

Al-Afghânî, a case of religious unbelief ?

Ernest Renan delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne University on March 29th, 1883, under the title "Islamism and science"¹. Renan took for granted the manifest inferiority of the Muslim countries, their decline, the intellectual nullity of those races "the culture and education of which exclusively comes from this religion" (p. 377). According to Renan, the Muslim boy, who until ten or twelve years old "was quite awake", suddenly becomes a bigot who is convinced of possessing the absolute truth and is proud of something which actually is his inferiority.

One might claim that such inferiority was temporary because, in the past, Arab civilization was superior to the European, Christian civilization. Renan, however, countered that there was never any Arabic philosophy and science at all, and that what we know as such was, in fact, "Greek-Sassanian" philosophy and science. He believed that it did not develop either at the time of the Arab Bedouin culture nor during the Islamic revelation, but much later, around 750 AD when the Iranian element prevailed under the Abbasid dynasty. This civilization fell into the deepest intellectual decline after 1275 (p. 389).

Renan had no doubt that this philosophy and science were not Arabic, nor even Islamic. "In fact, Islamism has always persecuted science and philosophy" (p. 393) although the persecution increased in the 13th Century. He saw the reason for it in the very essence of Islam: an inextricable union of the spiritual and worldly elements. When the link is strong it acts violently, and when weak, liberally.

1. Ernest RENAN, *Discours et conférences*, 2. ed. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1887, pp. 375-401.

Renan's lecture echoed in the Arabic press when Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Afghânî wrote an editorial in the issue on May 3rd, 1883 of the periodical *Al-Baṣîr*². The sheikh al-Afghânî (1838-1897) is well-known³ and there is a much literature about him⁴. Afghânî acknowledges Renan for his education and politeness: "In his speech, Renan has not neglected the rules of politeness and has not gone beyond the limits of correctness requiring showing respect toward the nations that have chosen our religion" (p. 207). Nevertheless, the speech attacked the Arabs, and French personalities protested against such an attack, Afghânî remarks and compares the tolerant attitude of the French to the British policy.

In addition to publishing this editorial, Afghânî replied to Renan's lecture and his reply was published in the *Journal des débats* on May 18th, 1883⁵ and was countered, in turn, by Renan on May 19th ⁶. Afghânî's analysis found two tenets in Renan's speech: Islam is by nature contrary to science, and the Arabs are not prone to philosophy. Afghânî agreed with Renan on his diagnostics of the situation of scientific underdevelopment at the time, but raised an objection: Renan should have asked himself whether a common feature of mankind's evolution on earth is that reason does not lead mankind in its initial stage. Renan should have considered the circumstance that mankind, "being persecuted by fears from which it is not able to get loose, cannot distinguish between good and bad"⁷. Mankind ignores the real causes of natural events and follows an "educator" who resorts

2. Published in Paris by a Maronite, Khalîl Ghânîm; reprinted in *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, ed. Sayyed Hâdî Khosrow Shâhî, 10 vols. in 7 parts (Cairo: Shurûq, 2002), vol. 3, pp. 207-208.

3. Homa PAKDAMAN, *Djamal-ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1969. Nikki R. KEDDIE, *Sayyid Jamâl ad-Dîn "al-Afghânî"; a Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972

4. A. Albert KUDSI-ZADEH, *Sayyid Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî; an Annotated Bibliography*. Leiden: Brill, 1970, collecting works by and on Afghani, and his "Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: a supplementary bibliography" in *Muslim World*, 65 (1975), pp. 279-291, and *Index Islamicus*' updating.

5. Published by A-M. GOICHON as an annex to her translation of *Réfutation des Matérialistes* (Paris, 1942), pp. 174-185. Arabic translation, see nt. 2, pp. 192-200. English translation in Nikkie R. KEDDIE, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Afghânî*. (Berkeley – Los Angeles: UC Press, 1968, 1983), pp. 181-187.

6. RENAN, *Discours* (nt. 1), pp. 402-409.

7. GOICHON, *Refutation*, p. 176.

to imagination and makes them believe that some outside Being is the cause of the events. Afghânî concluded that Muslim society can develop and become free of tyranny of the imagination in the same way that the Christian did.

Afghânî did not accept Renan's theory of the inborn incapacity of Arabs for science and showed its falsity because Averroes was as Arab as al-Kindî. The only cause for the decline lay in religion, and in this case, in Islamic religion, because all religions want to suppress reason. Afghânî expressed his fears that reason, also called "free examination" does not prevail because "the common people do not like reason and only few intelligences of the elite are able to understand its teachings", but also because science cannot quench "the thirst of mankind for idealistic things"⁸.

Renan felt flattered by the response. He tells us that Ghânim, the editor of *Baṣîr*, had introduced him to Afghânî two months before. He realized that Afghânî was "an enlightened Asian", and that following the conversation with him, Renan chose the topic of his lecture. Renan praised Afghânî and saw him as "free from Islamic prejudices", embodying the Arian spirit, and being a true freethinker⁹.

They both disagreed, according to Renan, only on one issue, namely, "the sheikh does not admit the distinctions that historical criticism has drawn for complex realities called empires and conquests" (p. 404). Everything produced on Christian lands is not necessarily the effect of Christianity, and everything produced on Islamic lands is not the effect of Islam.

Renan insisted on his tenet that any religion except natural religion is opposed to positive science, but he did not expect the Christians to abandon Christianity or the Muslims to abandon Islam. He just wanted those "enlightened parts" in any religion to "reach some state of benevolent indifference in which any religious belief becomes innocuous" (p. 406). He reflected on the situation in Christian countries where the scientific development took place once they were free of the influence of Catholicism, and concluded that the regeneration of the Islamic world will be possible only under a weak Islam.

Among the scholars who studied Afghânî, some adopt the same interpretation as Renan. Elie Kedourie, for instance, affirms that

8. GOICHON, *Refutation*, p. 185, "soif d'idéal". The Arabic translation gives *al-muthul al-'ulyâ*.

9. RENAN, *Discours*, (nt. 1), p. 403.

Afghânî was “secretly a free thinker, and skeptical about Islam as dogma”¹⁰ and to prove it, he calls attention to the correspondence between Afghânî in Paris and ‘Abdûh in Beirut, who wanted to publish the Arabic translation of Afghânî’s letter to Renan. As soon as ‘Abdûh knew its content, he stopped the translation as well as its publication. In addition, Kedourie translated a letter of ‘Abdûh in which he declares that he shares Afghânî’s attitude about being a good Muslim and agrees with him about “cutting the head of religion using the very sword of religion”¹¹.

But not all scholars hold this view. Rashîd Rîfâ, the author of a hagiography of his master Muḥammad ‘Abdûh¹², ascribed no hypocrisy to Afghânî or to ‘Abdûh. There may be no right way to follow, other than to read what an author publicly and continuously states.

If we go back to Afghânî’s earlier writings, we do not find much trace of liberal thought; his supposedly heterodox discourse at the new university in Istanbul in December 1870 is not extant. On November 8th, 1882 he gave a lecture in Albert Hall, Calcutta “On Teaching and Learning” in which he praised the Indian legacy and the value of science, and added that Islam was prone to philosophical spirit, but he was addressing a mainly non-Muslim audience¹³. In fact, Afghânî became famous for his *Refutation of the Materialists* which he wrote in Persian with the title *Radd-e neitcheriyye* (1878). ‘Abdûh translated it into Arabic when he became Afghânî’s disciple during the latter’s stay in Egypt between 1872 and 1879¹⁴. Afghânî openly confessed that the work is an apology of Islam:

The author was moved to write [the Refutation] by his ardent zeal when he was living in India and saw how the British

10. Elie KEDOURIE, *Afghani and Abdûh. An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*. (Londres: Frank Press, 1966), p. 14.

11. *Afghani and Abdûh* (nt. 10), p. 45.

12. *Tārîkh al-ustâdh al-Imâm al-Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abdûh: wa-fi-hi tafṣîl siratu-hu wa-khulâsat sirat mûqiz al-Sharq al-ḥakîm wa-îl-Islâm Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî*. Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Manâr, 1324-1350/1906-1931; 2nd ed., Cairo: Dâr al-Faḍîlah, 2003.

13. *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, (nt. 2), vol. 9, pp. 127-134, in Persian. English translation in KEDDIE, *Islamic Response* (nt. 5), pp. 101-108.

14. Printed in Cairo 1303/1885, with following editions there and in Beirut, also in the collected works, vol. 2, (nt. 2), pp. 129-196. French translation by Amélie Marie GOICHON, Paris: Geuthner, 1942, and English by KEDDIE, *An Islamic Response*, pp. 130-174.

government misled groups of people encouraging them to desert the religions and to loosen the ties of faith¹⁵.

Neitcheriyye is from the English word nature and 'Abdûh translated it with *dahrîya*, a technical term of a longstanding philosophical and theological tradition. Algazel (d. 1111) called *dahrîya* those thinkers who defended the eternity of the world as well as the absence of a Creator. But to Afghânî, the term means anything which does not sound religious enough to his ears. Afghânî obviously had not studied the teachings of Ahmed Khan, the Hindu founder of the *Neitcheriyye* movement, but he was also very ignorant of the doctrines of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, Mazdak, Darwin, etc. object of his criticism. Afghânî even placed Joseph Smith "the Mormon" into the bunch of unbelievers¹⁶.

Afghânî made them responsible for all the evils afflicting men, for their moral depravity and the decline of nations. He did not preach in favor of religious practice in general, but called for Islam because Islam is superior to all religions. He presented the magnificence and glory it reached as a decisive proof of its superiority. Since Islam was not so glorious at the time and someone could have objected, Afghânî ended his plea by saying that "The universe proves the superiority of the Muslims by the fact that they did achieve what they achieved thanks to religion".¹⁷

Afghânî wrote in 1878, and he might have sincerely believed that Islam was the only source of moral and material success. However, Kedourie said that, since 1870 he, Afghânî, was not an orthodox believer; Keddîe pointed to his membership in a Masonic lodge since 1875¹⁸. Afghânî belonged to a Cairo lodge affiliated with the Scottish Great Lodge from 1876-1878, but he abandoned it and founded a kind of organization that H. Srouer considers to be an *Ad hoc* lodge¹⁹.

The evidence I have gathered is contradictory: This text of 1878 interpreted Islam from the Fundamentalist point-of-view and his answer to Renan, five years later, in 1883, blamed religion as the cause of sci-

15. *Al-âthâr al-kâmila* (nt. 2), vol. 2, p. 129. GOICHON, p. 61. KEDDIE, p. 132.

16. *Al-âthâr al-kâmila* (nt. 2), vol. 2, p. 178. GOICHON, p. 138. KEDDIE, p. 161.

17. GOICHON, p. 171. The sentence is missing in *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, vol. 2, p. 196, and in Keddîe's translation.

18. *A Political Biography* (nt. 3), pp. 92-93.

19. *Die Staats- und Gesellschaftstheorie bei Sayyid Ġamaladdīn al-Afġānī* (Freiburg i.Br.: Schwarz, 1977), pp. 75-76.

entific and cultural poverty. Then, between April and December 1883, Afghânî published some articles in the French newspaper *L'Intransigeant* which show no trace of doubt about his Islamic convictions²⁰.

And less than a year after his letter to Renan, Afghânî and 'Abdûh launched an Arabic journal in Paris. The journal was entitled *Al-urwa al-wuthqâ*, "The indissoluble bond", and was published by a society with the same name and no real existence. Homa Pakdaman discovered how the journal was funded²¹: with large sums of money from the ex-Khedive Ismâ'îl, exiled in Turin, and from a Tunisian general, Ḥusain Pâshâ, living in Italy, and from Wilfrid Blunt. The first issue of the journal was dated March 13, 1884, and the eighteenth and last issue, on October 16th of the same year²². The abrupt end was due to lack of funds.

In spite of its short life, *Al-urwa al-wuthqâ* had a wide and extended impact on the Islamic world and offers us a clear insight into Afghânî's doctrine. He may have believed in his own words or not! The first instance where we face this duality regards the purpose of the journal. Afghânî and 'Abdûh – from here on I shall call them "the authors" – opened the first issue with an editorial heading which read "Why the journal is published?"²³.

The editorial began, as many others, with some Koranic verse, here 60: 4 "Our Lord! In Thee do we trust, and to Thee do we turn in repentance: to Thee is (our) final Goal" and the authors trust in God for the success of his project centered at the situation of the Orient. Now, we have to proceed with reasoning and not rely on imagination for the analysis of the situation.

Clear mind and historical experience show us that "whenever the great nations are befallen by discord ... some foreign power falls upon them, what wakes them up and is a warning" (p. 96). If such incidents repeat, the nations rush into action in order to keep their goods and recover their losses.

20. Reedited by H. PAKDAMAN, « Notes sur le séjour de Djamal al-Din al-Afghani en France », *Orient* 35 (1965) 203-223.

21. *Djamal-ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani* (nt. 3), pp. 357-365.

22. The front page specifies: Al-mudîr al-mas'ûl Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî; muḥarriru-hâ al-awwal Muḥammad 'Abdûh; the journal was reprinted Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lâ li-sh-Shu'ûn al-Islâmiyah, 1981.

23. 15th Jumâdâ I, 1301/13th March 1884. Quotations follow the edition by Sayyed Hâdî Khosrow Shâhî of the *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, (nt. 2), here vol. 1, pp. 95-100.

For their right guidance, men need divine inspiration, rational perception and legal religious doctrine. Those human souls which are very corrupted are united in a righteous community “that does not stands injustice (*daym*)” (p. 96) and they fight ferociously.

In general, communities do not tolerate being ruled by those whose morals and customs are different even if their rule is more bearable than the one of people akin. When the danger is close and attacks increase, nations forget their differences about kinship (*jinsîya*) and they unite. The authors were amazed at seeing intellectual movement in most countries of the Orient, all seeking salvation. The intellectuals (*al-‘uqalâ’*) consider how to join forces so that one power can guarantee the rights of all (p. 97). Injustice against the Orientals reached its limit. There was no social class left untouched by oppression, which was especially awesome “in the Egyptian lands” after the events “around five years ago” (p. 97). Afghânî refers to events he knew very well: In June 1879, the Khedive Ismâ‘îl was deposed by the Ottoman sultan under pressure from the European powers and his son Tawfiq came to power at a time of financial stringency. Afghânî, who lived there, agitated against the European growing control. Grievances also extended to the army, and in particular to Egyptian officers who were excluded from promotion to the higher ranks. One of these officers, Col. Aḥmad ‘Urâbî (1841–1911) led a popular, protest movement in 1881–82. Tawfiq lost control of the situation and chose to collaborate with the foreign powers. British troops landed in Egypt in August and on September 13, 1882 they routed ‘Urâbî’s army. The British occupation would last 72 years.

From his Paris exile, Afghânî labeled the ‘Urâbî movement as “blindfolded” (*‘ashwâ’*, p. 97) but said that it was not in vain. No sooner had its flame gone out then another movement followed. Afghânî gave it his guidance.

The bad situation into which the Egyptian lands have got is hardly bearable for the souls of the Muslims. Egypt is considered by the Muslims as a holy land and takes a unique place in their hearts in view of its position among the Islamic kingdoms, and because Egypt is the gate of the Two Sacred Sublime Sanctuaries (p. 99).

This concern, even its painful suffering, was explained by believing that the religious bond binding Muslims is stronger than bonds of nationality or language. The authors employ *millî* as the adjective

for 'religious', and *milla* is a religious community, such as Christianity and Judaism. The recent attacks against the Orient revived the bonds among the Islamic countries and brought them closer to each other in spite of being geographically distant.

Difficulties may bring out good things. Intellectuals, above all in Egypt and India, started to move in the right direction, and they will be able to disseminate their ideas thanks to the Arabic language and publishing "in a free city such as Paris" (p. 100).

The opening editorial was completed in another editorial in the second issue, entitled "The journal and its program".²⁴ The authors announced that its purpose was to serve the Orientals, to explain the duties incumbent upon them, and the neglect which led to their weakness and fall, as well as to show them the way for recovery (p. 101). They suggested that there are some fundamentals (*uṣūl*) to which people have to embrace, as the fathers and forefathers of the Orientals did. These fundamentals are not those "to which the strongest and most powerful European state clings" (p. 102). The aim, power and strength, is the same but the Orient has to achieve them by different means. The authors oppose those who affirm that the Muslims will not progress as long as they stick to their old fundamentals.

The final paragraph of the article indicates that the journal is sent free to all whose names are known without distinction, "to the prince and to the low man, to the rich and to the poor" (p. 102).

To sum up: The authors saw the Orient in a difficult situation, but they did not speak of poverty or illiteracy, but of colonization, of being subdued by European powers, especially Great Britain. The editor's call for independence was based on the common identity that all these countries share in spite of their distance; this common identity is Islam. The union latent in the countries has to be restored to its full integrity, and the only way to do so is by going back to the fundamentals of Islam. The argument reads: Classical Islam was powerful because the Muslims at that time adhered to its principles. Therefore, if the classical values are restored, its political and military power will be restored too. The next step consisted of defining the fundamentals.

These editorials introducing the journal were not different from the rest of the articles and the authors do not argue in an elaborated

24. Issue n° 2, 22 Jumâda I, 1301 / March 20, 1884.

way: They advance one or several points forward and they mostly resort to rhetorical features to support them, I shall draw an outline of this doctrine abstracting from the more philosophical articles in the *Al-'urwa al-wuthqâ*.

HUMAN NATURE, SOCIETY AND HISTORY.

According to the authors, man is as such because of his thinking and his beliefs. However, he is strongly influenced by the images he sees and by all the perceptions of his senses; in fact, every thing seen becomes thought and every thought acts on the faculty of motivating (*dâ'iya*). The faculty of motivating produces an action. Action rebounds and has an effect on thinking too. Acting and thinking intertwine as long as the spirits are in the bodies (p. 123), but imagination often distorts the processes. "Delusive imagination depicts the weak as strong and the close as far" (p. 217)²⁵, and always veils the truth, but the aspect of imagination that really concerns Afghânî is the political one, how Orientals misrepresent the West.

The authors see the intellect as a mirror, and man is also described as a "polished surface where religion is the first image which is drawn on it" (p. 117), but religion is not unborn. Religion is a positive divine regulation (*wad'*) that human intellects receive from the chosen prophets by means of "eloquence and learning, teaching and instruction". Although religious law cannot be rationally known, it has rational justification. In an article about "Causes of the preservation of the kingdom"²⁶ the authors maintain that God has established the legal punishments (*hudûd*) in order that men "distinguish clearly the good from the evil" (p. 201).

There may be some incoherence in the authors' words, but their essential teaching says that man has to be understood as created according to God's design. God created him as "knowing and operating", which means that man has to work for himself and gain his sustenance with his hands, and should man lay down his work and turn towards nature begging, "nature would push him to the abyss of destruction" (p. 116).

25. "Imagination", Issue n° 17, 6 Dhû l-Hijja 1301/September 25, 1884.

26. N° 16, 21 Dhû l-Hijja 1301/September 11, 1884. *Orient* 23 (1962) 191-198.

The authors were sensitive to the issue of fatalism and devoted one of their articles to the classical topic of the fate and divine decree, one of the fundamental aspects of Islam. It was also one of the most controversial²⁷. Westerners –according to the authors- described Muslims as lacking of resolution (*himma*) and power, as weak and scanty, and attributed the cause to their belief in the doctrine of fate and divine decree. Westerners misinterpreted the doctrine as fatalism, and confused it with the old Jabarite doctrine that says that “man is totally forced on all his actions” (p. 142).

Afghânî and ‘Abdûh explained the doctrine of the fate and divine decree which they considered rationally proved as follows: Every event has a cause which temporally is close to it, but man does not see the entire chain of causes behind it. Only the Creator does. “Men’s will is one ring of the chain”. The will is defined, again, within the entwinement of perception and action: “Will is one of the effects (*athar, âthâr*) of perception, and perception is the soul being affected by what arrives to the senses, as well being aware of needs consigned in the mind” (p. 143). The most stupid man cannot deny that these factors have an influence upon the will and the thought, and the Creator is at the beginning (*mabda*) of the causal series.

Assuming this explanation, the authors did not find any difficulty in the doctrine of fate and divine decree. On the contrary, they found that it encourages man to strive for perfection. Man has not only received from God the capacity²⁸, but also His decreed obligation to work to attain it²⁹. Man’s perfection consists of acquiring as many virtues as possible and avoiding vices. Virtues are characters (*shajâyyâ*) in the soul, and examples include generosity, abstinence, and modesty. Virtues, necessarily, are the result of the union and harmony in those who possess them, since “two generous people do not quarrel and do not contend with one another”. The authors added:

If you examine all the virtues as they have been defined by those who are knowledgeable on the correction of the charac-

27. *Al-qadâ’ wa-l-qadar*, issue n° 7, 4th Rajab 1301 / May 1, 1884. French translation by M. Colombe in *Orient* 21 (1962) 98-109. Afghânî insisted on his views in a later article, carrying the same title, *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, vol. 2, pp. 81-89.

28. “God has distinguished man from other beings with an intellectual talent and spiritual power”, p. 223, “Cowardice”, see below.

29. “Virtues, vices and their effects”, Issue no 8, 18th Rajab 1301 / May 15, 1884. French translation in *Orient* 23 (1962) 169-179.

ters (*'uqalâ' at-tahdhîb*), every virtue carries union between the virtuous as a necessary attribute and as an immediate effect resulting from that virtue (p. 149).

Afghânî and 'Abdûh compared the uniting force of virtue with "the universal gravitation that keeps working the system of the stars and the planets" (p. 150) - a reverberation of Newton's universal law of gravitation. They established a parallel between the human world, microcosm, and the planetary world, macrocosm. Just as the divine wisdom has caused the universal gravitation to maintain the order and existence of the universe, it has caused the virtues to maintain the individual existence for a limited period of time and the existence of the human species, for a period of time lasting "until God's command".

On the contrary, vices are described as disintegrating forces, "they are bad qualities occurring to the souls. Their nature is to dissolve and to divide the souls infected by them" (p. 152). The authors enumerate shamelessness, obscenity, foolishness, imbecility, recklessness, hastiness, cowardice (*jubn*), vileness, fear (*jaza'*), hatred, envy, presumption, vanity (*'ujb*), stubbornness, scorn, perfidy, treachery, deceit, and hypocrisy. The large enumeration is striking, in contrast to the few virtues mentioned before, and reminds one of a moral rigorist.

For *Al-'urwa al-wuthqâ*, vices carry the destruction of the nations whose individuals are dominated by them because they despise one another and go as far as to call their enemies to become their lords (p. 153). Vices as well as virtues are relevant because of their social outcome much more than because of their individual impact.

No wonder that, for Afghânî, cowardice was the worst vice. There was an editorial that dealt exclusively with this vice³⁰. It began with a meaningful Koranic verse: "Wherever ye are, death will find you out, even if ye are in towers built up strong and high!" (4: 78). Cowardice prevents man from attaining his perfection, although the divine grace has endowed him with the necessary capacity. The authors defined cowardice as:

Abandonment of the soul, that gives up fighting against anything which happens to it and is not favorable to its condition; it is a mental disease that deprives [man] from the power to conserve his existence" (p. 224).

30. "Cowardice", No 18, 26 Dhû l-Hijja 1301/ October 16, 1884. French translation in *Orient* 21 (1962) 110-115.

Therefore, cowardice had its own meaning for *Al-urwa al-wuthqâ*, which could be described as lacking the instinct for survival; it never lost the connotation of avoiding or running away from armed combat.

As for the causes of cowardice, they are multiple. But, in the end, all result from fear of the death. Death is “the way of all besouled being”; its time is uncertain and only God knows it. The authors believed that death is unavoidable and that God provides man “with goodness in this life, and happiness in the afterlife”. However, this goodness paralyzes man and causes him to believe the opposite, namely that courage and boldness are the cause of his perishing, but courage is precisely what God has given to him in order to keep his life! (p. 225).

Inconsistencies are not uncommon in the arguments of the authors. I see one example in the love of death for which they argue. After a general plea in favor of courage, the authors addressed Muslims and told them: Cowardice is the highest obstacle preventing man from accomplishing what satisfies God because God has made the love of death the distinguishing mark of the faith, as Koran readers know, and they quote a Koranic verse that I want to cite because of its significance:

Hast thou not turned thy vision to those who were told to hold back their hands (from fight) but establish regular prayers and spend in regular Charity? When (at length) the order for fighting was issued to them, behold! a section of them feared men as - or even more than - they should have feared Allah; they said: “Our Lord! Why hast Thou ordered us to fight? Wouldst Thou not grant us respite to our (natural) term, near (enough)?” (4: 77).

Love of death is the distinguishing mark because the hypocrites pray and give charity but do not sacrifice their lives! In this way, Muslims achieve their highest perfection. We have read about perfection as the sum of virtues, but now the point is about courage and love of death. There is some inconsistency; what is true perfection?

Among the articles of the *Al-urwa al-wuthqâ* we find other interpretations of what constitutes the highest aim of man's life. In the editorial entitled “The hope and the search for glory”³¹, the authors

31. N° 11, 25 Sha'bân 1301 / June 19, 1884. French translation, *Orient*, 24 (1962) 135-144.

saw the seeking of glory (*majd*), -they use honor (*sharf*), nobility (*karâma*), and high rank (*'uluw al-maqâm*) as equivalent values for glory- as anchored in the very human essence (p. 169). The desire is kindled by God in the heart, and the glory that man gets is given to him by God.

Hope is the driving force on the difficult, painful way towards glory. The authors defined hope with metaphorical images such as “a brilliant light through the darkness of misadventures” or “an expert guide leading through the ocean of fears”. They also insisted that hope is “expectation followed by action and accompanied by the soul’s taking on adversities” (p. 171).

If action is essential for their idea of hope, God’s participation is even more important. Hope and thirst of glory have been designed by God and placed in the soul to let men prove themselves. Difficulties arise; men struggle against each other; they fail to attain their aims; and all of this “the Divine Wisdom does to identify who are the strenuous and who are the patient” (p. 172). The Muslims know it and know of God’s mercy that saves them from falling into desperation, and “desperation and despondency are evidence of unbelief” (p. 174).

Therefore, we should raise again the question: What is the man’s highest goal? Aghânî does not hesitate to answer: glory, honor³². Honor is not material at all, as many erroneously believe; it is neither wealth in owning buildings, clothing, servants, concubines, etc. nor in “titles and degrees, such as Bek and Pasha” (p. 186). True honor is beauty (*bahâ*) for the person, and gazes and thoughts go to it; honor results from action, from an action that has “a good effect upon the nation (*umma*), the co-religionaries, and the human species, in general” (p. 189).

Good deeds raise man to the highest esteem. Nevertheless, the authors admitted that not everybody praises his deeds, and that some suffer “adversities coming from people of corrupt nature” (p. 190). They are confident of the temporary nature of the adversities and that, in the end, the corrupt people will see the light and repent. After a person’s death God will take care of him, and his glory will last forever alive through the tongues of people.

The whole discourse is unconvincing, if not flawed, and it mainly focuses on the individual. The individual Muslim is called to sacrifice

32. “Honor”, no 17, 17 Ramaḍân/ July 10,1884. French translation, *Orient* 24 (1963) 145-150.

with the promise of enduring glory and honor. In addition, virtuous Muslims will produce a glorious nation, united, and free from the Western domination that humiliates them. The discourse may tell us something about the feelings and ambitions of the authors, especially of al-Afghânî.

Let us read again *Al-‘urwa al-wuthqâ* and look at its doctrine of society and Islamic community. Although the authors cannot deny equality among men, they are explicit about social stratification and they affirm that God wanted it:

Each individual has a function prescribed [by God] to him in his social class and in the nation, and a duty to fulfill in order to secure a good life for himself in this world and to acquire assets valid for the afterlife; he is a man of one heart (p. 202)³³.

The danger they perceive is that otherwise man will be chased by greed and appetite (*shahwât*) and that man will run after only one thing. The authors give a lavish life as an example of what man will long for, but “He will lose both this world and the afterlife and maybe the effects of his behavior will cause damage to his neighbors” (p. 202).

Scholars learned in religious sciences, ‘*ulamâ*’, have an important place in Afghânî’s ideal society. The *oulemas* are cheered as “spirit of the the nation, leaders of the Muhammadan religion”, and reminded of their duty “to apprise the negligent of what God imposes” (p. 204). *Oulemas* and what might be called intellectuals, ‘*uqalâ*’ should play a political role in bringing the Muslims to renewed unity (p. 127)³⁴.

The idea of unity is recurrent throughout their writings, and there is some peculiar approach in an article entitled “Group solidarity”, *ta‘aṣṣub*³⁵. The term *ta‘aṣṣub* often means “bigotry, fanaticism” and the authors complained that most people only grasp this aspect and that they blame *ta‘aṣṣub* for being the cause of all distress. Afghânî initially saw fanaticism as one of the main causes of the backwardness of the Islamic countries³⁶. Then, he reacted against criticism by the

33. The quotation comes from the before-mentioned article “The causes of the preservation of the kingdom”.

34. “Decline and stagnation of the Muslims, cause of it”, No 5, 24 Jumâdâ II 1301 / April 10, 1884. *Orient* 22 (1962) 131-138.

35. Issue no 6, 28 Jumâdâ II 1301 / April 24, 1884.

36. “Speech in Alexandria at Zizinîya Hall”, delivered in May 1879, and published in the report «The Sage of the East» in the journal *Miṣr* of Alexandria,

West of a supposed Muslim fanaticism, and saw positive features in the concept. Thus, we read that *ta'aşşsub* develops out of *'aşabîya*, tribal solidarity, and that *'aşabîya* derives from *'asaba*, association, the way by which people strengthen their force. *Ta'aşşsub* is "a quality of the human soul from which a movement originates to protect those who join [the group] and to defend its right" (p. 132). No doubt a virtue, group solidarity causes members of the group to react whenever one of them is attacked.

God created this quality to build up folks and nations; *ta'aşşsub* defines each group and fosters their competition. The authors got so enthusiastic, stating that *Ta'aşşsub* is a universal spirit and its descent is the shape and form of the nation, the spirits of the individuals are its perceptions" (p. 132). If it weakens, so does the cohesion of the nation. Eventually, the nation falls apart. By "nation" I am translating *umma* to denote the political or the religious community.

Ta'aşşsub is like other qualities; it has a middle term and two extremes. One is by defect, the other by excess, and the middle term is perfection (p. 133). Religious partisanship is one of the highest human virtues, if it keeps the middle position and if the followers do not act in a tyrannic manner and do not oppress those under their protection. The authors maintained that Muslims were never bigots in contrast to Christians since Muslims never forced others to convert "as the Spaniards did to the Muslims of al-Andalus" (p. 135).

The religious bond, as noted above, is the firmest among Muslims. No wonder that foreigners, Europeans who want to subdue Muslim countries, try to dissolve this bond by disseminating liberal ideas and affirming that *ta'aşşsub* is the whole cause of backwardness. Afghânî and 'Abdûh wondered why Muslims who believed them did not see that the French were the most religious fanatics, the most zealous defenders of their faith (p. 138) and that even Prime Minister Gladstone (p. 139)³⁷, the liberal politician, was a fanatic, that his spirit was not different from that of Peter "the Monk" (Peter the Hermit who called for the First Crusade in 1095).

issue no 47, on May 24, 1879. The speech is reprinted in *Al-âthâr al-kâmila*, vol. 3, pp. 97-104. Afghânî defined fanaticism as the misuse of the religion, at that time, p. 101.

37. William Gladstone (1809-1898) was first a conservative, later he became leader of the Liberal Party. He was elected Prime Minister in 1868, 1880, 1886 and 1892. Gladstone was incensed, in 1876, when he read about the massacres

Their obvious conclusion was, therefore, that all states are religious, and that all religions or nations are competing for power. In the editorial "Unity and sovereignty"³⁸ the authors maintained that nations are driven by two forces: the trend towards unity and the imperative of sovereignty, and that the one requires the other (p. 163). They went further to affirm that nations can only grow and be alive if they get the appropriate nutrition which is dominion (*taghallub*), and that a nation without dominion will perish.

If we observe the history of every race and analyze the conditions of the folks, their existence and passing away, we find the rule of God (sunnat *Allāh*) in human societies. Their share of existence is according to their share of unity, and their amount of greatness is proportional to their amount of dominion (p. 163).

If God decreed these commandments, He must have thought of the Muslims in the first place. Indeed, the authors recognized that the Koran, the divine traditions, and the records of the Prophet continuously call believers to expand the dominion of Islam, and that "most of its religious precepts can only be fulfilled without the power of legal authority" (p. 166). The last sentence reveals a fundamentalist concept of Islam according to which Islam can only be practiced in a Muslim state.

Since Muslims are failing to accomplish these divine commandments for unity and dominion, they are suffering under foreign intervention and occupation. "Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts" (13: 11). This Koranic verse opened an editorial on "God's ways in the nations and their relevance for the Muslims"³⁹ where Afghânî and 'Abdûh reflected on the political situation of Muslims. Their interpretation of history is similar to that found in other religious authors and is not innovative⁴⁰.

and tortures inflicted upon the inhabitants of Bulgaria by their Turkish rulers and he wrote a pamphlet "Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East". He had many speeches and books published so that I do not know which one Afghânî refers to here.

38. N° 10, 10 Sha'bân 1301/ June 5, 1884. *Orient* 24 (1962) 125-134.

39. N° 17, 4 Dhû l-ijja 1301/ September 25, 1884. French *Orient* 22 (1962) 151-159.

40. For instance, Ibn Hāzīm (d. 1064) and his *Kitāb al-Fiṣal (o al-Faṣl) fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-al-niḥal*, (Cairo, 1317/1899. Baghdad: Muthannā, 1964), vol.

The Arabs were a wild, primitive folk, and the undisputed success in their conquests was due to Islam exclusively: "This is a nation which God created out of little and which He raised to the highest rank" (p. 212). Whereas in his 1882 lecture in Calcutta "On Teaching and Learning" Afghânî had asserted that the first Muslims acquired science thanks to Islam and praised the role of philosophy, two years later he silenced this aspect.

The authors realized that "this nation has over 400 million individuals and that the lands belonging to it extend from the Atlantic Ocean to China" –in 1884. In spite of such greatness, many of its folks were being dominated by foreign powers. The way to recover the lost glory is to acquire the virtues the nation and their members once possessed. We have read about them, about solidarity, mainly religious solidarity, and about cowardice as the worst vice. We are reminded once again that true believers do not fear death because "those killed on God's path lives and God cares for them" (p. 216); they enjoy eternal happiness. Thus, the believer has to fear God alone and the authors quoted the Koran: "Fear them not; fear Me, if ye are true believers". (3:175).

Al-'urwa al-wuthqâ presents a series of arguments that support Islam. We should keep in mind that there were and are many sects and schools within Islam and that in spite of their differences they are generally accepted as Islamic. Those arguments were espoused by Afghânî and 'Abdûh after he first replied to Renan in contrary terms, but they are consistent with Afghânî's former writings, such as his *Refutation of the Materialists*. More importantly, they are consistent with Afghânî's public life. He was not an unbeliever. He always viewed Islam as a religion where political and military powers are inherent⁴¹. It is the traditional doctrine, and the circumstance that he might have interpreted Islam according to his own political and personal ambitions does not deprive it of validity.

Renan was duped by Afghânî who had good reasons for duping him. The British Empire ruled over India and Egypt, from where he

2, pp. 84-85. Spanish translation by M. Asín PALACIOS, *Abenházam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas*, (1931. Madrid: Turner, 1984), vol. 3, pp. 136-138

41. "The fundamental principle of the Islamic religion is to strive for supremacy, might, conquest, power, and to reject any law which conflicts with Islamic legislation, etc." in "Christianity, Islam and their followers", Issue n° 4, 17 Jumâdâ II, 1301 / April 3, 1884 (p. 118).

was ousted. The British were the first enemy to be fought. France was colonizing Algeria and Tunisia, but Afghânî could not fight all the enemies at the same time. By flattering Renan and the French intelligence he expected to win some friends whose support or at least sympathy was welcomed.

Josep Puig MONTADA
(Cambridge, USA)