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THE PRACTICAL APOLOGETICS
OF MUHAMMAD ABDUH
WITH A VIEW TOWARD HIS
APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY

BY
MICHAEL F. KUHN

1993

1005

THE PRACTICAL APOLOGETIC OF MUHAMMAD ABDUH
WITH A VIEW TOWARD HIS APPROACH TO
CHRISTIANITY

Thesis
1993/1005

Presented by: Michael F. Kuhn
as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the
Master of Arts degree in Arabic Studies

The American University in Cairo

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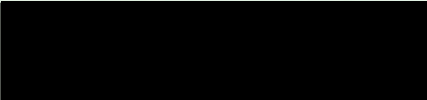
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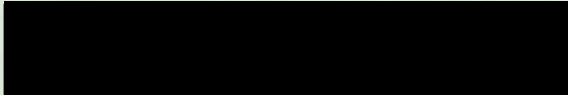
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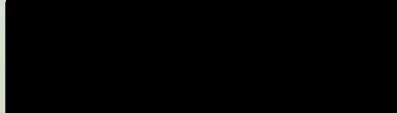
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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

It has been said that Muhammad Abduh, "more than any other man, gave Egyptian thought a centre of gravity, and created. . . a literature inspired by definite ideals of progress within an Islamic framework."¹ Much effort has been given to analyzing the views of Muhammad Abduh from the perspective of Islamic reform and its implications in fields of politics, economics, education, ethics, etc. There is general agreement that his thought had a significant impact at a critical point of Egyptian history and that it continues to impact the development of Egyptian thought and the modernizing of Islam in its various structures until the present day.

One of the critical aspects of Muhammad Abduh's thought and literary output is Islamic apologetic or his defense of the Islamic faith. The term "apologetic" (sometimes anglicized from the Greek as "apologia") is a branch of theology indicating one's rational defense of the faith. The word comes from two Greek words "apo" (a preposition meaning "from") and logia, from which the English word "logic" is derived. Hence, "apologetic" is a defense of theological tenets by appealing to the rational faculties of the intended audience.

Rashid Rida has analyzed Abduh's apologetic under three broad categories. First, his oral defense of Islam. Not all of his

¹H. A. R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, p. 43.

efforts in this area have been passed on to us in writing as a great deal of it took place in the form of informal conversations or question and answer sessions in which the Sheik adequately displayed not only his gracious winsomeness, but also his breadth of knowledge. The purpose of such a defense was to reassure fellow Muslims in some aspect of the faith which had been troubling them. The second category of defense was undertaken largely in writing. Here, again, the emphasis was on clarifying Koranic issues which had led to confusion in the minds of Muslims. Examples of this type of apologetic are his writings concerning Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab or other issues which orientalists and others had exploited as a platform for the attack of Islam. The third and final category is related to the second. It concerns Muhammad's Abduh's rebuttal of outside attacks on Islam and specifically what he penned in this regard. The outstanding examples of this line of defense are his rebuttal of Gabriel Hanotaux and his work rebutting the accusations of Farah Effendi Antoun, editor of "The Djaami'a," both of which will be discussed in some detail below. It seems that Rashid Rida's categorization of Abduh's apologetic leads to a bit of confusion. It is helpful to point out the distinguishing characteristics of each of the three categories such that one understands what exactly are the dividing lines. The particular trait of the first type is its being an oral ("shafawii" or "lisaanii") apologetic. The second category is qualified by the fact that it is a written (qalamii) or published apologetic and is essentially oriented toward Muslims and their concern over particular articles of faith. The third is polemic in nature in that it is directed toward those who attacked the dogma of Islam

from without such as Hanotaux and Antoun.²

Let us suggest a new categorization of Muhammad Abduh's apologetic works. It is helpful at the outset to break down Abduh's writings into two broad categories. First, those that pertain to cultural and/or historical Islamic apologetic. This apologetic concerns the defense of accusations against Islam as it was interpreted and implemented through the centuries of Islamic civilization. Here, we have in mind particularly issues such as Islamic tolerance (tasaamuh) of scientific thought, reasons for wars among Islamic nations, and reasons for the current state of stagnation (djumuud) in some Islamic countries. Closely connected to these issues is Muhammad Abduh's analysis of current Western progress in scientific thought. He deals extensively with this issue in his rebuttal of Farah Antoun, developing the thesis that the current progressive state of affairs in Europe actually originated with Islam and infiltrated the West via Andalusia and other channels.³ The West has stubbornly refused to admit its historical indebtedness and remains unrelenting in its passion to destroy Islam.⁴

The second broad category of Muhammad Abduh's defense of Islam can be designated as "contemporary and/or practical." Here, the emphasis is on Islamic dogma which has either fallen into improper

²Taariikh al-Ustaadh al-Imaam Al-Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, Vol. 3, Rashiid Rida, p. 789ff.

³This concept is also developed along slightly different lines by Mahmoud Qasim in his book al-Islam bayn 'Amsihi waqhadihi (Islam Between Its Yesterday and Its Today).

⁴al-Islaam wa an-Nasranniyya bain al 'Ilm wa al-Madaniyya, Muhammad Abduh, p. 3. Abduh's line of argument is developed further by Sayd Qutb in his work al-Islam wamushkilaat al-Hadaara (Islam and problems of Civilization).

usage through the additions of traditions or received criticism from the outside due to its seeming lack of congruity with reality. For our purposes, we have chosen four tenets of Islam to which Muhammad Abduh made a particular contribution. All are characterized by their being of a practical order and thus having a particular bearing on contemporary Islamic society. The first two areas are the status of women, particularly concerning divorce and polygamy and, secondly, the issue of the jihaad. Although both of these items might well be treated as relating to "tafsiir" (Koranic exegesis) or perhaps "fiqh" (jurisprudence), the salient aspect of Abduh's approach is his insistence on the implementation of a correct understanding of each of these concepts in Islamic society. Then we will endeavor to discuss Abduh's position on the sources of authority in Islam, namely the Koran and the Hadiith. Although Abduh stayed well within the bounds of traditional Islamic doctrine on the issue of "I'jaaz," (Koranic inimitability) he was innovative in his treatment of the role and authority of the hadiith. Finally, the philosophical question of predestination or divine decree (al-qadaa' wal-qadar) will be discussed.

Abduh wages his battle consistently on two fronts. First, he seeks to elucidate the Islamic doctrines to those who have understood poorly either due to the unhealthy influence of tradition (taqliid) and a desire to maintain the status quo in matters of religious practice. He recasts Islamic doctrine in a new mold for its own adherents. Secondly, he vigorously defends the tenets of Islam toward those who attack them from outside its walls.

The second category in Abduh's theological defense of Islam

concerns Abduh's treatment of doctrines peculiar to Christianity and their points of intersection with Koranic teaching. This aspect will be dealt with in "Section III" of this research. Our trajectory will be to examine possible entry points for constructive dialogue between the two religions. We will also seek to examine Abduh's penchants and leanings in dealing with Christianity as both a religious and socio-political entity. The suggestion will be set forth that Abduh's characteristic broadness of mind is, at some points, exchanged for a certain intransigence owing to both his fervent desire to have the Islamic "Umma" return to its former greatness and the desire to cast off foreign dominance where the encroachment of the Christian religion was necessarily linked to colonialism.

Our desire throughout is not to propound concrete conclusions concerning Abduh and his thought, rather, we hope to examine his thought from the perspective of his apologetic or defense of Islam. The issues which are dealt with, particularly in "Section III," merit a great deal more time and reflection than they have received in the present research. However, it is hoped that what is presented will be sufficient to cast some new light on Abduh and uncover some aspects of his thought relative to inter-faith dialogue and Islamic apologetic. It is conceded, therefore, that the present work, while by no means exhaustive, is, at least, an opening of the door. Perhaps a foundation will be laid on which further research may build in an era that is characterized by the urgent need of an objective analysis of the claims and merits of varying religious perspectives.

SETTING

Muhammad Abduh's approach to apologetic differed from his predecessors to the extent that his environment differed from theirs. The distinguishing factor in Abduh's work lies in the particular circumstances he faced at this period of history. These circumstances can best be treated under three headings, two of which concern outside influences on Islam while the third has to do with the state of Islam at the time of Abduh's prominence. These headings are, first, the political dominance of the West; secondly, Western cultural and religious dominance, and third, the entrenchment of Islamic doctrine in tradition as opposed to freedom of thought.

WESTERN POLITICAL DOMINANCE:

Egypt had been occupied by British troops in July of 1882 bringing the Urabi revolt to an end. Hope that the occupation would be brief, giving way to a renewed vigor of the Ottoman empire had disappeared. The Ottoman empire itself had just experienced "a brief and abortive attempt at constitutional reform under the leadership of Midhat Pasha, reverting to the despotic lethargy of the new Sultan Abd al Hamid."⁵ Muhammad Abduh himself was active in the Urabi revolt and was banished from Egypt as a result of its failure. Certainly, the failure of the Uraby revolt played a role in Abduh's adoption of more comprehensive and gradual means of implementing the desire to cast off foreign domination. Abduh considered education (particularly education in the principles of

⁵P. J. Vatikiotis, Muhammad Abduh and the Quest for a Muslim Humanism, "Arabica" 4 (1957), p. 57.

Islam) to be central to his agenda for reform. His penchant away from political involvement has been a factor in his being accused of siding with the British colonizing powers.

However, his desire was clearly to cast off foreign domination and establish the legitimate self-rule of the Islamic countries. This desire was a primary motivating factor in the founding of "The Indissoluble Bond," (al Urwa al Wuthqaa) a publication founded by Jamaal al Diin al Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.⁶ This desire was rooted in an unshakable confidence that Islam had produced great philosophers and scientists in its glorious past. Therefore, the current state of Muslim nations is not due to any defect in Islam, rather, it is due to political power-play throughout history that has left the religion stripped of its pure tenets such that what is called Islam is very remote from the original religion. "Political intrigue has taken what did not belong to religion and betrothed it to Islam. It has robbed the Muslim of his hope by which he previously penetrated the heavens and left him in a state of despair surrounded by beasts. What is seen today and called "Islam" is not Islam..."⁷ Muhammad Abduh consistently clung to the hope that Islam is capable of reforming the Muslim peoples. All that is needed is a sincere return to its principles

The cure for these ills of Muslim countries is not to be found in multiplication of newspapers--for these have little influence; not in introduction of schools modelled after those of Europe--for these can be used, together with the sciences they teach, to foster foreign

⁶Charles Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, p. 70. The three principles are 1)The unity of Muslims regardless of race, 2)The necessity of returning to rules of religion, and 3)Casting off foreign influences.

⁷The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, Vol. 3, p. 319 (translated from the Arabic).

influence; nor in European education and imitation of foreign customs--for imitation has only succeeded in quenching the spirit of the people and drawing down upon these countries the power of the foreigners whom they imitate. The only cure for these nations is to return to the rules of their religion and the practice of its requirements according to what it was in the beginning, in the days of the early Caliphs.⁸

WESTERN CULTURAL SUPREMACY

The political dominance and colonization of the Maghreb and the Middle East gave rise to a sentiment of Western superiority with which Abduh dealt extensively in his writings. Both Gabriel Hanotaux and Farah Antoun touched this very sensitive nerve. Farah Antoun theorized that Europe, due to its Christian history, was more tolerant of scientific progress while Islamic countries remained stagnant, entrenched in medieval concepts of persecuting religious dissenters. Hanotaux, on the other hand, struck a more theological chord in arguing that the Islamic concepts of the transcendence of God and predestination have rendered man's self-concept as that of a helpless entity far removed from his creator.

Abduh went to great lengths to delineate the facts concerning this "perceived" Western cultural superiority.

In the wake of this tendency to attribute Western political dominance to an innate cultural superiority, two phenomena became observable. First, there was a renewed interest in the study of the orient as a geographical region. Edward Said points out that "the period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion; from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to

⁸Charles Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, p. 60 (originally taken from Rashiid Rida's Tariikh, vol 1, p. 243.

about 85 percent of it."⁹ Governments began to see the wisdom in developing a corps of scholars who had expertise in various fields related to understanding the colonialized areas. The sheikh's lectures were often attended by budding orientalists such as Wilfred Blunt and Edward Brown.¹⁰ Thus, Gabriel Hanotaux and others who are properly called orientalists came to the forefront.

Another secondary factor in Muhammad Abduh's apologetic, which became a primary factor in the polemic of Rashiid Rida was the increased vigor of missionary activity during this period. Although many traits of the missionary endeavor have ostensibly the same effect as that of the orientalist (i.e. the examination of Muhammad's morals, the "mise en question" of Koranic inimitability, etc.), the two must be treated separately. Orientalism and missionary endeavor part ways at one important juncture. The objective of missionary activity is to effect a religious change while the objective of orientalism is, whether directly or indirectly, to study the orient and disseminate facts concerning it. Granted, this question has many subtlties and our purpose is not to delineate the finer points of orientalism vis a vis missionary activity. However, it is important for our purposes to establish that Abduh and Rida were not merely reacting to British colonialism and orientalism which came in its wake. They were also reacting to a 1900 year old current in the Christian church to "go and make disciples of all nations."¹¹ Abduh himself sees the

⁹Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York, NY 1978), p. 41.

¹⁰Osman Amin, Muhammad Abduh, trans. Charles Wendell (Washington, D. C., 1953) p. 86.

¹¹Holy Bible, Matthew 28:18-19 which is commonly referred to as the "great commission" of Jesus Christ.

missionary thrust as a preparatory stage for colonialism: "Mr. Hanotaux does not deny that Europe depends on religion for it's colonial agenda. Religious organizations and missionaries are important means for preparing the peoples to be subjugated...(they) open closed places and prepare terrain that no soldier with his arms could prepare."¹²

It is interesting to note that virtually all of the Sheikh's written attempts to analyze Christianity took place after the turn of the century. Al-Islaam wa An-Nasraaniyya was written in 1902 while his rebuttal of Hanotaux was penned in 1903. The activity of Temple Gairdner and Douglas Thornton, two missionaries sent to Egypt in 1898, is indicative of missionary endeavor during this period. Both of these men made no small stir in Cairo. Their methods were public debate, preaching, and publishing. They rented the former home of 'Urabi Pasha in 1903 in which they held public debates for both the "robed Sheik and the government worker."¹³ This debate house was frequented by a number of students and sheikhs from Al Azhar.¹⁴ One objective of Gairdner and Thornton was to formulate a corpus of Christian apologetic literature. Their weekly publication entitled "Orient and Occident" was semi-religious in content and aimed at providing a platform for dialogue and dissemination of Christian thought. The Church Missionary

¹²Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 469.

¹³C. E. Padwick, Temple Gairdner of Cairo (London, 1929) p. 133.

¹⁴An interesting footnote is given on p. 133 of Temple Gairdner of Cairo. Gairdner has a conversation on a felucca with Arabi Pasha concerning the relation of the decree of God (gadar) and the Urabi revolt of 1882. Thus it would seem that Gairdner attempted to have some impact on the notables of Egyptian society.

Society (to which Gairdner and Thorton belonged) was joined by the United Presbyterian Mission whose John Hogg worked extensively at evangelism and church planting in and around Assiut, Egypt. The following quote indicates an expanding mission thrust in the period following 1895. "This period witnessed both extensive growth and intensive development... scarcely any reference has been made to the college, the seminary, the hospitals, the large boarding schools... a great network of schools enrolling over 15,000 scholars...the sale of over 40,000 Bibles in a single year."¹⁵

While it is difficult to determine from the literature if Abduh experienced direct confrontation with missionaries, it is certain that Rida had at least one firsthand encounter. What is evident from the literature is that Abduh was observing the missionary endeavor and judged it to be the forerunner of European Western dominance.

TRADITION

The third and final crucial element regarding the setting of Muhammad Abduh's apologetic comes from within Islam. It is well known that the Sheikh concentrated a great deal of effort on defining the proper limits of the authority of the prophetic Tradition as opposed to the responsibility of each succeeding generation to interpret the Koran. His battle against tradition (taqliid) and his efforts to reform Al Azhar have been dealt with elsewhere extensively and need not be examined again here.¹⁶

¹⁵Charles R. Watson, Egypt and the Christian Crusade (Philadelphia, PA 1907), p. 190ff.

¹⁶Adams, p. 70. Footnote makes reference to Rashiid Rida's label of Abduh as a judge who was mujtahid and not mugallid. This obviously refers to the precedent in Islamic jurisprudence of basing legal decisions on authoritative deliverance rather than on

Muhammad Abduh saw religion, as the friend of scientific knowledge.¹⁷ However, he advocated the separation of the fields of religion and the secular sciences, because religion, specifically Islam, places limits on what one can know. Still, this aspect is rightly considered the "scarlet thread" of Abduh's apologetical tapestry. He sees tradition as antagonistic to scientific knowledge and advocates the use of the latter within the bounds established by revelation (wahii).

The larger part of the specialists are afflicted with the disease of traditionalism (taqliid). They believe and then demand proof, but only on condition that the proof shall agree with their belief. If they are confronted with what counters their belief they will have nothing to do with it. Indeed, they oppose it tooth and nail, even if it means jettisoning rationality altogether. The way of most of them is first to dogmatise and then to lay claim to proof...After a bout of apprehension, they recover their composure in the shelter of the familiar. "We take our stand only on the familiar, and only in God is there power and strength, the most high, the mighty."¹⁸

It remains clear that Abduh was essentially a reformer, attempting to recast Islamic doctrine in a mold that enabled positive growth in an environment of constant progress--the modern world. His major battle was indeed against traditionalism.

independent opinion based on one's reflexion in regards to the original sources. Abduh called for "ijtihaad" or critical reflexion as opposed to "taqliid" or authoritative precedence based on legal decisions of the early period of Islam.

¹⁷See Abduh's five foundations of Islam in his rebuttal of Farah Antoun. The first two of these are: 1. The rational view in the acquisition of faith 2) Preference of rationalism over apparent meaning in matters of interpretation if the two are irreconcilable.

¹⁸Muhammad Abduh, The Theology of Unity, p. 66.

SECTION II: THE APOLOGIA

INTRODUCTION:

A few comments are appropriate by way of introduction to the Sheikh's apologetic of these doctrines which are Islamic. First, Muhammad Abduh is a reformer, not a revolutionary. One senses that he stays well within the defined limits of Islamic doctrine. His distinguishing trait is that he shifts the emphasis of his commentary (tafsiir) from the authority of handed down tradition ("ma'thuur" or "mankuul") to a serious grappling with the text as a modern individual. This is not to say that the ancients are not quoted, they are. However, he does not hesitate to disregard classical interpretations if they have ceased to be appropriate to his generation. His commentary is far from abstract, he gives the reader a sense of his own caution in interpreting the divine text and a desire to elucidate only what is contained therein without wandering far afield. As a result, the modern reader may fail to see the reformative aspects in Abduh's views, present though they be. Again, we refer to the fact that has already been mentioned that Abduh was writing at a time when the enshrinement of tradition made any deviation impossible. He was a legitimate reformer.

It also bears mentioning that the commentary entitled Tafsiir al-Koraan al Hakiim was penned by Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Muhammad Abduh's disciple. The method used in this commentary is said to be that method which Muhammad Abduh used in his lessons at al Azhar University. We will make an attempt to differentiate between the views of Rida and Abduh where this is deemed important. Rida's intent was to carry on the tradition of his mentor. He was of the

persuasion that Abduh would have given his verbal consent to the entirety of the commentary had he lived to do so. This is certainly true for most matters of interpretation of Islamic dogma and Koranic exegesis. However, we have already alluded to new factors which came into play in the writings of Rashiid Rida. In the first excursus of this research, it will be observed that Rida's orientation was not identical to Abduh's. New circumstances created new conclusions. It is therefore not accurate, in the strictest sense, to attribute the views contained in the Manar Commentary to Muhammad Abduh except where Rida specifically quotes the sheikh.

CHAPTER I: STATUS OF WOMEN

Muhammad Abduh broke new ground in his dealing with the status of women in Islam. His break with traditional commentators was a break whose time was long overdue. Some had held that women were unequal to men either in their spiritual worth or their mental competence or both.¹⁹ Abduh vehemently denied this although as he qualifies his position, one begins to feel that he did not progress as far as he might have as we hope to demonstrate below.

The first and most striking key concept of Abduh's doctrine on the status of women is equality. He and Rashiid Rida go to some length to establish that the man and woman stand on equal footing before God. "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you be he male or female: ye are members one of another." (Al 'Imraan 3:195). This verse indicates that preferment (*tafaadul*) is given to an individual on the basis of his works, regardless of his sex. The same point is emphasized in connection with the commentary of al Baqara 228: "and women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them." Here, Rashiid Rida states that the work (*'amal*) of women is equal to that of men. They have the same rights (*hukuuk*), works (*'a'maal*), emotions (*'ihsaas*), feelings (*shu'uur*), essence (*dhat*) and mind (*'aql*).²⁰

The second key concept in Abduh and Rida's dealing with the

¹⁹Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tafsiir al Koran al Hakiim (Beirut), II, 123-125.

²⁰Ibid., III, 375-377.

status of women is "instinctive or innate reason" (*fitra*). Islam is the religion of *fitra*. In other words, if left to his natural instinct man's mental processes would naturally lead him to Islam. This flows from the fact that Islam was revealed by God, the creator. As creator, he has commanded his worshippers to do only that which nature teaches them is proper and for their benefit both spiritually and materially.

In commenting on the following verse "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means..." (al Nisaa' 34), Abduh pleads that the man is in the position of headship while women can be compared to the body. Thus man is the beneficiary of preferment from God in leadership or headship (*riyaasa*).²¹ Likewise, the woman has been endowed with preferment in other areas. Nature demonstrates that the woman is uniquely suited for child-bearing and raising children. Thus each member carries out its natural role in relation to the other. If one member is the recipient of preferential treatment, this is for the benefit of the entire body. The man must not exert his physical strength over the woman and the woman, in turn, must not deem the man's headship to be burdensome.²²

Until this point, the only differentiation seems to be that of roles played by the two sexes. Such is essentially the position of

²¹"*riyaasa*" is derived from the Arabic word "*ra's*" meaning head. Thus our translation of "*riyaasa*" as "headship" in order to fit the analogy of the husband being the head and the wife/woman, the body.

²²Interestingly, the apostle Paul uses this metaphor with slightly different implications in Ephesians 5:22. "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church."

Sayyid Kutb who deliniates between the equality of the male and female in their humanity and their status before God. He goes on to state that, while the Koran declares the male and female to be one "soul" (nafs), it has perfectly defined the nature of their relation to one another in their various roles and situations according to their innate capabilities and penchants.²³

The Manar Commentary gives a strong endorsement of the education of women in religious matters. Al 'Imraan 3:61 states: "Come, let us gather together our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray and invoke the curse of God on those who lie." The point of the passage is that Muslim women and children should be assembled together with men in a dispute with Christians over the nature of Jesus. This indicates two aspects of the status of women in Islam. First, women are not to be prohibited participation in public life. This dispute was a public gathering in which women were rightful participants. Secondly, Abduh infers from this that women were instructed in matters of theology and were in a position of certainty (yakiin) regarding them. Although the implications Abduh draws from this verse may or may not be warranted, his intention is appreciated. He builds on these two elements to decry the deplorable condition of women in Egypt. He makes a strong case for women being instructed in the basic elements of religion. He says that such a movement is indeed taking place, but it is more the offspring of European intrusion than the result of a return to the foundational principles of the Koran. This type of social

²³Sayyid Kutb, al-Islam wa Mushkilaat al-Hadaara, (Cairo) pp. 65-66.

evolution is, in reality, regression because such a movement is void of morals that give true spiritual life to any expression of reform.²⁴

Until this point, Abduh's views seem to be forward-looking, in particular when one views them through the lens of the pervading sentiment toward women during his lifetime. However, a closer scrutiny of his views reveals some discrepancies. In the commentary on al Nisaa' 4:34, Abduh says that man's disposition (mizaadj) is more complete ('akmaal, 'atamm), more beautiful ('adjmaal) and stronger ('akwaa) than that of the woman. Anticipating the reader's sense of surprise at his qualifying the man's disposition as more beautiful than that of the woman, he elucidates by reference to the animal kingdom. "We see that the male of every animal is more complete and more beautiful than its female as is true in the rooster and the hen, the ram and the ewe, the lion and the lioness. Also, the presence of the beard and mustache is an indication of the perfection (kamaal) of man's makeup (khilqa)."²⁵ He goes on to say that mental prowess follows these qualities, supporting his view from the earthy wisdom of the Arabic proverb "al 'aql al-saliim fii al-djism al-saliim" (sound mind in a sound body). Thus, the man is better able ('akdar) to earn money than the woman and for this reason he has been given the responsibility of providing for her.²⁶

Again, we refrain from reading too much into these passages

²⁴Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tafsiir al-Koran al-Hakiim, vol. III, 322f.

²⁵Ibid., V, 69.

²⁶Ibid., V, 69-70.

given the era and setting of Abduh's writings. Credit must be given to Abduh for his raising the status of women in Islamic society to a higher plane. He wrote on virtually all the issues that relate to the place of women in society, which is no small accomplishment. He redefined the place and function of the veil (hidjaab) which continues to be a live issue even in this day and age.²⁷ However, there remains a certain discrepancy in maintaining the doctrine of the equality of women and men vis a vis its application in society. If left in the ethereal, the doctrine seems wholesome enough. Men and women have equal standing before God and are rewarded on the basis of their virtuous completion of the differing tasks assigned to them by their Creator. However, the immediate application of the doctrine needs elaboration. Does this doctrine indeed infer that men are better able to earn a living than women? That men are more astute intellectually and thus more apt to become doctors and lawyers?²⁸

A. Divorce:

Various researchers have suggested that that parts of Qasim 'Amiin's book Tahriir al Mar'a (The Emancipation of Woman) were penned by Muhammad Abduh. Amiin was one of a closed circle of followers and close friends of Abduh. The far-reaching impact of this book as well as his second one (Al-Mar'a al-Djadiida) has been

²⁷The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 2, pp. 108-113. Abduh's position is that the exposure of the face and hands is proper in Islam and any practice that exceeds that comes from pre-Islamic customs.

²⁸Ibid., V, 69. Abduh gives the example of doctors and lawyers as being among those who must have clarity of vision in understanding of principles. This "clarity of vision" follows on the heels of his list of the attributes of the male suggesting that a male is more apt to fulfill such a capacity.

stressed by Dr. Muhammad Hussayn Haykal in his biography of Qasim: "If he were to return today (after only 20 years), and witnessed, as a result of his summons, this compulsory education for boys and girls, this great woman's movement in the various phases of life, this comparative freedom that women now enjoy...he would be filled with astonishment."²⁹

The appeal made in the book bears many of the marks of Abduh's thinking. First, Qasim Amiin ridicules the antiquated methods of Islamic lawmakers in their insistence on the verbal formulas used in divorce. He shows the extent of their ridiculous debating and goes on to say that the authentic Islamic principle in judgement of this and like matters is the "intent" (niyya). The sole importance of the words used is to reveal the intent of the speaker. He then denounces the state to which the practice of divorce has fallen, claiming that the woman often becomes a toy in the hand of man and divorce, nothing more than a fear tactic for manipulating her.

He suggests five steps that should be taken during the process of any divorce. Among them are the mandatory appearance of the couple in the presence of a judge who is to counsel them regarding the fact that divorce is "loathsome" (mamkuut) to God, a one week waiting period, and the presence of two witnesses to make the divorce lawful.

After stressing that these reforms are well within the scope of what is allowed by classic Islamic doctrine and assuring his reader that the decision as to whether or not a divorce was desirable remained in the hands of the man, he turns to a much

²⁹As quoted by C. C. Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, p. 234.

more explosive issue--is it within the woman's right to ask for a divorce? His clear answer to the question is "yes." In fact, he states that the woman has not received a just share of dignity until she has been granted this right. He then suggests two possible means of implementing the suggestion with regards to the prevailing legal code (hanafiiya).

The article is certainly indicative of desire for grass roots reform regarding the status of women in Islamic society. It bears many of the marks of classical Abduh thought not the least of which is a discarding of "taqliid" in favor of a return to pristine Islam. It is also indicative of Abduh's desire to cast off the shackles off traditional interpretations and legal codes in order to reform Islam to a more contemporary expression which will be able to make its presence felt in the modern world. Whether or not the article was actually penned by Abduh is a matter of speculation. However, what is certain is that Kaasim Amiin was one of Abduh's admirers and followers. The stamp of Abduh is clear in Amiin's works.

B. Polygamy

The second Koranic teaching which has received no small criticism from outside the walls of Islam is the sanctioning of polygamy. Here, Muhammad Abduh takes a clear and decisive stand against polygamy except in the case of sterility on the part of the first wife. Muhammad ?imaara gives an excellent analysis of a formal legal opinion (fatwaa) of the Sheikh contained in a series of points. First, polygamy is not an eastern phenomenon strictly speaking. It is occasioned by circumstances, the removal of which delete the necessity of polygamy. Secondly, polygamy was provoked

by warring societies where women outnumber men and warriors acquire women to satisfy their sexual drives. Thirdly, Abduh negates the western claim that Islam merely constitutionalized the prevailing conditions during the pre-islamic (Djaahiliyya) period. There was specific reform in the form of limiting the number of wives to four. Fourthly, the license to take four wives must be understood in its Koranic context. The verse where this permission is given deals with orphans and the possibility that they will be treated unfairly in marriage and the giving of dowries.

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then one or (a captive) that your right hands possess that will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice. (al nisaa' 4:3)

The thrust of this point is that the license to take as many as four wives is only for the protection of the orphans who might be abused as a result of men's lustful penchants. Sixthly, Abduh stresses that the condition of polygamy is that justice be done to each wife. Obviously, Abduh points out, this will happen rarely, if ever, and thus must be construed not as an incitement (targhiib) to polygamy but as a disuasion (tabghiid) from it. Finally, in answering the question, is the prohibiting of polygamy a tenable position for the Muslim, Muhammad Abduh answers a resounding "yes." This is due to the fact that absolute justice is required in the act of polygamy. The evident lack of this justice in addition to secondary negative effects (such as enmity between children of the same father) leads the sheikh to conclude that polygamy should be prohibited.³⁰

³⁰al A?maal al kaamila, ed. Muhammad ?imaara, vol. 1, pp 174-177.

Abduh's tendency to interpret the Koran according to reason given contemporary circumstances is evident in an article he penned entitled "Man's Need for Marriage." Here he presents a careful argument the thesis of which is the presence of an instinct in man to protect what he has acquired in the past. The instinct, he calls "jealousy." Because of the presence of jealousy, man's passion, if given free reign, will bring him to a bitter end of strife, war and bloodshed. Also, such promiscuity would destroy the moral infrastructure of society as the woman would have no specific male to afford her protection during her vulnerable period of pregnancy, childbirth and nursing. The result is a call for man to overcome the animal instinct by self-control (dabt al-nafs) and be allegiant to a monogamous marriage relationship. The male must seek the good of each family member to the same extent that he seeks his own.³¹

Muhammad Abduh opened up the way for a more thorough reform in Islamic thinking in regards to the status of women in Islamic society. His "fataawa" or formal legal decisions evidence an authentic grappling with the status of women in Egypt and in Islam. The forward vision of his efforts in such areas as modernization of conditions for divorce, the eradication of polygamy and women's education is evidenced by the fact that Egyptian society is still

³¹Abduh makes reference in this article to the "prophetic (literally "sent down") books" (al kutub al munazzala) as being the basis for a correct understanding of marriage. It is interesting to note that the concept of marriage which is presented in this article is quite close to the Christian concept in that it is monogamous, ("a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh") and it urges the husband to seek the welfare of his wife above himself ("husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Ephesians 5:25).

struggling to implement his suggestions which were made over a century ago. However, the practical application of his views leaves room for the question: "did he progress as far as he might have?" His "fataawa" indicate his grasp of the plight of women in Islam. However, his discussion of the nature of women as opposed to that of men reveals that his assessment of the innate nature of women was not totally in step with his battle for upholding women's rights in areas such as divorce.

CHAPTER II: THE JIHAAD

Muhammad Abduh played a significant role in recasting the Islamic concept of the the use of force or war in contemporary Islamic society. It is evident that he is battling on two fronts which are inseparable. He is seeking to reformulate the doctrine for his fellow Muslims while defending Islam against the charge that it was spread by dint of the sword. "The Muslims conquered the territories of men with the Qur'an in one hand and the sword in the other. They offered the Qur'an to the defeated and if it was not accepted their life was forfeit. Forsooth! this is a great slander."³² The concept of the Jihaad continues to be a source of tension in Islam. Muhammad Abduh sought to bring this concept into the light of modernist reform. He was not the first, nor does he claim to be, to take such a moderate position towards the jihaad. He states that the Koranic concept of the word is best discovered in its literal definition: "the enduring of hardship (mashaqqa) in encountering misfortunes (shadaa'id)."³³ He argues that the primitive Muslims (salaf) understood this to mean the individual believer's battle with his own lusts (shahawaat) especially during the years of youth. In addition several ancient scholars of Islam are quoted by Rashid Rida in his defense of the accusation that Islam was established by force. For example, Abii Dharr is quoted as saying "the preferable jihaad is the jihaad of

³²Muhammad Abduh, The Theology of Unity, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg, (London, 1966) p. 147.

³³Ibid., IV, 155.

the soul and that which resists passions." ³⁴

Rashiid Rida cites the well known verse "let there be no compulsion in religion" (laa ikraah fii al-diin... al Bakara 2:257) as a proof text against those who claim that Islam was established by the sword. He first explains the reason for the revelation of the verse (sabab al-nuzuul). The tribe of Bani Nadiir had broken a truce with Muhammad and attempted to attack him twice. Thus, the prophet ordered that the tribe be surrounded and forced out of Medina. It was at this point that some of the Muslims advocated forcing Bani Nadiir to become Muslims. Thus the revelation descended "Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error." (Bakara 256) Rida goes on to explain the reason for which killing was allowed, also preferring to interpret that this was a practice reserved for the early days of Islam. After quoting Bakara 2:193 "And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God," he states "killing was permitted in order to safeguard the call to Islam (da'wa) and to put an end to the evil of unbelievers so that the weak (believer) would not be disturbed in his faith before the right guidance (of Islam) was firmly established."³⁵ Muhammad Abduh carries on in the same vein:

The Muslims only used the sword in self-defence and in retaliation against aggression. Subsequently opening up of those territories to conquest was a necessity of statecraft. Otherwise good neighbourliness and immunity was the principle of Muslim relationships and a way whereby Islam came to be known for what it was.³⁶

³⁴Muhammad Rashiid Ridaa, Tafsiir al Manaar, vol 10, p. 307.

³⁵Ibid., III, 39.

³⁶The Theology of Unity, p. 147.

Abduh adds that religious sedition (fitna) is properly responded to in one of two ways. First, the expounding of true Islam to the instigators. The second means is the collection of the "djizia" (a tax imposed on non-Muslim beneficiaries of Muslim rule). The effect of both these means is to establish Islam firmly; the first, by its power to convince the unbeliever, and the second, by its firm grip on the reigns of power.

Furthermore, the Shaykh deems that such tactics are only practicable when Islam is in a position to wield authority. This, then is the purpose of "jihaad." It is not of the essence (jawhar) of Islam, but its proper role is that of a shield (junna) or fence (siyaadj) enabling Islam to maintain its position of authority such that religious sedition (fitna) can be checked while the freedom to call others to Islam (hurriyyat al- da'wa) is maintained.³⁷

There is an obvious effort on the part of Muhammad Abduh to recast the concept of jihaad and wrest it from the grips of those who understand it to sanction the use of brute force as a foundational tenet of Islam. Yet, the Shaykh himself sees a place for jihaad and he has clearly not discarded the Islamic concept of the role of religion in government for anything akin to the Christian concept of the separation of church and state. His view is that Islam must hold authority and practice the Jihaad, on the individual level through the purification of the soul, but also corporately by means of the proper exposition of Islam to its detractors.

³⁷Ibid., III, 39.

CHAPTER III: KORAN AND HADIITH

Now, we turn our attention to issues related to the sources of authority in Islam as viewed by Muhammad Abduh. These sources are, of course, the Koran and the Hadiith. We shall see that Muhammad Abduh's views on the inimitability (i'jaaz) of the Koran did not vary from those of his predecessors. However, he was innovative in his analysis of the relationship of the hadiith to the Koran and its proper place in the life of the Muslim. We will consider briefly Abduh's views on inimitability before analyzing Abduh's apologia concerning the "Swan Story." Then we will focus on the role of the hadiith.

Abduh argues skillfully for the inimitability of the Koran following two basic lines. First, the excellence of the revelation in both content and style. Secondly, the inability of its detractors to produce anything of similar quality. Of course, the entire argument is reinforced by the illiteracy of the prophet.

The excellence of the Koranic revelation is defended by Rashid Rida in the Manar Commentary by setting forth seven qualities of the Koranic revelation:

1. Its unconventional composition (natham), its peculiar meter (wazn), and its stylistic variance from any other form of speech known to the Arabs of that day.
2. Its inimitable rhetorical style.
3. Its revealing of divine mysteries (ghayb).
4. Its continuity of content
5. Its revelation of religious observances and judicial norms
6. Its timelessness (time has not nullified any of its content).
7. Its

revelation of scientific facts unknown to mankind during that era.³⁸

Abduh gives the context of the Koranic challenge to produce something of similar value to its revelation. He states that "the Quran was sent down at a time when, as is widely and confidently agreed, the Arabs had reached the finest point in their history. It was an age that was copious in literary eloquence and richer than any earlier time in men of noble speech and knights of the pulpit... His only argument on its behalf was to bid them outmatch even the shortest chapter of the Book or ten chapters. They were free to rally to this task all the learned, eloquent and literary pundits, to their heart's content, in order to rival Muhammad's deliverances and so confound his case and put him to rout."³⁹

Another aspect of Muhammad Abduh and Rashiid Rida's apologetic is their eagerness to defend the Koran against attacks of amendment or deletion during the process of the transmission of the Koran through generations. An excellent example of such a defense is found in the "Manar" of 12 June, 1903. The source of the attack is a Protestant magazine which had condensed some information from a book that was in circulation at the time. Most of the accusations in the article deal with the possibility of lost verses or additions to the Koran due to political rivalries or human error. One of the hadith which is quoted substantiating such a claim is attributed to al-shafaa'a and states: "May God have mercy on such a person (fulaan); he reminded me of a certain verse which I had let slip ('asqattuhunna)." The verb has another rendering which is "I had forgotten" (unsiituhunna). The position of the "Manar" on the hadith is that it is not properly authenticated. However, he deals with the possibility of the "isqaat," saying that it often

³⁸Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tafsiir al Manaar, vol 1, pp. 198-206.

³⁹The Theology of Unity. p. 119.

took place on the occasion of quoting verses from the Koran after prayer. The reasons for it could be anything from a desire to abridge the quotation to an attempt to test the memory of the listeners. However, this practice in no way establishes that portions of the Koran were forgotten since its contents had already been memorized by hundreds of Muslims. Another example of the accusation of certain verses being dropped from the contents of the Koran is Ali's having deleted a verse related to the "marriage of convenience" (al-mutʿa).⁴⁰ The tradition is related on the authority of Abd al-Massih al Kindi that Ali commanded that this verse be deleted and that whoever recited it should be beaten. Aisha is said to have accused Ali of corrupting (baddal wa harraf) the sacred text. The obvious defense is that Ali's followers, the Shiites, are those who practice the marriage of convenience. Why then should they be bent on its prohibition while Aisha supported its inclusion in the Koranic text?⁴¹

While defending the Koran against any accusation of "Isqaat," it is clear that the author does not hesitate to lash out at some points against his accusers thereby furnishing the article with an unmistakable polemic tone. The title and opening statement indicate this penchant. The title of the section is "The Vague Suspicions (shubhaat) of the Christians and the Proofs of the Muslims." The opening statement is a reference to the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount where his followers are asked, "why do you behold the mote that is in your brothers eye but take

⁴⁰al mutʿa literally means pleasure, enjoyment, gratification. The marriage referred to was a temporary arrangement exclusively for the purpose of sexual pleasure.

⁴¹al Manar (June 12, 1903), p. 217-220.

no notice of the beam that is in your own eye." Following this is a candid accusation directed toward Christians that their own book was written in an era subsequent to that of their prophet and it had indeed undergone significant rewriting at the whims of political rulers. It is clear that the writer of the article is attempting to establish Koranic authority while taking the opportunity to cast doubt upon Biblical authority.

The Swan Story:

One of the issues that continues to be of central interest to Muslim apologists is what has been labeled by orientalist as "the Satanic verses." The event in question is a story which has been related by the Islamic historian at-Tabarii concerning the descent of Suurat an-Najm verse 19-20: "Have ye seen Lat, and Uzza, and another, the third (goddess), Manaat?" The tradition then continues "as he was saying it to himself, eager to bring it to his people, Satan threw upon his tongue (the verses), "These are the swans exalted, whose intercession is to be hoped for."⁴² The Meccans were delighted to hear this apparent sanction of their gods and joined Muhammad in prostrating. Subsequently, Gabriel came to Muhammad and revealed to him the error of what he had recited as the Koran. This revelation is found in al-Hajj verses 52-55. "Never did we send an apostle or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw some (vanity) into his desire: but God will cancel (yansakh) anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and God will confirm (and establish) His signs: For God is full of knowledge and wisdom." It is in exegeting these verses that

⁴²Watt, Muhammad at Mecca, pp. 102-103. Abduh gives several different versions of the story in his commentary on the Fatiha, p. 132.

Muhammad Abduh gives his defense of the "swan story."

The first element of Abduh's defense is to establish a clear Koranic principle as a guiding light in dealing with an issue which is clouded by a great deal of ambiguity. The principle is the infallibility ('isma) of the prophets. Abduh states that the Koran has raised the status of the prophets from what was formerly believed about them, even by the adherents of the religions they came to proclaim. He further defines the nature of the prophets' infallibility by saying that it is a preserving them from lapse or oversight (zalal) during the delivery of the message.⁴³

The second element in Abduh's defense is his calling into question the accepted exegesis of the verse as Ibn 'abbas related it. The particular point which Abduh chooses to question is that of definitions of words, namely the meaning of the word "tamannaa" which Ibn Abbas defines as "kara'a" (to read/recite as in the recitation of the Koran). Its derivative, "'umniyya," is defined by Ibn Abbas as "kiraa'a" (recitation). Abduh points out that al-Bukharii, in relating Ibn Abbas' exegesis, translates the word "kiraa'a" but he also relates that Ibn Abbas, in explaining the word uses a different translation "hadiith." Thus, there is some incongruity of the meaning of this word. Is "kiraa'a" (meaning

⁴³Abduh touches only briefly on the doctrine of the infallibility of prophets in his Theology of Unity. His approach is similar to that of classic Islam: "Necessarily, inseparable from this is the duty of belief in their exceptional nature (fitra) or endowment, the soundness of their reason and the trustworthiness of their words, their fidelity in the communication of their message and their immunity from all that degrades human behavior, as well as their freedom in the body from all that is unseemly and gross. It is to be believed also that they are above everything that is inimical to these qualities. They partake in such measure in the soul of the Divine splendor that no human kind can presume against them any spiritual charge" (p. 78).

"Koranic recitation") the proper understanding or is the real meaning "hadiith" (which can be taken to mean any kind of normal speech including one's speech to himself or "wish")? Also, the word "alkaa" is called into question. Its normal meaning, "to cast," can be discarded as will be discussed below.

Abduh proceeds to expound the views of certain Koranic commentators and historians, such as Ibn Ishaq who states categorically that this story is an invention of unbelievers (zanaadiqa).⁴⁴ The views of other Islamic authorities ('a'imma) such as al qaadii 'ayyaad are given in summary fashion. His main argument is that the hadiith itself corresponds neither to the past teachings of Muhammad nor to the conditions of the burgeoning religion which would have obviously suffered an onslaught of criticism and significant attrition if such an event had actually taken place.⁴⁵

Then Abduh gives two possible exegeses of the verses depending on variants in translation as discussed above. First, the verse must be taken in its context which is dealing with prophets of the past and how they were rejected by those to whom they brought their message, "If they treat thy (mission) as false, so did the peoples before them (with their prophets), the people of Noah and Ad and Thamuud." (al-Hajj, verse 42). The "casting" of Satan's vanities into the "recitation" of the prophet then has nothing to do with the actual pronouncement of the message. It is rather its being misconstrued and misrepresented by the opponents of the message.

⁴⁴The interesting aside of this statement is that Abduh points out in a footnote that Ibn Ishaq is considered a falsifier (mudallis) of hadiith. See Tafsiir al Fatiha, p. 136.

⁴⁵Ibid, pp. 135-136.

This is consistent with the context of the passage which states that similar circumstances have surrounded each prophet's message. This interpretation depends not on the meaning of "tamannaa" but on the meaning of "'alkaa." The word is normally taken to mean "to cast or throw." However, Abduh points out that it can be used in the sense of corrupting another's speech by distorting its intended meaning or quoting what was not said under the pretext of communicating the speaker's intent.⁴⁶

The second acceptable exegesis of the verse is contingent upon the meaning of the word "tamannaa" and "'umniyya" as has already been discussed. Abduh suggests that the proper definition of the word is that of "wish" or "desire" as is reflected in Yussuf Ali's translation of the verse, "Never did we send an apostle or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw some (vanity) into his desire." The desire that possesses the prophet is that his own nation (qawm) come to the divine guidance of his message. This desire is combatted by Satan who casts every imaginable obstacle in the way of the prophet's fulfilling this great desire. In the end, the prophet is given the signs ('ayyaat) and the power (sultaan) to overcome the impediments that Satan has placed in the hearts of the hearers and the word of God gains the upper hand.⁴⁷

One can distinguish at least two principles of Abduh's dealing with difficult issues. First, he is free to question any tradition which seems to run against the current of any established Islamic doctrine. The infallibility of the prophets cannot be questioned

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 141-142.

as it is established by the Koran and confirmed by authentic Hadiith. The clear Koranic principle is given precedence over the tradition which, as will be discussed below, often suffered from additions and distortions. Secondly, Abduh shows no hesitation to discard, even disdain, the Koranic exegesis that has been passed down through the ages. This is admirable, but one senses the need for a clear warranting of such a discarding. As Montgomery Watt has pointed out in connection with the issue of the Satanic verses, "it is unthinkable that the story could have been invented later by Muslims or foisted upon them by non-Muslims."⁴⁸ The convincing qualities of Abduh's argument cannot be denied for those who hold to the Koranic principle of the infallibility of the prophet. However, for the non-Muslim (for whom the infallibility of the prophet is seldom a consideration), a clear mandate is needed for the disregard of tradition, especially tradition that is related on the authority of at-Tabarii.

Role of the Hadiith:

According to Abduh, the Muslim is bound to render obedience only to the sunna which can be considered "authentic." There are two types of traditions which may be considered authentic. First, those traditions which can be traced to the prophet through one of the companions (sahaaba). Secondly, such traditions as are related by the scholars of the companions on subjects related to the sense of the language used or the meaning of customary practice of the day.⁴⁹ Rashiid Rida followed Ibn Taimiya in disallowing such traditions as were related by converts from Judaism or Christianity

⁴⁸Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca, p. 103.

⁴⁹C. C. Adams, Islam and Modernization in Egypt, p. 200.

as well as heretics from Persian background. Traditions traced through Ka'b al Ahbaar and Wahb ibn Munabbah are refused in spite of the fact that the older commentaries relied on them heavily.

In explaining nisaa' 4:59 ("Obey God, and obey the apostle, and those charged with authority among you."), Abduh stresses that "those charged with authority over you" refers to "those who have authority to bind and release, the notables among our learned ones and leaders after having taken council together."⁵⁰ This is in contradistinction to elements of tradition that have been passed down through the generations which are said to have produced factions and even led to a complete denial, in extreme cases, of the need for the beginner to read the Koran and Sunna.

This was the thrust of Abduh's thought. Islam had to be returned to its pristine form. In the early days of Islam, its tenets were simple enough that the adherent could easily grasp them in "one sitting." Later centuries brought the complicated additions of jurisprudence and the science of theology. This has culminated, in the present time, in an Islam that is comprehensible only with great difficulty to the uninitiated. Thus, this cumbersome addition of the traditions has proved to be a stumbling block in the way of the progress of Islam. Only as the traditions which were added to the corpus of Islamic teaching through the years are stripped away will Islam return to its glory and be successful in elevating its adherents to a higher plane of civilization.⁵¹

In addition, Abduh and Rashiid Rida recognized that the

⁵⁰Tafsiir al Manaar, vol. 3, p. 10.

⁵¹C. C. Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt. p. 190.

classic commentaries and sources of hadith had become polluted with a wealth of Israelite stories. These were stories taken from Jewish tradition which commentators used to fill in background details from events in the Koranic text. Abduh and Rida castigated this practice.⁵²

In conclusion, both Abduh and Rida remained well within the defined norms of Islamic orthodoxy regarding the authority and inerrancy (iʿjaaz) of the Koran. They provided specific innovation in the field of defending the Koran against outside attacks of textual corruption. Abduh advocated a gleaning of the authentic hadith, according to established criteria, such that all those traditional sayings of the prophet which were not reliable could be deleted from their former authoritative status.

⁵²See Tafsiir al-Manaar, vol. 2, p. 455.

CHAPTER IV: PREDESTINATION

Muhammad Iqbaal has stated "the task before the modern Muslim is therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past."⁵³ Iqbaal goes on to establish a case for the freedom of the human ego based on three clear teachings of the Quran (the last of which is that man is "the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril.") as well as a host of references from modern psychological sources.⁵⁴ His approach combines an emphasis on modern science with an apologetic justification of the excesses of fatalism in Islam. Ultimately he ends up near the same place as Muhammad Abduh, if not even a bit further down the line in his assessment of the role of human freedom.

It is clear that Abduh was influenced by the ancient school of theology known as "Mu'tazilism." This has become known as the movement that introduced speculative theology into Islam. Some of the outstanding characteristics of this school of theology were its apologetic nature, its dependance on the Koran as the source of all religious precepts, its vigorous polemic toward other religions, its recourse to speculation and philosophy, and finally, its penchant toward intellectualism.⁵⁵ A separate study of this movement has pointed out that Abduh's departures from accepted

⁵³Muhammad Iqbaal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, (Lahore, 1944), p. 97.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁵Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, p. 424.

norms in theology were, in effect, a return to Mu'tazilism. As we shall see, Abduh's choice of terminology in his approach to the delicate issue of predestination versus free will indicate a reluctant acquiescence to Mu'tazilite theology.

The apologetic aspect of Abduh's approach to the doctrine of predestination (al-kadaa wa al-kadar) is seen from his opening remarks to an article dealing with this subject in "The Indissoluble Bond." Here he refers to a deviation (inhiraaf) in the proper understanding of a particular doctrine saying that its application, subsequent to this deviation, becomes a source of bad doctrine and corrupt practice over the course of time.⁵⁶ He also takes up this doctrine with apologetic fervor in his rebuttal of Hanotaux whom Abduh understood to have claimed that the Islamic concept of "kadar" devaluates man to the level of animals. Here, the Shaykh points out that monks can rightly be accused of abandoning their work while waiting on God to provide for their material needs and that this is indeed an extreme view of "kadar."⁵⁷

Abduh introduces the subject by distinguishing it carefully from the philosophy of "jabriyya" (fatalism) which came into existence around the fourth century of Islam but has since faded out. The claim of this school was that every action and decision of man derived directly from God. No allowance was made for the moral responsibility of man. Abduh insists that no Muslim holds to this form of the doctrine of predestination although he does concede that the doctrine has degenerated to something akin to this

⁵⁶al Urwaa al Wuthqaa, p. 49.

⁵⁷Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh al Ustadh al 'Imaam ash Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, vol. 1, pp. 400-401.

school of thought.⁵⁸

Abduh lays his own foundation for a proper understanding of the doctrine by characteristically hearkening back to the foundational tenets of Islam. He refers to the following as the "twin pillars of happiness and human activity. The first is that man, the servant acquires the means to happiness by his will and capacity. The second is that the Divine authority lie behind this acquisition as that from which all existents derive."⁵⁹ This "acquisition" (kasb) is enjoined on man by the divine relation as well as pressed upon him by the logic of all nature around him. "His works are throughout the consequence of his "acquisition" and choice."⁶⁰ Muhammad Abduh avoided an evident affiliation with Mu'atazilism through the choice of this word "kasb." Some Mu'atazilites opted for the use of the word "khaaliq" (creator) in describing man's actions while others preferred to avoid any appearance of "shirk" (belittling of the uniqueness of God, here in attributing "creation" to something other than God) and opted for the use of "mukhtari'" (inventor). Abduh chose the word that only the most cautious Mu'tazilites used, meaning "the acquisition of the power of transitive action."⁶¹ There is no declaration on the part of Abduh that he is attempting to make a break with conservative "Ash'arite" theology of his time, but such is the effect of his views.

⁵⁸al Urwaa al Wuthqaa, p. 52.

⁵⁹The Theology of Unity, p. 64.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 65.

⁶¹Malcolm H. Kerr, Islamic Reform and the Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 111.

Al qadaa' is defined as God's foreknowledge, while "al-qadar" is his calling into existence all that exists in its proper time. Neither of the two constrain one to act outside of his own free will and choice, through which God acts to produce results according to His will.⁶² The great backdrop to "acquisition" is the "divine authority" of God. It encloses man and "is the context of what the human will effectuates... His works are throughout the consequence of his "acquisition" and choice. Nothing in (Divine) knowledge dispossesses man of his option-taking in acquisition."⁶³

In dealing with this doctrine, there is an emphasis on "fitra" or innate reason which is a recurring theme in his theology. Man is in the precarious position of admitting that he does not understand the concourse of circumstances which have led him to take a particular action. He reacts to stimuli out of needs that are imposed on him by the nature of the universe. Thus, the phenomenon of nature has an undeniable authority over man's reason and will.

Abduh also insists that the proper understanding of the doctrine will result in renewed courage and intrepidity. "If one believes that the limit of one's life is appointed, and his daily sustenance provided, and all things are in the hands of God to direct as He will, how can he fear death in defence of the truth and in the service of his country and his religion."⁶⁴

Thus we see that Abduh seeks to extract the qualities of the

⁶²The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 2, p. 467.

⁶³The Theology of Unity, p. 65.

⁶⁴C. C. Adams, Modernism, pp. 154-155. Adams translates from the article found in al Urwaa al Wuthqaa p. 53.

doctrine of "al-kadaa wa al-kadar" giving an impetus to a renewed understanding of the doctrine. He praises the accomplishments of the early Muslim armies drawing the conclusion that their faith in God's "kadaa" was obviously a motivational factor or a catalyst in their accomplishing unparalleled exploits. He seeks to leave the doctrine in its pristine form, stripped of every hint of fatalism (jabriyya) while maintaining the difficult balance of the responsible moral action of man against the backdrop of God's transcendence. He seeks to "manipulate the doctrine of "al kadaa wa al kadar" into a concept of destiny in which man has an important role to play."⁶⁵ Having highlighted these two aspects of the doctrine, he sounds a familiar refrain: "However, to discuss further the reconciliation between the Divine prescience and the Divine will, already proved, and the evident power of human choice, is to attempt to penetrate the secret of "kadar," or destiny. In this we are forbidden to involve ourselves. It is useless to busy our minds with what they can scarcely attain."⁶⁶

⁶⁵P. J. Vatikiotis, "Muhammad Abduh and Muslim Humanism," Arabica 4 (1957), p. 67.

⁶⁶The Theology of Unity, p. 63.

CONCLUSION

The doctrines which have been dealt with were chosen for their unique importance in contemporary Islamic society. It is clear that Abduh was attempting to recast these concepts in such a way as to move Islam as a worldview out of stagnation, whether it be social, economic, religious, or political and into a viable role in the contemporary world. This is certainly his greatest contribution. His efforts exceeded the bounds of Koranic exegesis or Islamic legislation. He labored to return Islam to a foundation that would give it an elan towards productivity and self-realization. While seeking to move Islam forward, his trajectory was always towards pristine Islam. His conviction was that if the true intent of Islam were realized, progress would be the necessary result. Thus, his primary thrust was a reconstruction of contemporary Islamic thought by means of a return to the principles on which the religion was founded. He sought to show that society could function, indeed, flourish if it operated according to these principles. This reconstruction of the practical side of Islamic doctrine and practice is the first front on which Abduh waged his battle.

The second front of apologetic was toward those who attacked Islam from outside its walls. We have already made reference to the fact that he was reacting to the political dominance of the West in addition to a perceived cultural superiority. This superiority was manifested through both the formation of the branch of study known as orientalism and missionary endeavor. He repelled this misrepresentation by constant clarification of historical data

and/or dismissing of what had heretofore been regarded as historical--the traditions. Furthermore, he did not hesitate to come against any doctrine which opposed the clear principles of Islam whether such be a result of ambiguity in understanding the sacred revelation or an attempt to undermine the faith by its detractors, of which we will speak more in the ensuing pages.

SECTION III: APOLOGETIC AND CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION:

There can be no doubt that Muhammad Abduh was characterized by a breadth of understanding and experience which enabled him to hold constructive dialogue with those of other faiths. It will also become evident that he envisioned a certain cooperation between the major religions of the Middle East as playing an essential role in liberating the East from the scourge of colonialism and foreign dominance. Although he was fundamentally committed to the path of Islam as a means of reforming Egyptian and Eastern society, the tone of his approach toward those of other faiths was not disparaging, but conciliatory. The first chapter of this section will examine Abduh's formation of "The Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill" which we deem to be the primary example of this novel ability possessed by Abduh to be singularly committed to Islam, while conversant with those who have fundamental differences of opinion.

There is, however, a seeming discrepancy when Abduh begins to deal with Christianity in a theological vein. We will notice that his writings are not void of a polemical note as he rebuts both Farah Antoun and Gabriel Hanotaux. In the sixth chapter of this section we will delineate this polemic note seeking specific evidence for it in Abduh's writings. We will refer specifically to his rebuttal of Hanotaux and Antoun as well as to various other references to the Christian faith contained in his letters and writings. Then, we will examine the reason for this apparent incongruity in Abduh's approach to Christianity by linking it to

the two essential properties of Abduh's mission: his thorough commitment to Islam and his passion to cast off foreign domination.

Finally, in the seventh chapter, we will examine some of the theological positions which Abduh took relative to their Christian counterparts. We will look at the doctrine of the atonement (involving the question of the crucifixion of Christ), the doctrine of the incarnation, and the doctrine of the trinity. In addition, we will briefly examine Rashiid Rida's follow-up of these and some other doctrines in his commentary on the Koran in the form of an excursus.

CHAPTER 5: ATTEMPT AT DIALOGUE

Abduh was banished from Egypt as a result of his participation in the Uraby Revolt. He made his way to Syria and later joined Jamaal ad-Diin al-Afghani in France in forming a secret society known as "the Indissoluble Bond." The society published a periodical which bore the same name. Abduh was the vice president of the society whose goals, as stated by Rashid Rida, were "to return Islamic rule and religious guidance to their former state of purity, justice and equity by establishing an Islamic government according to the principle of the original Caliphate and the demands of the modern world."⁶⁷ This society was intended to rescue Muslims as well as other Easterners from political subservience to foreign powers. Only the most notable Muslims were allowed membership in "the Indissoluble Bond" after having taken an oath of allegiance to the principles of Islam and indicating their earnest desire to return the religion to its former glory. In spite of the brief existence of the society's periodical, its intention of heightening Islamic awareness of the glories of Islamic history and rallying its people around the banner of a return to such a glory, was entirely successful.

It has been noted that the intransigent tone of the articles of "The Indissoluble Bond" do not bear the characteristic stamp of Abduh's tolerance. It is clear that the periodical primarily

⁶⁷Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, p. 283.

reflected al-Afghani's thought, not Abduh's. For a more authentic reflection of Abduh's opinion, we turn to yet another secret society--"The society for Rapprochement and Goodwill" (jama'iyya at-taqriib wa at-ta'liif). The establishment of this society took place during Abduh's second sojourn in Syria which lasted roughly three and one half years. The features of the Sheikh's residence in Beirut provide background for the establishment of the society and deepen our understanding of Abduh's approach to those who differed from him in matters of religion. The sheikh had devoted himself to teaching in the Sultaniyya School as well as giving lectures in two of the outstanding mosques in Beirut. His weighty intellect had earned him quite a reputation as a scholar and educator. He was also very active in promoting the reform of education primarily in the Sultaniyya School but also in Egypt and Syria generally through his writings. It was said that leaders of every religious grouping frequented the Sheikh's residence and lectures. One of his students has pointed out that his philosophical approach enabled him to facilitate understanding between adherents of different religions: "Scholars of the Sunnies, "mujtahiduun" of the Shiites, the leading intellectuals of the Druze, Christian bishops and authorities of every denomination found the Sheikh's lectures to be a natural stopping place."⁶⁸ It has also been observed that many who came to hear the Sheikh came with an attitude of disdain toward Islam. Some of them were atheists and unbelievers, while others were adherents of other

⁶⁸Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, p. 402.

religions, notably Christianity. Inevitably, these left the presence of the Sheikh with an appreciation of Islam. Some may have even become Muslims, while preferring not to make their conversion public knowledge. What is evident is that the Sheikh had a unique ability to converse with adherents of other religions and expound the religion of Islam to them in such a way as to inspire within them a new respect and appreciation for this religion. The sheikh was thoroughly Muslim. He never made any concession of a theological nature to "win over" his hearers. His power lay in his breadth of knowledge and winsome manner with those who differed from him.

Upon arrival in Beirut of an old friend and colleague--Mirzaa Baaqir--Abduh found the occasion favorable for the establishment of "The Society for Rapprochement and Goodwill." The most notable distinctive of this society by comparison with "The Indissoluble Bond" was its obvious emphasis on the unity of the three faiths--Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The intent of the founding of this society was "the rapprochement between the three religions, the removal of discord between their adherents, the cooperation for the removal of foreign supremacy over the East, particularly the Muslims, and informing Europeans about true Islam."⁶⁹

The unfortunate fact is that we have relatively few extant documents which relate the activities of this society. However, we are able to gain a fuller appreciation of it from the work of two of its outstanding members--Isaac Taylor and Mirzaa Baaqir.

⁶⁹Ibid., vol. 1, p. 819.

ISAAC TAYLOR

Isaac Taylor was a British clergyman whose activities in the society made great strides toward achievement of its final stated goal--"informing Europeans about the truth of Islam." His articles in the British press were successful at revealing many of the virtues of Islam which tend to be overlooked in the West. Osman Amin has stated that "a whole series of letters and disputations revolving about his doubts passed between the English minister and the Egyptian sheikh... The Protestant cleric was amazed by the weighty intellect and penetrating judgment of the Muslim."⁷⁰ Muhammad Imaara has preserved two of these letters for us in his collection of the complete works of Muhammad Abduh. The opening paragraph of the first of these two letters is revealing of Abduh's trajectory as concerns the rapprochement of the major religions.

I was recently in Jerusalem for a visit of the holy lands which the three major religions revere. Here, the visitor is struck by the impression that the true religion is as a mighty tree from which numerous branches have spread out. The presence of differing leaves and branch networks in no way detracts from its unity of kind and species. It is correct that its resemblance in fruit, both in color and flavor, is condensed in the religion of Islam which has been nourished by its roots and veins. Islam is its epitome, and the objective of its growth. For [Islam] affirms the whole and magnifies all while calling to unity and union. (al-fardaaniyya). For this is the destiny of all creatures though their differences have attained a number which is beyond all limits.⁷¹

Although it seems probable that more letters passed between

⁷⁰Osman Amin, Muhammad Abduh, trans. by Charles Wendell, (Washington D. C., 1953), p. 72.

⁷¹The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 2, p. 365.

the two correspondents than the two which we have mentioned, they are representative of what he wrote to the British clergyman. Also, we are able to deduce some of the subjects which Abduh must have dealt with in his correspondence from the articles and sermons which Isaac Taylor penned concerning Islam. The subjects covered are the unity of the faiths through their father and originator-- Abraham, the unique position of Christ as a prophet in Islam, the Islamic prohibition of such vices as gambling, drunkenness and prostitution which are destroying Western society, the innate reasonableness of the religion for Africans and others who assimilate it quickly and Islam's limiting of polygamy as opposed to an unlimited sanction of it.⁷²

Isaac Taylor must have endured some amount of disdain from his compatriots as he issued a call for them to re-evaluate their former position on the colonized religion. His own position was clearly that Islam had succeeded in spreading its tenets in some areas where Christianity had met with failure and he did not discount the possibility that a union of the two faiths might be achieved, "Islam is very close to Christianity and Muslims are as Christians. Come, let us assist them on to completion in their religion without vainly trying to annul it. Perhaps we will find in Islam a Christianity and find Muhammad endeavoring to support Christ in his religion."⁷³

Abduh relayed to Taylor his enthusiasm for this new-found

⁷²Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, p. 823.

⁷³Ibid., vol. 1, p. 824.

positivism toward Islam. He was eager to extend a call to Taylor to deepen the bonds that would bring the two religions closer together. "Come, my friend. Let us agree on the basics in order to facilitate harmony on the secondary issues, let us agree on the Father, in order to facilitate unity on the Son."⁷⁴ Taylor was for Abduh a shining example of a Westerner who had discerned the essence and beauty of Islam. His words were a beacon for all who would be enlightened.

Taylor's original positivism toward Islam was eclipsed by a visit he made to Egypt. Abduh's opinion was that he was invited to Egypt by missionaries who found no other way to silence his pro-Islam propaganda than to accompany him on a tour of the taverns that he might ascertain the true state of Muslims. It was at this point that the note of positive enthusiasm became less prevalent. His writings continued to emphasize the possibility of rapprochement between the two religions, but his tone of magnifying the virtues of contemporary Islamic society was significantly diminished. In addition, Taylor stressed that Muslims were well within their rights in criticizing the apparent worship of icons and the virgin Mary in the Coptic Orthodox church. In addition he considered it reasonable that Muslims would not be apt to assimilate the contents of the writings of Protestant missionaries due to the seeming contradictions contained therein.

MIRZAA BAAQIR

One other outstanding member of "The Society for Rapprochement

⁷⁴The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 2, p. 366.

and Goodwill" deserves our attention. Mirzaa Baaqir was a Persian who had at one time been a convert to Christianity. During this stage of his life he had a confrontation with Jamaal ad-Diin al-Afghani in the port of Bushire in the Persian gulf. During this encounter, Mirzaa Baaqir was heard to utter an insult of the prophet Muhammad, upon which Jamaal ad-Diin ordered that he be beaten. The beating did take place and there was a desire on the part of some to burn the heretic's home.

It was not until Abduh and al-Afghani's residence in Paris and their collaboration on "The Indissoluble Bond" that Mizraa Baaqir entered the scene a second time. He brought news of his return to the fold of Islam and his desire to make amends for his days of apostasy by employing his magnificent intellect and memory in the service of "The Indissoluble Bond." This he did translating Persian, Arabic and English with relative ease. It was said that he had memorized large portions of the Koran and the Bible and could draw from his prodigious memory at will to refute whomever might oppose the sound principles of Islam.⁷⁵

It should be noted that Baaqir did not share Abduh's tendency toward rapprochement of the three major religions. Rather, his tendency was to engage in polemics and extend a frank call to the unbeliever to join the ranks of Islam. Abduh sought to keep Baaqir's tendencies in check as the two of them traveled throughout England speaking on the colonization of Egypt and the Sudan. On one occasion, Baaqir was awarded a prize of five hundred pounds for

⁷⁵Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, p. 817.

having rendered an ode of praise to the queen of England from either Persian or Urdu into poetic English. Baaqir's response was to return the prize to the queen insisting that the only recompense he sought was the conversion of her majesty to Islam.⁷⁶

It was due to Baaqir's contacts with liberal minded Englishmen and others that the Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill" was able to embrace a certain number of Westerners.

However, it would seem that the spirit and tone of the "Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill" is to be attributed to Abduh.

Although Mizraa Baqiir did not demonstrate the same open-minded posture towards other faiths which was characteristic of Isaac Taylor, he was a welcome member of "The Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill," largely due to his fervent commitment to the foundational principles of Islam. He was an eloquent apologist of Islam to non-Muslims and well-versed in the Christian Scriptures. His services were needed by the "Jama'iyya," and were used extensively.

THE AXIS OF ABDUH'S DIALOGUE:

There remains an important and salient ingredient to Abduh's vision of reform in the Muslim world. It is, quite simply, Abduh's fervent commitment to the religion of Islam. It is the scarlet thread of all his writings and, in fact, provides Abduh with his personal mandate as a thinker and reformer. While the West has excelled in erecting an edifice of modernity in their civilization, it is an edifice which remains void of moral and spiritual impetus

⁷⁶Muhammad Rashid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, pp. 817-818.

according to Abduh. Islam alone contains the proper combination of emphasis on the affairs of this life and the life to come which will enable it to become the inspiration of a great civilization for the Islamic nations of the East. This emphasis is clearly seen in both "The Indissoluble Bond" and "The Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill." It is evidenced in Abduh's call to the nations of the Muslim world to unite. Although Abduh was not in total agreement with Jamaal ad-Diin concerning the means of achieving pan-Islamic unity and bringing about reform, his writings leave little doubt that he sought the unity of the Islamic nations and chastised the current state of infighting among sister nations adhering to the religion of Islam.

Perhaps the most indicative feature of this tendency is the call to Muslims to forego the nationalistic affinities in favor of affiliation with the religion of Islam exclusively. The "Indissoluble Bond" repeatedly called for the suppression of nationalistic tendencies in favor of a profound commitment to Islam as the basis of unity.

Should they not then agree on matters of defense and attack? They must know that such an agreement is not an innovation on their part for agreement is a basic tenet of their religion. Are they struck by numbness such that they no longer feel their need of each other? Should not each one look to his brother as God has decreed "Indeed, believers are brothers." Thus they would erect a dam to divert the torrent which rains down upon them from all sides. By thus saying, I do not seek to establish one person as the ruler of all, which would be difficult. But, my hope is that the Quran would become their ruler and Islam the basis of their unity.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 284.

The oath to which allegiance was sworn by the members of "the Indissoluble Bond" is also indicative of Abduh's commitment to see Muslims unite and come to each other's defense. Members were to swear allegiance to an agenda of supporting one another and investing their energies in personal and corporate reform in order to return to the original intention of the establishment of Islam. The following is a translation of some of the articles of this oath which was penned by Abduh.

I swear by Allah who knows all things in their particular and general details, He who is both manifest and mysterious, who requites each man according to what he has earned, who punishes the criminal according to his crime that the book of God will be my standard in my works and morals without deviation from it.

...I swear to expend my best efforts in order to revive the brotherhood of Islam.

...I swear by the dread of God and his omnipotence to abide only by the institutes of religion. I will give precedence to what religion gives precedence and forego what religion instructs should be foregone. I will not take so much as one step which I deem to have an adverse effect on the state of religion...⁷⁸

It is this aspect of Abduh's character which gives a decisive color to his dialogue with Christianity. He is motivated by a pervasive commitment to Islam as the only legitimate means of reform whether it be of a personal nature or on the national and international scale. His commitment to Islam does not limit his ability to hold dialogue. However, his dialogue will always give evidence of this fundamental commitment.

CONCLUSION:

Although we have relatively few documents from the "Society of

⁷⁸Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 3, p. 287.

Rapprochement and Goodwill," we are able to deduce from the activities of the Sheikh in Beirut and the activities of the outstanding members of the society (such as Isaac Taylor) the prevailing sentiment that characterized it. That is, the thrust to bring unity to the different religious groups of the East in order that the domination of the foreign colonial powers might be cast off. While under the tutelage of Jamaal ad-Diin al-Afghani, this dimension of Abduh's character did not come into full maturity. The tone of "The Society of the Indissoluble Bond" is distinct from that of "The Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill" in that the former is exclusively Muslim and was essentially a society that promoted the political unity of the Arab world under the leadership of a modern-day Caliph. Abduh's discarding of this tenet is evidenced by a comment made to Rashiid Rida who consulted the Sheikh about one of the objectives of the "Manar" periodical which was to "make known the rights of the ruler (al-imaam) to the ruled (al-Umma) and the rights of the ruled to the ruler." Abduh's reply to this was that the people of the Muslim world know no ruler other than the Koran.⁷⁹ The two societies did hold in common the conviction that the countries of the East must cast off foreign dominance. However, Abduh's policy of gradual reform through education and a prevailing religious renewal was the motivating sentiment behind "The Society of Rapprochement and Goodwill."

We have seen that Abduh possessed the unique ability to hold constructive dialogue with people of other faiths. Indeed, in some

⁷⁹The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 1, p. 734.

cases he brought them into the fold of Islam, not by polemic and debate but by a clear demonstration of the foundational principles of Islam. We have also seen that the one motivating factor behind Abduh's activities in both the above mentioned societies is to cast off foreign dominance. He was conciliatory towards other faiths, but never given to making concessions. He carried out dialogue, but never acquiesced.

The two aspects that characterized all his relations with those of other faiths were his emphasis on the necessity of liberating the East from the shackles of the colonizing powers and his unswerving, sometimes passionate, dedication to the foundational principles of Islam as a sufficient structural base for the resurrection of a truly great civilization. These two aspects of Abduh's treatment of other faiths in general and specifically Christianity will take on more importance in the following chapter as we examine Abduh's treatment of Christianity where the propagation of its teaching intersected with the objectives of the colonizing powers which he was determined should be removed.

CHAPTER 6:A POLEMIC NOTE

ABDUH'S REBUTTAL OF FARAH ANTOUN:

Although Abduh's predominant tendency was towards dialogue and the free exchange of ideas even in matters of religion, he did engage in a type of polemic under certain circumstances. Our objective is to carefully show this polemic in Abduh's writings before proceeding to analyze the circumstances which occasioned this seeming incongruity in Abduh's thought. First, we will examine his rebuttal of Farah Antoun Effendi contained in his well-known work Islam and Christianity (al-Islaam wa al-Nasraaniyya).

Farah Effendi was a Syrian who emigrated to Egypt at the same time as Rashiid Rida. The two had been acquainted in Syria and their cordial relationship carried over into their stay in Egypt until Farah Effendi penned an article in "al Jami'a" (a periodical which he had established) dealing with the philosophy of Ibn Rushd (Averroes). The article led to a flurry of correspondence between Rida, Abduh and Farah Effendi and ultimately a complete break in their relationship and the demise of "al Djaami'a."⁸⁰ Rashid Rida indicates that Muhammad Abduh's rebuttal of the article caused Farah to "weep with his head between his hands," such was its force. However, this is questionable given that Farah Effendi was yet confident enough subsequent to the interchange to author a book of 235 pages dealing with Averroes and

⁸⁰Rashid Rida, Tariikh al Ustadh al 'Imam as Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, (Egypt, 1931) pp 805-816.

his philosophy.

Abduh chooses four essential elements in Farah Effendi's article dealing with the philosophy of Ibn Rushd which he will make the object of his rebuttal. First, he claims that Islam is tolerant (tasaamuh) exclusively of its own adherents. Secondly, among the ranks of Islam are factions (tawaa'if) which have engaged in bloodshed on the basis of doctrinal differences. Third, the nature of Islam as a religion does not lend itself to tolerance of scientific progress while the nature of Christianity facilitates such progress. Fourthly, the current state of progress in Europe is the fruit of Christian religious tolerance.⁸¹ It will be observed immediately that the tone of Antoun's article is quite polemic. Thus, a polemic rebuttal would be expected. In addition, it should be noted that Antoun is not representative of classic Christianity. Of these four points, we are primarily concerned with the third because, in defending it, Abduh expounds the foundational doctrines of both Islam and Christianity.

Abduh begins his defense of the tolerance of Islam towards scientific progress by comparing the foundational tenets ('usuul) of the two religions Christianity and Islam. His method is to derive these tenets from the writings of those who were the original recipients of the religion.⁸² He lists six tenets of the

⁸¹Al 'A?maal al Kaamila, vol. 3, p 250.

⁸²Ibid., p. 259. Abduh's continual reference to Christian sources is a recurring aspect of his apologetic. It is predominant in both the cultural/historical apologetic and the theological.

Christian faith in addition to eight foundational principles of Islam. It is in the comparison of these foundational principles of the two religions that one senses the note of polemic in Abduh's writings. Our method shall be to take the principles which Abduh deems to be foundational for Islam and make comparisons with those chosen for Christianity.

The first distinctive of Islam is rational reflection in the acquisition of knowledge. Abduh stresses that this reflection is the true means (*wasila*) of faith and that Islam insists on the presentation of rational proofs before acceptance of an article of faith. This principle finds its counterpart in the fourth principle of Christianity, namely "faith in the irrational" (*ghayr al-ma'kuul*). Abduh stresses that all Christian groups (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) agree that faith is a gift and "has nothing to do with reason" (*laa dakhil lil'akl fiihaa*). Furthermore, they insist that religion is above the human mind which is tantamount to saying that it contradicts reason. The obvious implication is that, if the Christian's rational reflection on the world around him contradicts his faith, he is caught in an impasse.⁸³

The second item is the priority of reason over the apparent sense of the judicial law if the two are in contradiction. Through history, Islamic scholars have agreed that reason (*'akl*) takes precedence over tradition (*naql*). In addition, when dealing with

⁸³The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 3, p.282 and p. 262.

tradition (nakl) there are two accepted methods. The first is to acknowledge the truth of the transmission, even if its apparent meaning is unintelligible, accompanied by the referral of its true interpretation to God. The second is interpretation (ta'wiil) of the transmission in accordance with established grammatical rules so that its meaning complies with reason. This principle has an interesting, though not perfect, counterpart in the fifth principle of Christianity, namely "that the Bible contains all that is necessary for man's happiness." Tertullian is quoted as saying that the Bible not only teaches mankind the proper exercise of religion, but also, all he is destined by God to know about the cosmos. This teaching of the Bible thus becomes a given (yajib tasliimahu) no matter how it contradicts reason and the empirical senses.⁸⁴

The third distinctive of Islam is its inclination to refrain from accusing anyone of being an infidel. (al bu'd 'an at-takfiir). Abduh points out that one of the principles of Islam is to judge any speaker, not by the criteria of whether or not his statement can be construed as that of an infidel, but whether or not it can be construed as that of a believer. Even if the statement is 99% be construed as that of a believer. Even if the statement is 99% that of an infidel, the speaker is given credit for being a believer based on the 1% that might indicate his faith. In contradistinction to this principle of Islam is the sixth tenet of Christianity which is "the severance (tafriiq) between Christians and non-Christians even though they be kinsmen." This principle is

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 282 and p. 263.

deduced from Jesus' words in Matthew 10:34: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Abduh points out that the gospel affirms many times that faith is the sole requirement for receiving salvation, but that a spirit of severity (shidda) resulting from the verse quoted above, has replaced the more deserving elements of Christ's teaching by leaving a lasting impression on his followers.⁸⁵

The fourth distinctive is the essential role established laws of God in creation in calling mankind to faith in Islam. After the prophets, all those who propagate Islam must do so on the basis of fixed proofs, not miracles or wondrous works. Christianity on the other hand was established by miracles (khawaarik) and depends exclusively on miracles not only for the validation of Christ's ministry, but also that of his followers. Matthew 17:20 declares "truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, "move from here to there" and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you." Abduh points out that the entire cosmos is based on the establishment of God's laws and the relationship of cause and effect. Hence, this principle of breaking the laws of the universe by means of faith goes against all sound knowledge and voids the adherent of religion of any need of a rational approach to the universe around him.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 283 and p. 264.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 283 and p. 262.

The fifth foundational tenet of Islam is the complete overturning of the concept of religious political divine right. In Islam complete authority is given to God alone as His will is expressed in the Koran and to the prophet. Furthermore, each Muslim bears the responsibility of rightly interpreting the Koran and educating himself in order to be fitted for that task. The second foundational principle of the Christian faith is the counterpart of this principle: "the authority of rulers." Abduh derives this principle from Matthew 16:19 where Jesus states to the apostle Peter: "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Hence, the appointed ruler in Christianity is allowed to decide who is a Christian and who is not. The believer is not allowed to act according to his own conviction and, should he decide to investigate matters of faith, the grip of the religious ruler will prohibit such an investigation.⁸⁷

Sixth, Islam prescribes the protection of the "call" to Islam (da'wa) as a guarantor against religious sedition (fitna). Abduh stresses that war and killing are not inherent in Islam as are forgiveness and pardon. Killing is only prescribed in instances where Islam has been assaulted (u'tudiya 'alayhi). This is one of the eight foundational principles of Islam that has no obvious counterpart in the six principles of Christianity.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 285 and p. 261.

⁸⁸Ibid., p.289.

The seventh distinctive is Islam's friendly affection (mawadda) towards those who reject it. Abduh's premise is that Islam guarantees the same rights to a Christian or Jewish wife as it does to a Muslim wife. She is not prohibited from practicing her own religion. This principle corresponds with the sixth principle of Christianity, "the severance between Christians and non-Christians even though they be kinsmen," which has been discussed above.

The final tenet is the uniting of temporal concerns with those of the hereafter. Islam gives particular attention to the maintenance of earthly position and wealth. Christ's injunction to one inquirer to "sell all that you have and come and follow me," is seen in the light of Muhammad's response to a similar inquiry concerning how much money should be given as alms. His response is one third. This principle corresponds with the third principle of Christianity which is "forsaking (tark) the world." The Christian is called to forsake the world and concentrate solely on the hereafter in passages such as Matthew 6:24-25: "You cannot serve God and Mammon (riches). For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what to put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?" Abduh postulates "what will be the portion of the believer in this principle concerning a rational examination of any (branch) of science? Science has nothing to do with the hereafter..."⁸⁹

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 293 and p. 261.

Much could be said by way of analysis of the foundational doctrines of the two religions. However, we point out one consideration which is obvious from the whole. The pivotal issue of the entire presentation is the question of knowledge and tolerance of scientific advance. Which of the two religions is more apt to be tolerant of scientific inquiry? In our assessment this was the starting point for Abduh's assessment of the foundational doctrines of both religions. It is clear that the discussion is not a theological treatise discussing the cardinal dogma of each religion. If such were the case, the doctrine of the unity of God would figure pre-eminently in the list of the Muslim doctrines as would the doctrine of redemption in those of the Christian faith. Farah Antoun's premise is that Islam has manifested an intolerance toward scientific progress throughout the course of its history. Abduh is anxious to display the error of this thesis. Hence, his central concern is demonstrating that the opposite is true. Christianity is not tolerant toward scientific progress while Islam is.

Given this over-riding concern of Abduh, it is possible to understand why Christianity received such a cursory and, at times, errant analysis. It is clear that much of Abduh's exegesis of the New Testament is questionable at best. This is demonstrable by the simple fact that no ecclesiastical gathering would consent to Abduh's six foundational principles of Christianity as being a valid synopsis of their faith. At times his deductions do not follow necessarily from the verses quoted and it is an unfortunate

fact that they seldom resonate with the tone of the whole of the Christian scriptures. There are yet other instances where Abduh's assessment of a particular aspect of the Christian faith is virtually correct. However, the inference he draws from the principle is in error. The centrality of miracles (principle #1) is an example. While it is true that miracles have played an essential role in validating the message of the prophets, it is a fallacy to deduce that the manifest effect of a sincere faith in Christianity is to ascribe little or no value to a rational analysis of the relation of cause and effect in the created order.

Finally, an interesting comment comes from Abduh in a letter to his protege Rashiid Rida. It is an ample demonstration of the sheikh's hesitancy to be involved in matters of a polemical nature. It is taken from his correspondence with Rashiid Rida on the occasion of the publishing of the Sheikh's rebuttal of Farah Antoun. It should be mentioned that the statement has two possible implications. The first is that Abduh feels Christian doctrines are "a deceiver." The second is that Farah Antoun or the summation of his views is the "deceiver."

...and what I had hoped to ascertain was if the Christians were pleased with my show of courtesy. I feared that they might find something wherewith to criticize me on this account. As for any pain they felt in regards to the truth, it would not be proper for me to regret it ('ashukk fiih) because if the deceiver does not feel pain from being exposed to the truth, from what will he then feel pain?⁹⁰

Interestingly, Abduh prohibited the publishing of the final statement contained in this quote during his lifetime. It is

⁹⁰Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 3, p. 809.

obvious that Abduh was intensely committed to the truth which Islam represented. He is anxious that this zeal not exceed proper bounds into a show of discourtesy.

ABDUH'S REBUTTAL OF GABRIEL HANOTAUX:

Garbriel Hanotau was the French minister of Foreign Affairs. He penned an article in the "Journal de Paris" in 1900 in an attempt to acquaint the French with the Muslim faith and force the French government to a realization of the differences which separate the two faiths and thus draw up a statement of principles determining standards of conduct toward the Islamic peoples. Essentially, Hanotau interprets Islamic history asserting that two doctrines of Islam are crucial to an accurate understanding of the formation of its culture. They are the doctrine of the unity of God and the doctrine of predestination (kadar). Standing in contradistinction to these doctrines are the Christian concepts of the trinity and man's free will.

Abduh's plain assertion is that Christianity had little to do with the formation of what is known as Western civilization. He draws this conclusion from the content of the gospel. Such injunctions as not being concerned over matters of temporal significance and "turning the other cheek" when persecuted have completely disappeared from Western culture. Furthermore, an example of authentic followers of the teachings of the gospel are to be found in a small group of Americans who have forsaken home and labors in order to wait for the return of Christ in Jerusalem.

After a discussion of Western civilization's borrowing of many of its arts and sciences from the East, Abduh proceeds to discuss the issue of predestination as opposed to free will and the implications of the respective views. Abduh's tendency is to first demonstrate Hanotaux's failure to take into consideration a wide range of variation in the Christian consensus. He shows that certain Christian sects have come extremely close to "fatalism" (al-jabriyya). He then points out that while no Jew can be accused of neglecting to seek out his daily living, monks live a life of isolation from the world.

Next he proceeds to expound the proper Koranic concept of the doctrine of "kadar." He states that the Koran teaches man's acquisition ('iktisaab) in more than 64 separate passages. He proceeds to state that man exercises his freedom of choice in his own actions. However, in the various instincts and temperaments which are distributed among the peoples of the world, man's choice plays no role. It is a matter of God's predestination. Further evidence is marshalled from the life of the prophet who was unflagging in his efforts to carry out his mission to the fullest. Finally, Abduh gives his assessment that the original Islamic doctrine of "kadar" has been polluted by foreign intrusions into Islam. This is one of the reasons for the current state of stagnation in the Muslim world.

Abduh's recasting the mold of the Islamic doctrine of Predestination has received a vast amount of attention and our objective is not to assess this aspect of Abduh. Rather, we are

concerned with his particular treatment of Christianity. Two aspects are noteworthy. First, Abduh does not credit the religion of Christianity with the progress of contemporary Western society. While Abduh's argument that Christian values no longer form the moral basis for Western culture is generally true, his total divorce of the religion from the society is unwarranted. One would expect a more realistic assessment of the role of the Christian faith in the formation of Western society accompanied by a careful delineation of the forces that have shaped European culture. Secondly, Abduh does not hesitate to turn the tables on Christianity. His mention of the retirement of monks to their cloisters without bothering to provide for their daily needs is characteristic of this tendency. Islam, while being accused of being a fatalistic faith, actually combats an erroneous concept of "kadar." Christianity, on the other hand has given rise to certain expressions of fatalism that remain in existence until the present day.

Abduh's treatment of the contrasting doctrines of "tanziih" (transcendence) and "tashbiih" (immanence) in his rebuttal of Hanotaux will be dealt with more specifically in the following chapter. It is sufficient to point out two contrasting characteristics. First, on two occasions in the article, Abduh states his desire not to defame (ta'ana fii) Christianity. This corresponds with the penchant for tolerance which possessed the Sheikh. Secondly, he creates within the reader the impression that the Christian tenet of the incarnation (tadjassud) is a form of

paganism (wathaniyya). His thesis is that mankind has struggled through history to come to a proper and correct understanding of God as a God of unity. The greatest and most advanced civilizations have come to this realization. He then asks the penetrating question: "Was Christianity, in ancient times, struggling against the adherents of paganism only to return them to another form of paganism?"⁹¹ Abduh does give the Protestant reformation credit for cleansing the religion of many of its excesses. However, the reformation did not do away with the doctrine of the incarnation. Hence, although Abduh's desire to refrain from criticism of Christianity is noteworthy, his ardent commitment to the principles of Islam (namely "tawhiid") constrains him to take on a critical tone.

CONCLUSION:

From the preceding it may be observed that there is an incongruity between the preceding presentation of Abduh's tolerance toward those of other faiths (chapter 5) and the treatment he gives Christianity particularly in his rebuttal of Farah Antoun. There are three considerations that shed light on this seeming incongruity.

First, Abduh was passionately committed to the propagation of the principles of Islam as the means for reform of the Islamic nations. Although much has already been said regarding this issue, we stress the fact that Abduh viewed it as his own mission in life, a personal agenda which motivated all his activities. A telling

⁹¹The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 3, pp. 216-217.

example of this passion is found in the account of Rida concerning a personal encounter with Abduh. Rida went to the Sheikh one Ramadan afternoon and was told that he was asleep. Realizing that it was not his practice to sleep at this hour of the day, Rida later inquired about the reason for the Sheikh's slumber. The Sheikh's reply:

"my contemplation [was] about the current state of Muslims and how they are withheld from courageous achievements due to their remoteness from their religion and their pursuit of trifles and lusts. The thought grew in its power and my nervous system grew agitated such that my soul spoke to me that I should go out to the public places such as al-Musquee and al-Ezbekiyya and stand in the street or in front of a cafe and call "O people, what offensive element have you seen in your religion which has caused you to forsake it? What have you seen in that which you choose for yourselves which has caused you to imitate it. Then I would address them about the truth of their plight and the consequences of what they are involved in as well as the means of being spared from them."⁹²

Accompanying this deep sense of personal mission is the second aspect which was a determinative factor in the apparent incongruity of Abduh's approach to Christianity. Abduh was fervently committed to the liberation of his homeland from subservience to foreign powers. This inclination had led him, in his earlier years, to participate in the Uraby revolt in spite of the fact that he preferred a more gradual reform to an armed uprising. He had passionately defended the cause during a visit to England. He had participated in two secret societies whose ultimate objective was one and the same albeit the means of achieving that objective as well as the constituency of the societies differed widely. His

⁹²Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, p. 965.

mentor, al-Afghani, was also committed to this cause. Thus, Abduh was not merely engaging in theological polemic, he viewed the assault of Christianity on Islam as the precursor and necessary comrade of Western political dominance. The following excerpt from Abduh's rebuttal of Hanotaux illustrates: "...Mr. Hanotaux does not deny that Europe depends on religion in their colonizing policies. Also, the missionaries and religious groups are among their most important means of preparing a people to accept their rulership... It opens previously closed doors which arms alone are not able to penetrate and prepares means of entry which the soldier's strong arm is incompetent to prepare."⁹³

Other writings such as a letter on the subject of reform addressed to the Sheikh al-Islam at Constantinople echo the same theme. He refers to the foreign devils from France, England, Germany and America who have attempted to undermine the loyalty of the Muslim peoples. This is accomplished by establishing schools which win the sympathies of the Muslim peoples to the countries represented by the schools.⁹⁴

An aspect of Abduh's writings which combines both his fervent commitment to the fundamentals of Islam and his passionate plea to cast off foreign dominance is found in an article entitled "Islamic Unity." Abduh states that the greatest pillar (al-rukn al-'azam) of the religion of Islam is the injunction to the Muslim to cast

⁹³Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 469.

⁹⁴Sami Abduhhal Kaloti, The Reformation of Islam and the Impact of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh on Islamic Education (Ann Arbor, Michigan 1981), p. 118.

off the foreign dominator and cast him out of Muslim lands.⁹⁵ Thus, Abduh's call to rise above foreign domination is at the heart of Islam. The right practice of Islam cannot be achieved in a condition of submission to outside non-Muslim powers. His views on the jihaad also reflect the necessity that Muslims be under Islamic rule. The jihaad can be understood as the struggle to maintain the upper hand of authority for Muslims. In yet another article Abduh promotes the maintaining of "'asabiyya" suggesting that one of the tactics of the foreign intruder is to destroy this "esprit de corps" that characterizes the Muslim peoples.⁹⁶ His exhortation is to let this collective identity be preserved and ruled by justice.

A final consideration may provide ample justification for Abduh's polemic tone in his rebuttal of Antoun and Hanotaux. Antoun, in essence, had made a statement concerning the nature of Islam and its tolerance toward scientific progress. Thus, the pattern was established of the "other" who was attempting to analyze and evaluate Islam from the outside. His analysis was obviously biased. In Abduh's assessment, such an evaluation warranted an intransigent tone in the rebuttal. Hanotaux, on the other hand, is evaluating Islam from the perspective of the foreign colonizing power. Indeed, Abduh had traveled in the Islamic

⁹⁵Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 281.

⁹⁶"'asabiyya" is often translated as "fanticism." We prefer to render it as "esprit du corps" as it seems that this is closer to Abduh's intention. The reference is found in Tariikh, vol. 2, pp. 262-263.

countries colonized by France and made reference to them in his rebuttal. Hanotaux assures his readers in a subsequent interview that he had no intention of attacking Islam. In addition, some of his ideas were poorly translated into Arabic. However, the inevitable result of an outside evaluation is that the insider will perceive it to be an attack. Such was the case with Hanotaux.

While we readily admit that neither Hanotaux nor Antoun represent an orthodox Christianity, Abduh does respond to them largely from the documents of the New Testament and Church history. Therefore, Abduh is stating his views on the Christian faith, not merely reacting to the views of the two aforementioned writers. By examining Abduh's rebuttal of both Farah Antoun and Gabriel Hanotaux, we have seen that his assessment of Christianity did not always maintain his typical charitableness and conciliatory nature. He seems to emphasize irrational elements of the religion and, at times, can be understood as deriving his own fundamental doctrines without consulting what ecclesiastical councils and creeds of the Christian faith might have regarded as their foundational tenets. We have attempted to show that this atypical treatment of the Christian religion can be explained by two factors. First, Abduh was fervently committed to casting off foreign dominance and secondly, Abduh was driven by his consuming commitment to the principles of Islam. In addition, the nature of Antoun's and Hanotaux's articles warranted a polemic tone. Together, the first two aspects gave Abduh a sense of personal mission. The encroachment of Christianity was seen through the lens of these two

characteristics of Abduh. Foreign missionary endeavor (and all it entailed in terms of education, publications, etc.) was primarily a means of penetrating Eastern societies and preparing them for Western domination. Also, the Christian doctrines of the trinity and incarnation seemed to be diametrically opposed to Abduh's understanding of the unity of God ("tawhīd"). Of which we will speak more in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

The position of Muhammad Abduh on some of the essential Christian doctrines sheds yet further light on his views of the religion. We will limit our discussion to the specific doctrines of the trinity, the incarnation (Christ as God becoming man) and the doctrine of the atonement (Christ's death as a payment for the penalty of man's sin). These doctrines have been chosen on the basis of three criteria. First, they are doctrines which are central to virtually every branch of the Christian church. Secondly, they are doctrines which have historically highlighted the theological parting of ways between Christianity and Islam. Hence, Abduh's positions on them would be of great importance in a discussion of his dialogue with Christianity. Finally, these doctrines were chosen due to Abduh's dealing with them specifically in the literature.

It will become evident that Rashiid Rida dealt with each of these doctrines extensively (as well as the issue of the inerrancy/corruption of the Christian scriptures). We will limit our observations to Abduh's positions on these doctrines in spite of the fact that Rida was convinced that Abduh would have approved the entire Manar Commentary. Rida's treatment of Christianity was markedly more polemic than that of his mentor. (For a more complete discussion of Rida's approach to Christianity, consult the excursus.)

UNITY AND TRINITY

As a start, it is helpful to give a synopsis of Abduh's principles in regards to the Islamic tenet of the unity of God before looking into his concept of the Christian trinity. He defines the doctrine in Risaalat at-Tawhiid as "the belief that God is one in inalienable divinity...From Him alone all being derives and in Him alone every purpose comes to its term."⁹⁷ The right and proper exercise of theology leads one to posit to God those attributes that are His of necessity while emphasizing his being exalted above any attribute that is improper. Abduh's philosophical defense of the doctrine of unity is based essentially on the impossibility of God's existing in any other fashion. For example, the "non-compositeness" of God becomes a basic presupposition because if God were deemed to be composite the elements of his composition would necessarily precede the essence. God is essence, which by its very definition, exists of necessity, that is to say, God exists in and of himself. If he were constituted of elements, it would have to be conceded that these elements necessarily preceded God in order to form the composite essence. Hence, the existence of God becomes predicated on the existence of his constituents. This is not acceptable because His existence is not predicated on anything. God necessarily exists with no compositeness in his being.

Hand in hand with the "non-compositeness" of God goes his

⁹⁷Muhammad Abduh, The Theology of Unity, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg, p. 29.

indivisibility--God has no extension.⁹⁸ Thus, all existents (man and the created order) derive being and existence from God as opposed to God who exists necessarily. Therefore, man's knowledge of God is rightly formed by his empirical analysis of the effects of the existents, not by an attempt to penetrate beyond this veil to a knowledge of the divine essence. Such is the intent of the hadiith, "ponder the creation of God, but do not take your meditations into the Divine essence, or you will perish."

Any right estimate of human reason will agree that the utmost extent of its competence is to bring us to the knowledge of the accidents of the existents that fall within the range of human conception, either by senses, or feeling or intellection and then from that to the knowledge of their causation and to a classification of their varieties... But reason quite lacks the competence to penetrate to the essence of things.⁹⁹

The summation of the doctrine is given in an article entitled "Tawhiid" by Muhammad Abduh. The two essential points are the "tawhiid" of God in his works and essence and his transcendence over any likeness (mushaabaha) in the created order. His attributes (siffaat) are seen in the created order (such as knowledge, power, will, etc.) but he is not to be likened to any of them for there is no inter-relation (nisba) between God and his creation.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the transcendence of God is magnified to such an extent that God is knowable only through his attributes. His nature

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁰The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 3, p. 440.

(dhaat) is not accessible to man. His acts are visible and open to empirical analysis, but His essence remains transcendent beyond the reach of human reason. It would seem that it is at this point that Abduh's doctrine of God's transcendence and Christianity's emphasis on the immanence of God part ways. While the doctrine of the trinity rightly understood does lay some emphasis on the mystery of God and his unapproachableness, its distinctive feature is a balancing emphasis on the immanence of God. Thus the Islamic doctrine of unity carries the doctrine of God's ultimate transcendence as its necessary companion. While the concept of an immanent God (a God whose nature is revealed to man) is the necessary companion of the Christian concept of the trinity.

Abduh expounds that Christianity, at its outset, gave strong impetus to transcendence. Abduh's persuasion is that there is no hint of immanentism (tashbiih) in the writings of the original gospels. Only later, in the reign of Constantine, was this extrapolation propounded.

Transcendence (at-tanziih) was the mainstay of their (the Christian's) call. This is evident to all who carefully consider their words. No hint of immanence (tashbiih) appeared in [Christianity] until centuries after its establishment. The history of the emperor Constantine is well known among men of learning and there is no need to expound the details.¹⁰¹

Abduh proceeds to ask the question, as was noted earlier, "did Christianity struggle against paganism only to return its adherents to paganism?" Hence, the intent of the author is clear. Any

¹⁰¹The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh. vol. 3, p. 216.

understanding of the Divine Essence in such a way that lends itself to "tashbiih" or attributing God's nature and essence to anything temporal, human or worldly is unacceptable.

One observation is noteworthy before proceeding to a discussion of the doctrine of the incarnation. Abduh sought to understand the doctrine of the trinity on the basis of the Christian scriptures. His penchant is to examine the gospels themselves without accusing them of being altered and thus no longer appropriate for determining the essential elements of Christian theology (such was not the case with Rida). Also, as has already been noted, it is as though Abduh approaches a line of appropriate behavior towards the other faith. This line has been established in his own mind as the standard which should not be violated. Upon sensing his proximity to this line, he quickly deviates and points out that it is not his business to criticize Christian doctrine. Immediately following his question concerning Christianity's struggle against paganism and its return of its adherents to paganism he states: "We seek refuge from God from this haphazard action which comes from one who is a lover but not a scholar. My courtesy prohibits that I defame the Christian faith in a newspaper, for I have been commanded to "debate according to what is preferable..."¹⁰² This, we believe to be further corroboration for our thesis that Abduh was driven by a fervent commitment to the essential doctrines of Islam. Abduh does mention in passing some Protestant groups whose doctrine of the trinity he

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 217.

finds to be palatable. However, it is unclear just who these groups are and is therefore difficult to assess how well Abduh grasped their doctrine or if they can be considered as being in the mainstream of Christian doctrine. The fact remains that "tashbiih" is diametrically opposed to "tanziih" and therefore it is inappropriate that it should be attributed to God.

THE INCARNATION

The Christian concept of the incarnation is the clearest manifestation of what has been referred to as "tashbiih." According to this doctrine,

The Son of god, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VIII, Article II)

This doctrine of the incarnation is central to the Christian faith. The question that must be explored is "how did Muhammad Abduh deal with this doctrine?" The first and most obvious characteristic is Abduh's equating the doctrine of the incarnation with "tashbiih" which cannot be attributed to God. "Tashbiih" can be translated as "anthropomorphization" which is the attributing of human characteristics to God. However, this is not referring to

using anthropomorphisms as a linguistic expression to convey truth about God (ie. "the hand of God" or "the voice of God"). Abduh's prohibition, and indeed the prohibition of Islam against "tashbiih," is the literal attribution of human characteristic to God. The concept behind the word is captured in Abduh's comment on the use of anthropomorphisms among the early Muslims. "The Arabs who were recipients of the book (the Koran) experienced no confusion when they came upon expressions such as "the face, the two hands," etc (of God). His essence and his characteristics cannot appear in any flesh or spirit of this world, but are His alone..."¹⁰³ Thus, the concept of the incarnation is disallowed for it speaks of God himself taking on human frailty. The anthropomorphism is not linguistic but literal.

As mankind progressed in knowledge, and was refined by understanding, and his rationality began to penetrate the secrets of the universe, the veils of the material world were rent asunder and the higher being was gradually revealed. Hence, the belief in one unified, self-existent being for whom the dawning of the garb of the material (as Monsieur Hanotaux has propounded) is impossible. For it is inconceivable that the infinite should be contained by the finite.¹⁰⁴

It is for this reason that the doctrine of the trinity generally and the doctrine of the divinity of Christ specifically is referred to by Abduh indirectly and Rida directly as a return to paganism or idolatry (al-wathaniyya). The great civilizations had come to the realization that God was a unity and transcendent.

¹⁰³The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 3, p. 440.

¹⁰⁴Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 404.

Islam had sealed this realization by revelation. Hence, the doctrine of the incarnation is seen as an addendum to the pristine Christianity which was brought by Christ. It was added centuries later during the reign of Constantine when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire. Abduh insists that the original gospels had no hint of "tashbiih" but that "tanziih" (elimination of anthropomorphic elements in theology) was the vigor of that pristine religion. Thus the doctrine of the trinity and its necessary counterpart, the doctrine of the incarnation, are understood to be later additions to the corpus of Christian doctrine. Rida quotes the following from the Sheikh in response to the teaching of Miirzaa Faadil, a propagandist of the Bahai faith.

The Ustadh said: If Peter had known what would befall Christianity and had spoken of it, he would surely have told of something more important than the advent of Protestantism or any other event concerning it. [He would have told of] its upheaval and return to paganism (wathaniyya). Christianity reverted to paganism during the era of Constantine three hundred years after Jesus Christ. Constantine was a pagan king and he feigned a conversion to Christianity in order to obtain assistance against his adversaries from others who professed this faith. In this, he was successful.¹⁰⁵

A few comments by way of analysis are appropriate. First of all Abduh never sought to make an overtly polemical stance. His penchant was for an unswerving defense of the essential Islamic dogma. It was only as that defense intersected with the doctrines of the Christian faith that Abduh manifested a certain intransigence. Even then, the note of caution in his writings is evident. He sought to avoid polemic in matters of theology, but he

¹⁰⁵Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 1, pp. 934-935.

did not concede on any doctrine which he considered essential to Islam.

Secondly, the literature does not indicate that Abduh had a broad knowledge of the Christian faith. His primary source for his knowledge was the New Testament itself, however, he relied on his own powers of understanding to interpret the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The positive aspect of this *modus operandi* is that it manifests an implicit acknowledgement of the authority of the New Testament text. This is an essential ingredient to meaningful dialogue between the two faiths. Whereas Rashid Rida was intent to discredit the gospel record, Abduh is content to use these sources as the foundation for his own understanding of the Christian faith. The negative aspect of Abduh's practice is that he had no opportunity to receive any formal training in Biblical exegesis or church history. He states that the Christians with whom he has had contact insist that the doctrine of the trinity "has nothing to do with reason."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, his tendency to attribute the formulation of the doctrine of the trinity to three centuries after Christ might well be modified by an understanding that ecclesiastical councils began to convene to discuss matters of theology at that time. Thus, no formal consensus was possible prior to that date because the various branches of the church had no viable platform for interaction.

In summary, Abduh displayed the admirable quality of courtesy when dealing with Christian doctrine. Although he was well

¹⁰⁶The Complete Works of Muhammad Abduh, vol. 3, p. 216.

informed in matters of Christian doctrine, his understanding was derived from his own reading of the Christian gospels. Had he conducted more face to face dialogue with trained theologians and had he had more facility in the use of European theological reference works, one would expect that the modern day Islamo-Christian dialogue would have benefitted from a more auspicious beginning.

THE ATONEMENT

The opposing doctrines of atonement and merit are the basis of salvation (an-nadjaat) in the religions of Islam and Christianity. Therefore, it is appropriate to give a synopsis of the position of both historic Christianity and orthodox Islam on salvation.

The doctrine that Christ Jesus bore the guilt of mankind corporately and individually in his sacrificial death on the cross is known as the doctrine of the atonement. The word "atone" comes from the Middle English and means simply "at one" or to make amends, reconcile. We will attempt to give a synopsis of the traditional understanding of this doctrine before examining the Islamic understanding of salvation.

First of all, sin is seen, not merely as a mistake or a moral lapse, but a flagrant violation of the law of God incurring his wrath and displeasure. Death is the ultimate result of any sinful action. Both sin and death have affected and continue to affect all mankind. However, God, in mercy, extends to man a full pardon

for his evil ways on the basis of a righteous substitute--Jesus Christ. This substitute is uniquely fitted for his task by virtue of his being a partaker in both the divine and the human nature. Only an authentic participation in humanity could qualify him as a substitute for man. Only authentic deity could give him the authority to accomplish redemption for the entire creation. "But Christ himself bore our sins, in his body on the tree." (I Peter 2:24) Protestant theology in particular has emphasized that the process of salvation is based solely on God's initiative in sending a sin-bearer. Man's good works cannot earn God's favor for him, although they are an appropriate response of the believer to God's unmerited pardon of sin.

The plain teaching of Islam, on the other hand, is that no human being can bear the sin of another. "Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another." (al-an'aam 6:164) A synopsis of the Islamic view of salvation (an-najaat) is given by Rashiid Rida in the Manar Commentary. At the outset he makes the distinction that Islam does not hold to a doctrine of an intercessor, thus any attack on the impeccability of the prophet's morals is strictly beside the point. Rather, the true doctrine of salvation is based on one's

purging (tazkiya) himself and purifying (tathhiir) his soul (nafs) from pagan or idolatrous doctrine and corrupt morals such that he has relinquished all vanities and evils and become furnished with virtuous and righteous works. "By the soul and the proportion and order given to it; Truly he succeeds who purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it!" (suurat al-shams 91:8-10) God most high has rendered every man capable by the power of his innate disposition to

perform works of debauchery and iniquity or works of godliness and devotion. He who has right doctrine and performs good works has brought his soul (or himself) into a good state and purified it. He whose doctrine is fictitious (khuraafiyya) and vain and whose works are evil has become corrupt in both morals and soul... It is not necessary that a man never experience sin (khata') or commit any evil whatsoever, but it is crucial that he be characterized by purity of heart and intention. Thus, if he is overcome by his soul's excitations and is pained by his sin, he [should] endeavor to repent and take refuge in remorse and pleading for forgiveness. The atonement for this sin is virtuous work (al-'amal al-saaliḥ). He is to be likened to a house whose caretaker is accustomed to sweeping and cleaning it by various means. If it becomes dusty or is struck by some impurity, the caretaker endeavors to remove the uncleanness such that its prevailing state is cleanliness. Hence, a true testimony to its cleanliness may be given without concern about the normal dust which is commonly found in any clean home. Thus, reward (al-djaza'a) is the effect of work and "on no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear."¹¹¹

Thus the Islamic concept of salvation is through man's self-purification. A foundational tenet which sheds further light on the perceptions of salvation noted above is the contrast which is found in the Christian and Islamic teaching of the original state of man. Whereas the Islamic concept is that evil is foreign to man's nature, the Christian teaching is that evil is inherent in man's nature. Rashiid Rida in commenting on al-Baqara 2:286 ("It [the soul] gets every good that it earns and it suffers every ill that it earns") points out that "the essential on which no one disagrees is that man was fashioned in such a way that he does only what he believes is for his own good... The same is true for any act he avoids doing." Rida points out the need for man to be guided by the four proper means of guidance (the senses, the

¹¹¹Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tafsiir al Quran al Hakiim, vol. 6, p. 29-30.

conscience, the mind and religion) and if he is negligent in any of these means, his lapse into sin can be attributed to his wandering from the path of innate guidance (*fitra*). He deals with man's tendency towards adultery by classifying it as a tendency toward sexual intercourse which is ultimately for man's own good. Thus, the inclination towards adultery is misplaced "*fitra*."¹¹²

On the other hand, the Christian concept is that man was created perfect. However, he willfully chose to disobey God and thus lost perfection forever. All actual transgressions are merely the evidence of this fundamental depravity. This doctrine does not teach that man cannot perform any good work, but rather that even his good works no longer bear the stamp of innocence. He has fallen from a right relationship with God. Therefore, any good work done is to be measured, not by comparison with the works of other men, but by the righteous standard of God. By this standard, man's virtuous acts always fall short.

It now remains for us to discuss the views of Abduh on the Christian concept of atonement. First, it is essential to note that Muhammad Abduh did not reject the historical death of Jesus Christ. In commenting on Aal 'imraan 3:55 ("Behold! God said: O Jesus I will take thee [*mutawaffiika*] and raise thee to myself...), Abduh points out that there has been disagreement over the proper interpretation of the verse. The disagreement is based on the order of the events listed, namely the "taking" (*mutawafii*) and the

¹¹²Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tafsiir al Quran al Hakiim, vol. 3, p. 148.

"raising" (raafi'). One school prefers to reverse the given order saying that Jesus was taken up alive and will come to earth again. He will then be killed (tawaffaa). Abduh is disinclined to this interpretation as he views the alteration of the given order of events in the verse to be out of accordance with accepted rules of interpretation. The second school interprets the verb "tawaffaa" by its most clear and immediate meaning which is "to kill" (imaata). It also understands the "raising up" to follow the "killing" in chronological order. Thus, there is implicit assent to the literal death of Christ as it is recorded in the Biblical narrative.

Although somewhat parenthetical to our objective, it is interesting to note Abduh's understanding of the return of Christ. He points out two possible digressions (takhriidjaan) concerning the doctrine of the return of Christ. The first is the assertion that the "raising up" of Christ is a matter that cannot be investigated due to its belonging to the classification of "the divine mysteries" (umuur al-ghayb). In addition, there is no substantiated hadiith (mutawaatir) to verify the doctrine that Christ will return to rule. The second digression is to make the "raising up" of Christ to be a spiritual allegory. Since the mission of Christ, according to Abduh, was to free the Jews from the shackles of tradition, his being "raised up," and even more significantly, his descent (nuzuul) and future reign (hukm) is an allegory of the victory of true religion. Wherever religion is freed from the bonds of tradition and the true teaching of Christ

(love, mercy, adherence to the objectives of the law apart from the letter of the law, etc.) is revived, Christ rules.¹¹³

Abduh, although affirming the historical fact on which the atonement is based (the death of Christ) remains silent as to its theological significance. The reasons for this lack of comment are at least twofold. First, Abduh did not need to comment on the atonement. His view of salvation had been made abundantly clear through such works as The Theology of Unity. Secondly, he was not forced to make a clear statement on the atonement by his contact with Christians, and particularly, Protestant ministers as was Rashiid Rida. In spite of the fact that Abduh did not address the issue of the atonement directly, his acknowledgement of the death of Christ is quite significant as it is an issue which has been debated by Muslim theologians through the centuries. The one obvious difference between Abduh's exegesis of this Koranic verse and the Biblical doctrine is the Biblical insistence on the bodily resurrection of Christ. The New Testament narratives insist that the body of Jesus was not found in the tomb and that Christ appeared in the body to his disciples.

So then, Abduh accedes to the historicity of the death of Christ while refraining to comment on the theological importance attached to the event of Christ's death by the Biblical record and the history of Christendom. The thrust of Christ's mission was to set men free from the shackles of tradition and renew them to religion in its truest sense--its "spirit and true ethic." Any

¹¹³Tafsiir al Quraan al Hakiim, vol. 3, pp. 316-317.

indication of the propitiatory nature of the death of Christ is absent.

Through the centuries, the issue of Christ's death has been a formidable obstacle in the path of Islamo-Christian dialogue. Abduh's revival of Ibn Abbas' understanding of the Koranic term "tawaffa" provides a window of fresh opportunity for meaningful discussion. Abduh's assessment of the mission of Christ as being "to break the shackles of Jewish religious tradition" is an emphasis which most Christians would be quick to agree with. Many would also readily acknowledge the relevance of that aspect of Christ's mission to the contemporary Christian church.

CONCLUSION

Muhammad Abduh was fervently committed to the basic tenets of Islam. Furthermore, he saw the revival and proper implementation of these tenets to be the sole means of reforming Muslim countries thus giving them the needed moral, spiritual, and educational values to cast off foreign dominance and begin to set their own course of development. In the light of these two driving passions of Abduh's life, we are able to glean a fuller appreciation of his views of Christianity. We would suggest that the actual points of tension which existed between Abduh's theology and Christianity are secondary in importance to the perceived ends of the Christian mission. While it is true that the Christian concept of the trinity and the doctrine of the unity of God are not compatible, it would seem that Abduh's thought contained ample ground on which to

lay a productive foundation for dialogue. While insisting on the unity of God, he also insisted that the essence of God is impenetrable and incomprehensible to the human mind. Such a statement is often made by Christian theologians who acknowledge the mystery of the trinity. While manifesting a certain intransigence in dealing with these doctrines, it must be noted that Abduh used the New Testament as his source material in seeking to understand Christian dogma. Finally, his understanding of Christ's death as being a historical event is a critical element in the continuing dialogue.

However, Abduh's perception of Christianity was not primarily theological, it was primarily cultural. His concern was for his homeland. His observation was that Christian schools and hospitals were the necessary forerunners to an ever-increasing presence of European power in Islamic countries. His grasp of Islamic history was thorough and his hope for greatness for Egypt and other Arab countries lay in a renewal of the principles that had established Islam as one of the world's greatest religions in a relatively short period of time. Abduh saw the influx of Christianity as a deviation from the true path of progress for his country, the path of Islam.

Abduh made a unique contribution to the field of Islamo-Christian dialogue. However, his firm conviction was that a return to the original principles of Islam and education of the masses in the foundational tenets of the religion were the essential means of restoring greatness to Egypt and the Muslim countries.

Christianity and its encroachment upon the East was not seen so much as a religious phenomena, as it was the sociological forerunner of European and Western domination. Hence, Abduh, perhaps unwittingly, places a signpost along the path of Muslim-Christian dialogue. The message of Christ can only be heard when it is given in the spirit of Christ who came "not to be served but to serve." The fact that Christian missionary endeavor was the companion of colonial expansion so marred its visage, that it could not be tolerated even by the most tolerant of Islamic intellectuals--of whom Muhammad Abduh certainly was one. The following penetrating assessment in an article entitled "Islam and Christianity" remains as a signpost for those seeking to avoid the pitfalls of past errors.

The Christian religion is built on complacency and conciliation in everything. It lifted the burden of divine wrath, cast away ownership and authority, and declared the forsaking of the world. It proclaimed submission to every authority which rules over the adherents of religion and the necessity of allowing such rulers to maintain their own wealth. It enjoined the forsaking of all disputes whether they be personal, national or religious in nature. Indeed, among the commandments of the gospel is the saying "he who strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the left as well." It also states that while a ruler's leadership is temporal, God's kingdom is eternal. The one who pauses a moment to reflect on these facts in light of our thesis that religion forms the basis of man's actions, will be amazed to see the deeds of those who adhere to this compliant religion. They race to acquire the vanities of this life and its embellishments. Furthermore, they proceed to overrun kingdoms and empires while daily inventing new weapons to achieve their ends. They devote their greatest efforts to the proper ordering of their armies to the extent that military science has become one of their most developed fields of study...¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴Muhammad Rashiid Rida, Tariikh, vol. 2, p. 246.

For Abduh, Christianity was inseparable from Western political dominance. Dialogue of a purely doctrinal nature was beside the point for it did not take into account the manifest contradiction between the teachings of the gospels and the actions of the so-called "Christian West." He could not perceive of a religion which called for compliance and tolerance while its adherents advocated colonialism which was nothing more than an agenda for domination.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to examine two separate but inter-related aspects of the life and thought of Muhammad Abduh. In dealing with his apologetic, the thrust was to demonstrate his recasting the mold of Islamic doctrine--particularly doctrines of a practical nature in the reform of Islamic society. In the second part of this research we have given ample consideration to Abduh's thought concerning yet another intensely practical aspect of the reform of Islamic society, namely "what is the appropriate response of Islam to the Christian faith, with which it must coexist daily?" Muhammad Abduh's thought was certainly broad and contained many of the essential elements for an invigorated and meaningful dialogue between the two faiths, not the least of which was his interpretation of the death of Christ.

However, our thesis is that Abduh was not reacting to Christianity as a religious entity primarily, but as a combination of political, cultural and social forces which was imposing itself on the Muslim East. For Abduh, the encroachment of the Christian religion was the forerunner and advocate of Western political dominance. The hospitals and schools it brought in its wake were merely cultural manifestations of that same dominance. This perception of the Christian faith was the factor which led Abduh, at times, to take an intransigent posture towards Christianity. In addition, Abduh was motivated by a deep sense of personal mission to recall Islamic nations to their former greatness. He was,

therefore, incensed by this encroachment of Western dominance as would be expected. Additionally, in both his written attempts at characterizing Christianity, he was rebutting one Eastern Christian and one European who had made unbalanced assessments of the Islamic faith. Hence, a sharp rebuttal was in order and, to a certain degree, cannot be faulted. However, this type of interchange between faiths continues to prove fruitless even in our own day. Although to offer an answer is merely an exercise in speculation, one must question what contribution Abduh might have made to Muslim-Christian dialogue had the issue of political and cultural dominance of the West been absent. Note must be taken that meaningful interchange can only take place between adherents of different religions when and where the element of political and cultural dominance has been laid aside.

Although the issue of cultural domination of the West remains a live one in the minds of many Muslims, it would seem reasonable that a more meaningful dialogue might be achieved between adherents of the two faiths in the present day. Noteworthy among such efforts are the writings of Muhammad Ayoub who points out that Abduh and Rida's polemic can only be rightly understood "in the context of Christian polemic against Islam both in its religion and culture."¹¹⁵ Ayoub seeks to establish a legitimate Christology albeit outside the Christian tradition. His approach to the "substitutionist theory," for example, demonstrates a commitment to

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 115.

seriously grapple with the issues at stake.¹¹⁶ He comes out of the argument emphasizing the failure to kill Jesus as an indication that the "divine word" cannot be vanquished.¹¹⁷ On the other side of the dialogue issue, Montgomery Watt may be mentioned as a Western scholar whose approach to Islam is conciliatory and sensitive.

The notable contributions of Muhammad Abduh to the ongoing Christian-Islamic dialogue were first, his willingness to use the scriptures of the New Testament as a primary source for information on the events of the life of Christ. Secondly, his return to Ibn Abbas' understanding of the death of Christ is crucial. Thirdly, his own attempt at establishing an Islamic Christology is noteworthy. We are referring to his characterization of Christ's mission as one of liberation from the shackles of tradition. Finally, we glean from Abduh a rich mixture of some Sufi tendencies and a serious commitment to Koranic exegesis. As Abduh's disciples have pointed out, this combination provided the Sheikh with an unusual ability to hold dialogue with adherents of other faiths. His Sufi influence was perhaps what allowed him to penetrate beyond terminology to meanings, which remains a priority for any attempt at Muslim-Christian dialogue.

¹¹⁶The substitutionist theory is the theory that a substitute took the place of Christ on the cross. Ayoub comes to the conclusion that "the substitutionist theory will not do, regardless of its form or purpose. First it makes a mockery of divine justice and the primordial covenant of God with humanity..." See Muhammad M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology II," *Muslim World*, LXX no. 2 (April, 1980) 104.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 106.

EXCURSUS A

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF ABDUH¹¹⁸

- 1849 Born in Mahallat Nasr
- 1859 Taught to read in his father's home
- 1862 First lessons in "tajwiid" at the al-Ahmadiyya Mosque in Tanta.
- 1864 Lessons in other subjects
- 1865 Return to the village and marriage
- 1865 Father sent him back to the mosque in Tanta. Came under the influence of Sheikh Darwish.
- 1866 (February) first lessons at al-Azhar.
- 1869 Met Jamaal ad-Diin al-Afghani
- 1873 Began writing
- 1875 Wrote gloss on "Sharh ad-Dawaani."
- 1876 Jamaal ad-Diin arrives in Egypt. Abduh writes article in first issue of al-Ahraam (Sept. 3, 1876).
- 1877 Received diploma (ash-shahaada al ?aalamiiyya).
- 1878 Appointed to faculty at "Daar al-Uluum."
- 1879 Khedive Tawfiik Pasha expels al-Afghani from Egypt
- 1880 Appointed editor of "al waqaa'i? al-Misriyya."
- 1882 Deported for his role in the Uraabi revolt.
- 1884 Traveled from Beirut to Paris to found "al-Urwaa al-Wuthqaa" with al-Afghani. First issue published 13 March. First visit to London (July) with Mirzaa Baaqir.
- 1884 Visited North Africa and traveled incognito to Egypt.
- 1885 Established residence in Beirut as teacher in the Sultaniyya School. Translated al-Afghani's "Risaalat ar-Rudd ?alaa ad-Dahriyiin." Wrote gloss on "Muqaamaat al-badii? wa nahj al-Balaagha." Resided three and one half years in Beirut during which the "Society for Rapprochement and Goodwill" was founded.
- 1888 Appointed judge in the Native Courts of First Instance.
- 1891 Appointed judge in the Court of Appeals.
- 1892 Founded Muslim Benevolent Society
- 1895 Appointed member of the Board of directors of al-Azhar.
- 1897 Authored A Theology of Unity.
- 1899 Appointed Mufti of Egypt and became a member of the "Majlis ash-Shuura."
- 1900 Elected president of the Muslim Benevolent Society and founded a society for the renewal of Arabic sciences.
- 1902 Authored Islam and Christianity.
- 1903 Penned a rebuttal of Hanotaux. Visited both Algeria and Tunisia.
- 1905 Retired from Azhar's board of directors (March 19).

¹¹⁸Elements of the chronology was taken from: Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, The Genius of Reform and Education, Beirut, Lebanon, 1971.

1905 Death.

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