qur’an and other sacred writings. Although al-Biruni knew long before Copernicus that the earth revolved around the sun, this was not propagated lest the spiritual, social and cultural equilibrium be disturbed. Even if under Muslim domination progress in natural sciences is conceded, these studies were always subjected to severe restraint while modern science refuses to recognize any limit, on its activities or applications with the catastrophic results we daily see all round us,

The fact that none of the learned Muslim scholars dared profane nature to the extent that the scientific or technological revolution could take place, It was impossible for Muslims to do so without betraying Islam. So it did not and could not happen there, being wholly a product of the modern West. Furthermore, the sciences as pursued by these Muslim scholars were totally different in aims and ideals from modern science as we know it today, By identifying the latter as merely a continuation of the former and Islamic civilization the parent of the European Renaissance, Wahiduddin misrepresents history.

Contrary to Wahiduddin's claims the early Muslims had a profound respect for virgin nature and the natural phenomena in which they saw the "signs" and presence of God. The deep compassion and respect with which the Holy Prophet treated animals is proof of this. Once a man carelessly plucked some leaves from a tree, The Holy Prophet rebuked him, saying "Every leaf glorifies Allah." The Holy Qur'an says that the seven heavens and all creatures on earth sing the praises of Almighty Allah, including the birds in flight, though we poor humans understand not their praise. Pre-colonial Muslims never attempted any "conquest of nature" but tried their utmost to live in harmony and equilibrium with it. In so doing they were innocent of modern science's attempts to dehumanize man and destroy the earth,

Wahiduddin commits his more serious errors in his unquestioned assumption that modern science and technology is an unmixed blessing for mankind. He has nothing to say about the ugliness and degradation of modern industrialism or the acute environmental crisis which threatens the continuation of all life on earth, At least, the pre-colonial Muslims cannot be blamed as responsible.

Contrary to Wahiduddin's claims, the modern age could not originate in Dar ul Islam because its civilization was traditional and orthodox, in harmony with the rest of humanity beyond the boundaries of North-Western Europe. Modernity was wholly foreign to Islam and Muslim until forcibly imposed upon them by European colonialism and imperialism.

The sad result of this hook's apologetic misrepresentation and distortion of history for the emotional gratification of his readers is nothing short of intellectual dishonesty_ in short, making the complete westernization of Muslim lands and peoples appear legitimate, thus unintentionally guilty of utmost disservice to the cause of Islam.

Reviewed by:

Maryam Jameelah