

IX

RASHID RIDA

IDEAS such as those of 'Abduh were 'in the air' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. We find similar groups of reformers in all the more advanced of the Muslim countries, and perhaps it is too simple to explain them in terms of the influence of al-Afghani and 'Abduh. It could be said, as an alternative, that *al-'Urwa al-wuthqa* could only have had its influence because there were already little groups of Muslims thinking on the lines which it made popular. In Tunis such a group existed among the associates and followers of Khayr al-Din: in particular, there was Muhammad Bayram, one of a line of religious scholars, who wrote a number of works on reform of the law, as well as an important history of his age. In Baghdad there were the scholars of the Alusi family, one of whom wrote a vast commentary on the Quran, a judicious summary of the traditional learning, while another, a generation younger, wrote a defence of Ibn Taymiyya against charges of unorthodoxy—a sign of the influence which such ideas were now beginning to exercise over educated Muslims of a different tradition.¹ In Syria similar men can be found in all the great centres of Muslim learning, Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. Among those who were roughly contemporary with 'Abduh, and had some contact with him, was Tahir al-Jaza'iri (1851–1920). A scholar of Algerian origin from the entourage of the famous Amir 'Abd al-Qadir, a writer on literary and linguistic subjects, he had a wider importance through his work for the establishment of modern schools and the preservation of ancient books; it was he who founded the Zahiriyya library in Damascus as a home for the manuscripts scattered throughout the mosques and old schools of the city. The same concern for a blend of ancient and modern learning, for an acceptance of the modern world which would not destroy the convictions and values of Islam, can be seen in the life and writings of Shaykh Husayn al-Jisr of Tripoli (1845–1909).

¹ Cf. N. Alusi, *Jala' al-'aynayn*.

A student of the Azhar, where he was influenced by the teaching of Marsafi, he later edited one of the early newspapers and founded a 'National Islamic School' in his native town; the curriculum included the Arabic, French, and Turkish languages, the religious sciences, logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences of modern Europe, all studied in Arabic through such works as those of Dr Van Dyke, an American missionary who provided the Syrian Protestant College with many textbooks explaining the modern sciences in a clear and correct Arabic.² He also wrote an exposition of Muslim doctrine, *al-Risala al-hamidiyya*, of which the purpose was to present Islam in a new way and one easily understood, and respond to the new interest in Islam which, or so he believed, was being shown by non-Muslims. On many matters his attitude was that of a traditionalist, not that which 'Abduh was making into the new orthodoxy. He maintained for example that the *jihad* was legitimate, not only to defend Islam but to bring into the faith those who obstinately refused it; he defended the Islamic conception of slavery; and he accepted the traditional view that the door of *ijtihad* had been closed after the first three centuries—the scholars of the first ages spoke with more authority than those who came later because they were nearer in time to the Prophet and those who had known him, and after a time all the important questions had been settled.³ But there is perhaps a new note to be seen in the way he begins, with the personality and preaching of Muhammad, and still more in his insistence on the rights of reason in interpreting Quran and *hadith*.⁴ They must, he claims, be interpreted literally unless the literal interpretation clearly contradicts some rational principle; if so, they must be explained figuratively. What cannot be accepted is that there should be a contradiction between all possible interpretations and a conclusive intellectual proof (*dalil 'aqli qati'*).

Among Syrians of the next generation there were a group who had been prepared by the teaching of such men to appreciate and accept fully the ideas of al-Afghani and 'Abduh. They included 'Abd al-Qadir al-Maghribi, who spent some years of his youth in close contact with al-Afghani in Constantinople; Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, a Kurd from Damascus; Amir Shakib

² Cf. Rida, *al-Manar wa'l-Azhar*, p. 142.

³ *Jisr*, pp. 301, 310, 320.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 4 & 328 ff.

Arslan, a member of one of the noble Druze families of Lebanon who, while still a schoolboy, fell under the influence of 'Abduh during his years of exile in Beirut; and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935). Life led them in different paths. Kurd 'Ali and Maghribi, after a youth spent in journalism in Cairo and Damascus, gave their riper age to scholarship: they founded the Arab Academy of Damascus, and Kurd 'Ali became the historian of the city. Shakib Arslan, although he never lost his concern for Islamic reform, was drawn into Arab nationalist politics, and we shall come upon his traces again later. It was Rashid Rida who, more than the rest, preserved the impulse imparted to them by 'Abduh.⁵

Born in a village near Tripoli, of a family not unlike 'Abduh's own, a village family of some standing and with a tradition of learning and piety, Rashid Rida started his education in the ancient way at a local Quranic school; but coming a generation later than his master, he was able to profit from the new education, and at a Turkish government school in Tripoli and then at Husayn al-Jisr's school he imbibed something of the new sciences as well as a certain knowledge of French. But he also mastered the sciences of the Islamic religion and the Arabic language, and his writings bear witness to a solid scholarship of the old-fashioned type.

He has left us something which is not so rare in Arabic as was once thought, a fragment of autobiography describing his mental and spiritual formation during the first thirty years or so of his life.⁶ The great intellectual influences stand out clearly. In Husayn al-Jisr's school and through the writings of the Lebanese journalists of Cairo he caught his first glimpse of modern science and the new world of Europe and America. Among the Islamic classics he fell under the spell of Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, and in a sense this was to remain the deepest influence of his life. Ghazali had struck a balance between external obedience to the law and personal inner devotion; Rashid Rida, like 'Abduh, always laid stress on the importance of such devotion and on good intentions as necessary if ritual prayer and works were to be

⁵ For the life and thought of Rida cf. Arslan, *Rashid Rida*; Jomier; Kerr, *Muh. Abduh and Rashid Rida* and 'Rashid Rida and Islamic Legal Reform', *Muslim Wld*, 1 (1960); Laoust, 'Le Réformisme musulman dans la littérature arabe contemporaine', *Orient*, x (1959).

⁶ Rida, *al-Manar wa'l-Azhar*, pp. 129 ff.

valid. But in later generations the balance had been tilted: inner devotion within the bounds of the law had become mystical practices free from the law's restraints and evolving a ritual and theology of its own. Rashid Rida realized this when, under the influence of Ghazali, he decided to join one of the orders of mystics and practise the spiritual life under the direction of a shaykh. He chose the Naqshabandi order and for a time followed its teachings, adopting ascetic practices of an extreme severity. But he gradually became aware of the spiritual dangers of the mystical systems, and his doubts came to the surface in a dramatic way when he attended a session of the Mawlawis, the 'dancing dervishes':

They said to me, 'Won't you come and attend the meeting of the Mawlawis in their monastery—it is like the heavenly paradise, lying on the bank of the river Abu 'Ali.' I agreed, and went with those who were going after the Friday prayers. It was the opening of the season for these meetings in the spring. I sat in the spectators' space . . . until the time of the session came, when Mawlawi dervishes appeared in their meeting-place in front of us, with their shaykh in the seat of honour. There were handsome beardless youths among them, dressed in snow-white gowns like brides' dresses, dancing to the moving sound of the reed-pipe, turning swiftly and skilfully so that their robes flew out and formed circles, at harmonious distances and not encroaching on one another. They stretched out their arms and inclined their necks, and passed in turn before their shaykh and bowed to him. I asked, 'What's this?' and they told me, 'This is the ritual prayer of the order founded by our Lord Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, author of the *Mathnawi*.'

I could not control myself, and stood up in the centre of the hall and shouted something like this: 'O people, or can I call you Muslims! These are forbidden acts, which one has no right either to look at or to pass over in silence, for to do so is to accept them. To those who commit them God's word applies, "They have made their religion a joke and a plaything." I have done what I was obliged to do; now take your leave, and may God pardon you.' Then I left the place and retraced my footsteps quickly to the city; as I was going I looked back, and found behind me a small number who had returned, while the greater number stayed on. . . .⁷

The suspicion of Sufism thus generated was one of the factors which in later years was to draw him nearer to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and the practices of Wahhabism, but at the time

⁷ Ibid. pp. 171–2.

of which he was writing he knew Ibn Taymiyya only through the works of his opponents, and nothing about the Wahhabis except for the orthodox condemnation of them and such tales as that they stabled their horses in the Prophet's mosque.⁸

No less powerful than this revulsion from the mysticism of his time was the attraction exercised on him by al-Afghani and 'Abduh as soon as he came to know their ideas. He has recorded that his first acquaintance with the *'Urwa al-wuthqa* was in 1884-5, the time of its first appearance. He heard some articles from it read aloud by Egyptian political exiles who were then staying with his family, and at about the same time he met 'Abduh when the latter visited Tripoli.⁹ But it was not until almost ten years later, in 1892-3, that he discovered a complete set of the *'Urwa*, and the effect was profound:

I found several copies of the journal among my father's papers, and every number was like an electric current striking me, giving my soul a shock, or setting it in a blaze, and carrying me from one state to another. . . . My own experience and that of others, and history, have taught me that no other Arabic discourse in this age or the centuries which preceded it has done what it did in the way of touching the seat of emotion in the heart and persuasion in the mind.¹⁰

He thought for a time of going to join al-Afghani in Constantinople, but this plan came to nothing, and the influence of al-Afghani upon him was soon overshadowed by that of 'Abduh. In 1894 'Abduh visited Tripoli again; Rashid Rida met him once more and talked at length to him. From that moment until his death he was 'Abduh's liege man: the mouthpiece of his ideas, the guardian of his good name, and his biographer. There were, it is true, others of 'Abduh's disciples who cast doubt on Rashid Rida's claim to be his spiritual heir, and, as we shall see, the doctrines of 'Abduh suffered a certain change at the hands of his follower, but the reality of his devotion cannot be doubted. In 1897 he left Syria for Cairo, and the next year he published the first number of a periodical, *al-Manar*, which was to be the organ of reform according to the ideas of 'Abduh. He continued to publish it more or less regularly until he died in 1935, and indeed there is a sense in which, from the time of its foundation, the *Manar* was his life. Into it he poured his reflections on the

⁸ *al-Manar wa'l-Azhar*, p. 179. ⁹ Rida, *Ta'rikh*, i. 390. ¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 303.

spiritual life, his explanations of doctrine, his endless polemics, violent alike in attack and defence, all the news that came to him from the corners of the Muslim world, his thoughts on world politics, and the great commentary on the Quran (*Tafsir al-Manar*), based on 'Abduh's lectures and writings, carried farther by 'Abduh's disciple but never finished. His other activities were numerous, it is true. He wrote a number of books: some were collections of articles first published in *al-Manar*, but others were new and important—above all his life of 'Abduh, the most important source for the history of the Muslim Arab mind in the late nineteenth century. He put into practice an idea which was dear to 'Abduh and created a seminary for Muslim missionaries and spiritual directors (*dar al-da'wa wa'l-irshad*): after he had failed to set it up in Constantinople under the auspices of the Young Turks he finally started it in Cairo in 1912, but it was only active until the beginning of the war of 1914. He took an important part in Islamic politics, and attended the Islamic conferences of Mecca in 1926 and Jerusalem in 1931. As a Syrian, he remained on the margin of Egyptian politics, but as the mouthpiece of 'Abduh was not uninvolved in them. His relations with the Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi were bad while the khedive was on bad terms with 'Abduh, but grew better later. Like 'Abduh, he wrote a severe criticism of Muhammad 'Ali, and by implication of the whole line of policy followed by his family, during the centenary celebrations,¹¹ but later the khedive gave financial support to the seminary. This change, and also his good relations with 'Ali Yusuf, were connected with his opposition to Mustafa Kamil and the nationalists of his party; 'Ali Yusuf, he thought, was a man of integrity and independent judgement, Mustafa Kamil was not.¹² He played a larger part in the political struggles of Syria, from the Young Turk Revolution until his death: in the Party of Decentralization before 1914, the wartime negotiations with the British, as president of the Syrian Congress of 1920, as member of the Syro-Palestinian delegation in Geneva in 1921, and of the political committee in Cairo during the Syrian revolt of 1925–6. But all such activities were no more than by-products of his essential work as guardian of the ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh.

In general, the view of Islam held by Rashid Rida and his

¹¹ *al-Manar*, v (1902–3), 157 ff., 175 ff.

¹² *Ibid.* xvii (1913–14), 68 ff.

friends was that expounded by al-Afghani and 'Abduh. It starts from the question, 'Why are the Muslim countries backward in every aspect of civilization?' and answers it in terms of the essential connexion, in Islam although not necessarily in other religions, between religious truth and worldly prosperity. The teachings and moral precepts of Islam are such that, if they are properly understood and fully obeyed, they will lead to success in this world as well as the next—and to success in all the forms in which the world understands it, strength, respect, civilization, happiness. If they are not understood and obeyed, weakness, decay, barbarism are the results. This is true not only of individuals but of communities: the Islamic *umma* was the heart of the world's civilization so long as it was truly Islamic. Now, in science and civilization, Muslims are more backward than non-Muslims: it is not necessary to compare the Muslims of the Near East with the Christians of Europe, it is enough to compare them with the eastern Christians who live among them. After a century of modern education, how many men of independent judgement are there in Egypt, and how many are there among the Indian Muslims compared with the Hindus and Parsees? The reason for this backwardness is that the Muslims have lost the truth of their religion, and this has been encouraged by bad political rulers, for the true Islam involves two things, acceptance of the unity of God and consultation in matters of State, and despotic rulers have tried to make Muslims forget the second by encouraging them to abandon the first.¹³ But what happened in the past can happen again: Islamic civilization was created out of nothing by the Quran and the moral precepts enshrined in it, and can be re-created if Muslims return to the Quran. It is irrelevant to say that modern civilization rests on technical advance, and that Islamic civilization cannot be revived so long as the Muslims are technically backward; technical skill is potentially universal, and its acquisition depends on certain moral habits and intellectual principles. If Muslims had these, they would easily obtain technical skill; and such habits and principles are in fact contained in Islam.¹⁴

What are the principles which are contained alike in Islam and in modern civilization? First of all comes activity: positive effort is the essence of Islam, and this is the meaning of the

¹³ *al-Manar*, ix (1906–7), 357 ff.

¹⁴ Arslan, *Limadha*, pp. 82 ff.

term *jihad* in its most general sense.¹⁵ The Europeans have this dynamism more than anyone else in the modern world, and that is why they have conquered the world: they are willing to sacrifice their lives and money for their nation, they have a loyalty which none of them will betray, they have in brief that fanatical devotion which is the basis of the strength of nations.¹⁶ All this the Muslims once had and can have again, but in a different way. The Europeans are active and successful because they have abandoned their other-worldly religion and replaced it by the principle of nationality, but Muslims can find such a principle of unity and loyalty in their religion itself. For the second distinguishing sign of Islam is that it has created a single community: not simply a Church, a body of men linked by faith and worship yet separated by their natural characteristics, but a community in every sense. The long history of the caliphate, the spread of a common culture, and many centuries of mingling and intermarriage, have created an *umma* which is both a Church and a kind of 'nation': it is held together by unity of religion, of law, by equality and mutual rights and duties, but also by natural links, and in particular that of language, since Arabic is the universal language of devotion, doctrine, and law wherever Islam exists.¹⁷

It is impossible indeed to exaggerate the importance of unity for these writers, and the scandal of disunity. But when they talked of unity, they did not mean a unity based on feeling or tradition alone. They were aware, as al-Afghani had been, how transient and unstable such a merely affective unity could be, and how dangerous when not transient. Nor did they mean that unity should express itself necessarily in the form of a single Muslim State; we shall see later what type and degree of political union Rashid Rida thought to be possible. Islamic unity meant for them, in essence, the agreement of hearts of those who accepted each other as believers and dwelt together in mutual tolerance, and the active co-operation of all in carrying out the commandments of religion. The community which was so constituted held authority from God: this was witnessed by the *hadith*, 'My community will not agree upon an error'. In so far

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 87.

¹⁷ Rida, *al-Wahy al-muhammadi*, pp. 225 ff.

as any human being exercised authority in it, it was 'those who have the power to bind and loose', a vague phrase which may mean, in general, those who have responsibility for the unity and continuity of the *umma*, or more precisely the doctors of the law and the holders of political power.

But unity is necessarily connected with truth: there can be no real agreement between Muslims unless they are all agreed on the truth, and conversely agreement is a sign of truth. Possession of the truth is the third and most fundamental sign of Islam, and the true Islam is that which was taught by the Prophet and the 'Elders' (*salaf*): a comparatively simple, easily intelligible system of doctrines and practices of which the knowledge is contained in the Quran and the tradition of what the Prophet and his companions said and how they lived. It was fully revealed in the lifetime of the Prophet, who himself proclaimed, in the 'Pilgrimage of Farewell': 'Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and approved Islam for your religion'. Thus the Islam of the 'Elders' is that of the first generation who had known Muhammad, and the only *ijma'* which is valid is that of this generation.¹⁸

Here there is a difference from the teaching of 'Abduh, and it is one which is significant of Rida's mind and method. When 'Abduh talked of the *salaf*, he meant in a general way the creators of the central tradition of Muslim thought and devotion, from the Prophet to al-Ghazali. Either because of a certain vagueness in his concepts, or from a sense of the overriding importance of unity, he had been content to construct a synthesis of elements which might prove incompatible with one another if any of them were carried to its logical conclusion. But Rashid Rida had the spirit of a disciple as well as a certain intellectual force and clarity which made him more rigid in his formulations than 'Abduh had been, and so, in spite of his emphasis on unity, more exclusive. Because of this, the Sunni element in his thought is more prominent than in that of 'Abduh, still more than in that of al-Afghani (who, as we have seen, was probably himself a Shi'i). He believed that unity between Sunnis and Shi'is was essential, and that it rested on two conditions: the first, that the two sects should co-operate in those matters on which they agreed and pardon each other for those about which

¹⁸ Quran, v. 5 (Arberry's trs.); Rida, *Muhawarat*, p. 58.

they differed, and the second, that when an adherent of one sect maligned the other he should be answered by a member of his own group.¹⁹ These are fine sentiments, but when disagreement broke out or unity could not be achieved, he was quick to lay the blame on the Shi'is and ascribe base motives to those of their leaders who had incurred his anger: Shi'ism was full of 'fairy tales and illegitimate innovations';²⁰ its leaders were preventing unity from selfish love of money and glory; it sprang from a doctrinal difference which did not exist in the time of the *salaf*, and was largely owing to the machinations of the first Jewish converts to Islam. (The accusation that early Jewish converts introduced legends and false ideas into the body of the faith is common in polemical writings of the classical age.) It is not surprising that his relations with Shi'i writers were not devoid of tension.

He interpreted Sunnism in the direction of strict Hanbalism, of which the tradition was more alive in Syria, particularly in Damascus, than in Egypt. Although he differed from Ibn Taymiyya in some ways, he derived perhaps as much from his teachings as from those of al-Ghazali, and through the *Manar* published a number of his works. Sympathy with Hanbalism led him, in later life, to give enthusiastic support to the revival of Wahhabism in central Arabia, and to the policy of its leader, 'Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud. He welcomed the Wahhabi conquest of the Hejaz and the holy cities, and defended them against charges of heresy. Their doctrines, he declared, were wholly orthodox. Their religion was that of the original Muslims; although they rejected all idea of a superhuman status for Muhammad they thought of him as having the highest rank among human beings, and in regard to the saints they objected not to the idea that they performed exceptional works but to the tendency of the ignorant to give them the worship they owed to God alone.²¹ Ibn Sa'ud indeed was maintaining and defending the essential principles of Sunnism better than almost anyone since the first four caliphs.²² (It was natural that his enemies should hint that he had been bought by Ibn Sa'ud: defending himself against this charge, he said that it was not personal contact but reading and thought which had caused him to give up his early view that

¹⁹ Rida, *al-Sunna wa'l-Shi'a*, ii. 208 ff.

²⁰ Ibid. i. 23.

²¹ Cf. Rida, *al-Wahhabiyyun*.

²² Rida, *al-Sunna wa'l-Shi'a*, p. 79.

Wahhabis were an innovating sect; it was only later that he established contact with Ibn Sa'ud, and even then it was only on the political level, as part of a plan he had to bring about a union of Arab rulers against foreign interference.)²³

Like 'Abduh, Rashid Rida disliked the later development of mystical thought and practice in Sunni Islam. Like him, he drew a distinction between the true mysticism and the false. It was legitimate and indeed necessary that the Muslim should add to sound doctrine and good acts according to the *Shari'a* something else: 'Truthfulness and sincerity and the making of resolutions and the examination of conscience'.²⁴ But it was bad when this led to the development of a false theology and of practices not sanctioned by the *Shari'a*. There were spiritual dangers in this kind of mysticism: an excessive submission towards a shaykh might come between the soul and God; the spiritual liturgies invented by the orders could lead to neglect of the forms of worship directly commanded by God in the Quran; the practice of calling up spirits had dangerous doctrinal implications. 'Abduh would have agreed with this, but it is perhaps typical of Rida that he casts doubt on the motives of the mystics. This sort of mysticism, he says, (echoing once more a theme of earlier polemics), was introduced into Islam by secret Zoroastrians who wished

to corrupt the religion of the Arabs and pull down the pillars of their kingdom by internal dissension, so that by this means they could restore the rule of the Zoroastrians and the domination of their religion to which the Arabs had put an end in Islam.²⁵

There is also a practical criticism of the mystics common to Rida and his friends. The Sufis are a weakness to society as well as a danger to religion. They neglect their duties in the world, studying things which are of no value,²⁶ and they corrupt the *umma* by teaching that Islam is a religion of passive submission not strength and activity; their festivals can be an occasion for drunkenness, drug-taking, and other kinds of immorality.²⁷

Rashid Rida's emphasis on the unchanging nature of Islam does not, however, mean that his thought is rigid, for, like the

²³ *al-Manar*, xxviii (1927-8), 1 ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.* xxii (1920-1), 177.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 177.

²⁶ Maghribi, *al-Bayyinah*, i. 55.

²⁷ Kurd 'Ali, *Mudhakkirat*, iv. 1014.

Hanbalis, he distinguishes between what belongs to the essence of Islam and what does not: what is laid down in the Quran and the authentic *hadith* is one thing, the accumulation of practices and traditions which has grown up around them is another. This distinction is connected with another: between acts of worship and those of morality, acts oriented towards God and those oriented towards other men. The first have been laid down for ever and completely in Quran and *hadith*; they can never be changed, and no addition can be made to them; so far as they are concerned, the *ijma'* of the first generation, of those who knew the Prophet and heard his words, is binding. Likewise in matters of personal religious habits, not covered by any strict religious obligation and not involving relations with others, it is usually best for Muslims to follow the example of the early Muslims as laid down in the *hadith*, for to do so will strengthen the bonds of the community; but they should do so freely, as a spontaneous act of conscience, and no one should put pressure on them.²⁸ But the whole complex structure of human relations has not and cannot be regulated in the same way by explicit texts. When there does exist such a text, precise, explicit, admitting of no ambiguity, well authenticated, then there is no argument, and men must obey it. But to this, two qualifications must be added. First, when a specific command is contradicted by a general one, laying down some such general moral principle as that no injury should be done (*la darar wa la dirar*), or that necessity permits what would otherwise be forbidden (*al-dururat tubih al-mahzurat*), then the principle should be preferred to the specific injunction.²⁹ Secondly, there are many problems in regard to which there is either no text at all, or else one of which the meaning is not clear or the authenticity doubtful. In such matters, it is for human reason to decide what act best accords with the spirit of Islam. In so deciding, human reason must be guided by the principle of interest, interpreted in the light of the general principles laid down in the Quran and *hadith*.

As we have seen, the principle of interest was not new to the Islamic jurists, and Rashid Rida is able to quote Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya, and others to support him. In some ways, however, he goes beyond his masters, at least by making explicit what was half-hidden in their writings. For the traditional

²⁸ Rida, *Yusr al-Islam*, p. 79.

²⁹ Rida, *Muhawarat*, p. 126.

thought, *maslaha* had been a subordinate principle, a guide in the process of reasoning by analogy rather than a substitute for it. For Rashid Rida, it tends to become itself the positive principle of decision, replacing analogy; and other commands or prohibitions, whether specific or general, have rather a negative function, of laying down the limits within which reason shall work. Since interests vary according to circumstances, the implications of this are far-reaching: what Rashid Rida is saying in fact is that there is and can be no *ijma'*, even that of the first generation, in matters of social morality; or, in other words, that the Muslim community has legislative power. The rulers of the community have not only the executive and judicial powers, they can legislate in the public interest. Thus there can be a body of 'positive law' (*qanun*) subordinate to the *Shari'a* in the sense that if there is conflict it is the latter which is valid, but otherwise independent and with a binding force which derives ultimately from the general principles of Islam; for it is not only the right but the duty of a Muslim nation to give itself 'a system of just laws appropriate to the situation in which its past history has placed it'.³⁰

This does not mean, of course, that every Muslim is free to exercise his own judgement and create his own system of rules. The creation and change of social morality and law is the function of 'those who have power to bind and loose': those who have authority in the *umma* or its political divisions, or, to put it in another way, those who have responsibility towards Islam. When he uses this phrase, Rashid Rida is thinking, like the jurists of later Islam after the caliphate broke up, of a partnership between the two types of authority: the just and devout Muslim ruler and the real '*ulama*', those who have the personal qualifications to exercise *ijtihad*. The making of laws, like all the functions of government, should be exercised by consultation (*shura*) between them. But here again the modern note is present. He thinks of the '*ulama*' as an organized body, of the *shura* as a deliberate process, and of the law which it produces as springing from some sort of formal procedure. In other words, having rejected the old conception of *ijma'*, he is introducing a new one: the *ijma'* of the '*ulama*' of each age, a legislative rather than a judicial principle, working by some sort of parliamentary process.

³⁰ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, p. 90 (Fr. trs. p. 151).

It is Rashid Rida's contention that this is the original conception of legislation in Islam. In course of time it was obscured: in every age some of the doctors of the law still remembered it, but except for the greatest they were silenced by fear of the government, while others lost sight of the distinction between what was essential and what was not. Thus there crept into Islam that disease to which he refers sometimes as congealment (*jumud*) and sometimes as blind imitation (*taqlid*). In the sphere of law this takes the form of slavish obedience to one or other of the four recognized legal schools, and as an example of this he mentions that the *Shaykh al-Islam*, the highest judicial authority of the Ottoman Empire, refused to give judicial opinions or allow his muftis to do so in regard to the new code of civil law, the *Mecelle* (ar. *Majalla*), promulgated by the government and which, although based on the Hanafi system, incorporated in it certain changes which did not have the authority of its founder.

Stagnation and imitation are always bad, but they are more dangerous than before, now that the Muslim countries are faced with a new civilization and therefore the need for new laws. Among Rashid Rida's friends were some who welcomed the modern civilization of Europe as valuable in itself. Kurd 'Ali, for example, was full of admiration for what he saw on his journeys to the west and generous to acknowledge what the Arabs had learnt, what they could still learn, from it: social reform, equality before the law, freedom of thought, the importance of national solidarity, above all the virtue of activity.³¹ Rashid Rida, however, was less moved by admiration than by the thought of necessity. He belonged to the last generation of those who could be fully educated and yet alive in a self-sufficient Islamic world of thought. His master 'Abduh had had close and easy personal relations with a number of Europeans and had travelled more than once in Europe. Rida went once only, and then for a specific political purpose; he seems to have read little or nothing in European languages; he had close contact with one European only, the Under-Secretary of State for Finance, Alfred Mitchell-Innes, and it is difficult to imagine what they could have talked about.³² He disliked the social life

³¹ Kurd 'Ali, *Masadir*, pp. 83–84, 111.

³² Cf. Rida, *al-Manar wa'l-Azhar*, p. 195.

of Europeans, and his references to Christianity were usually hostile; if it were not for the Church, for the politicians, and for the inner decay of Islam itself, Europe, he thought, might well become Muslim.³³ But with his robust sense he recognized the challenge of the modern world, and wanted Islam to accept the new civilization so far, and only so far, as it was essential for a recovery of strength. Always coherent and logical in his thought, he justified this by reference to a principle of Islam. The *jihad* is a binding duty for Muslims, but it is a duty which cannot be performed unless they are strong, and in the modern world they cannot be strong unless they acquire the sciences and techniques of the west. What is an indispensable condition for performing a duty is itself a duty; it is therefore a duty for Muslims to study the sciences and ways of the modern world.³⁴ He echoes here a thought which had first been expressed by Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din: in accepting European civilization, the Muslims are only accepting what had once been theirs, for Europe had only progressed because of what they had learnt from the Muslims in Spain and the Holy Land.³⁵

Because of this new need, the change in law must be greater than ever before. It involves more than a modification of the four existing systems: in fact, the development of a new and unified system. Again and again Rashid Rida urges the '*ulama*' of his time to come together in order to produce a book of laws based on the Quran and *hadith* but in accordance with the needs of the age: it should be free from ambiguity, easy for all believers to understand. At the beginning of each chapter dealing with social morality, it should show clearly what is an article of faith, based on texts, and what is a deduction of human reason. In this way, it would be 'a living refutation of all those who advocate slothfulness in law and religion'.³⁶ He is not, however, suggesting a complete abandonment of the four traditional schools, but rather a gradual approximation and amalgamation of them. Like 'Abduh he appeals to the principle of *talfiq*, but he wants it to be applied more systematically than before. The use of it, he argues, is not condemned by a consensus of jurists, and it is not in itself contrary to reason or the principles of Islam. *Talfiq* is

³³ Rida, *al-Wahy*, pp. 19 ff.

³⁴ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, pp. 29–30.

³⁵ Cf. Jomier, pp. 120–1.

³⁶ *al-Manar*, x (1907–8), 234; Rida, *Muhawarat*, p. 131.

only wrong when it is used in an uncritical way: to accept blindly a decision of another legal school is as bad as to accept blindly a decision of one's own school. But when *talfiq* is used in a rational way, it is a kind of *ijtihad*, and as such is legitimate in itself.³⁷

Much of his thought was given to sketching the outlines of the new system of law: in separate treatises on specific points, in his commentary on the Quran, above all in his *fatwas* in the *Manar*. A special section of each issue was given to answers to questions of morality and practice sent in by the readers of the periodical—and perhaps sometimes contributed by the editor himself. There is scarcely any problem in the moral life of the community which is not touched on somewhere in the *Manar*, and here it will only be possible to take a few examples which show to what extent, but also within what limits, Rashid Rida rejected the traditional position in favour of one more in accord with 'the spirit of the age'. In regard to apostasy, for example, he gave up the traditional view that the Muslim who abandoned Islam should necessarily be put to death. Instead, he made a distinction between the apostate who revolts against Islam and is therefore a danger to the *umma*, and him who abandons it quietly and as an individual: the first should be put to death if captured, the second not. His reasoning in favour of this conclusion shows the principles of his thought. The condemnation of the apostate to death is supported, it is true, by the unanimous *ijma'* of the jurists; but one must go beyond this, and ask if the *ijma'* is based on a clear text of the Quran or not. In this case, there is no text of the Quran stating that all apostates should be killed; on the contrary, there is a text condemning all compulsion in religion (*la ikrah fi'l-din*). The *ijma'* is therefore in contradiction with the principles of Islam, and must be rejected.³⁸

Similarly in regard to the *jihad*, the duty to wage war against non-Muslims: Rashid Rida admits its necessity but defines the limits within which it is legitimate. Once more, one must distinguish: between a war to spread Islam and a war to defend it. The second is always lawful, the first only when the peaceful preaching of Islam is forbidden, or Muslims are not allowed to live in accordance with their law. To use force to compel the 'people of the Book' to become Muslims would infringe this same principle of freedom in the faith.³⁹

³⁷ *Muhawarat*, p. 84.

³⁸ Jomier, p. 290.

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 272 ff.

In both these matters, Rashid Rida was drawing out the clear implications of the principles of his two masters, but when he talked of economic life he made perhaps a more startling break with tradition. Islamic law prohibits the taking of interest: Rida was convinced that this was the best system, but he pointed out that Islam was faced with a danger such as it had not known in the days when the structure of law grew up—the danger of economic penetration and domination by the western capitalism. The principle of necessity can therefore be invoked: necessity makes legal what would otherwise be forbidden, and in this case it may compel Muslims to depart from their traditional interpretation of the law and build their economic life on the same basis as the western nations:

At all times, wealth has been a mainstay of the life of peoples and States. In our days, it has taken on an importance such as it never had before, in particular in the time of the Prophet, when nations, having no more than limited needs, did not depend for their livelihood upon traffic with other nations. But God, to whom nothing is secret, in His wisdom and power revealed this truth in the time of the Prophet: 'Do not give to fools your property that God has assigned to you to manage' [Quran, iv. 4].⁴⁰ In this way God has made us understand how important is wealth in the life and organization of peoples and how necessary it is for them. . . . Can one maintain that the law of this religion demands that its adherents should be poor, and that what is essential for their livelihood and for the power of their community and State should be in the hands of covetous men belonging to other peoples?⁴¹

The limits of his sympathy with the modern world, and the strength of his roots in tradition, were shown most clearly perhaps in his discussion of the rights of women, a contribution to the discussion started by Qasim Amin. Muslim women ought to take part in the communal life of Islam, as they had done in the great days. Their faith is just the same as that of men and so also are their religious duties, and their social duties in so far as they are derived from the principles of religion. There is thus an equality of rights, but there is an inequality of fact, for men are stronger, more intelligent, more apt for learning and most types of action. So they have a predominance over women; but, like that of the ruler over the State, it should be exercised

⁴⁰ Arberry's trs.

⁴¹ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, p. 98 (Fr. trs. p. 164).

not despotically but by consultation. In this, they should learn from the example of the Prophet, who in his treatment of his wives was the perfect man. His polygamy was just because it was in the interest of the community; indeed, polygamy is always justified if it does not contradict the principle of justice and if there are advantages derived from it. Slavery also is not necessarily in conflict with justice: it protects women from harm and gives all of them a chance to bear children. The principle of Islamic law, so far as women are concerned, is

that every woman should have a legal guardian, to give her all she needs to be an honourable virgin, a virtuous wife, a careful mother, and a respected grandmother. She who is prevented from being wife or mother is not thereby prevented from enjoying protection and honour.⁴²

The need to create a system of law which people could really obey in the modern world—which should therefore be law in the real sense, just as it should be Islamic in the real sense—was at the centre of all Rida's thought. It was one of the factors which led him in the direction of Hanbalism, which combines great rigidity of principle with great flexibility of application. (In Saudi Arabia, Hanbali law is still the basis of the legal system, and there alone there has not grown up 'the same distinction between religious Islamic and modern statutory law as in other Islamic countries in the Near East'.)⁴³ But law, he believed, implies an authority to maintain and enforce it; by its nature Islam is a religion of 'sovereignty and politics and government',⁴⁴ and Islamic law cannot be reformed unless the Islamic polity is remade. There is such a thing as a truly Islamic political system: it is based, in Rida's view, on consultation between the ruler and the guardians and interpreters of the law. If it is to be restored, two things are necessary: real '*ulama*', and a real Islamic ruler—in other words, a true caliph.

There are some obscure points in Rida's doctrine of the caliphate. He certainly did not want the caliph to be an absolute ruler; it is not clear how far he wished him to be a temporal ruler at all, and if so what would be his relations with other Muslim rulers, for he certainly did not think it possible to reunite all parts

⁴² Rida, *Nida' ila'l-jins al-latif*, p. 121.

⁴³ Schacht, 'Islamic Law in Contemporary States', *Am. J. Comp. Law*, viii (1959), 138.

⁴⁴ Rida, *al-Wahy*, p. 239.

of the *umma* into a single State. His view of the essential function of the caliph however is clear: it is not to rule, it is to make laws and watch over their application. The caliph should be the supreme practitioner of *ijtihād*, the great *mujtahid*: a man capable by intelligence and special training and with the aid of the 'ulama', of applying the principles of Islam to the changing needs of the world, and capable, by the respect in which he is held, of imposing the results of this process on the Muslim governments: for while, in matters of private morality, a man should follow his own conscience, in matters of public interest the *ijtihād* of the caliph should prevail over all others.⁴⁵ Only if such a caliph existed could a real Islamic society exist. He alone could re-establish the authentic Muslim consultative government, taking counsel with those who bind and loose in questions which are not the subject of a text in the Quran, an authentic *hadith* or *ijma'*, or a previous formal act of *ijtihād*. He alone could restore Islamic civilization, and graft on to it the sciences and techniques necessary for national power and prosperity; could restore the purity of religion and drive out superstition and innovation; and could create an Islamic unity which would include Shi'is, Zaydis, Ibadis, as well as Sunnis of all four legal schools.⁴⁶

During the first half of Rida's career the Ottoman Empire still existed and the sultan claimed to be caliph. He and his friends were not then opposed to the existence of the empire, and indeed thought it necessary for the Arab and Muslim peoples, since it alone could provide the strength which they needed to protect them against foreign pressure. For this reason he was opposed to the idea, which was already in the air, of founding a new caliphate to replace that of the Ottomans; this idea, he thought, was of foreign inspiration and would serve only foreign interests.⁴⁷ The Ottoman caliphate could be accepted then as a 'caliphate of necessity', but it was not a real caliphate. The Ottoman sultans did not possess one of the essential conditions of *ijtihād*, which was knowledge of the Arabic language, the only language in which the doctrines and laws of Islam could be thought about, and in other ways too they were incapable of *ijtihād*.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, p. 79 (Fr. trs. pp. 132-3).

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 105 (Fr. trs. p. 178).

⁴⁷ Cf. Maghribi, *al-Bayyināt*, i. 87.

⁴⁸ Rida, *Muhawarat*, pp. 94-95.

After the war of 1914–18 the situation changed: the sultan fell under the control of England and France, who had occupied Constantinople, and then was deposed by Mustafa Kemal. For the next few years the problem of the caliphate occupied thinkers all over the Muslim world, and neither Rida's concern for Islam nor his polemical tendencies would have allowed him to stand aside. He took part in the great controversy aroused by 'Abd al-Raziq's book, which he denounced vigorously in the pages of *al-Manar*. The danger of views such as 'Abd al-Raziq's, he said, was that they could be made use of by the enemies of Islam. These enemies fought with ideas as well as the sword; in particular, they were trying to cut the links which bound Muslim peoples to one another so that they would become 'a prey to the wild beasts of imperialism'; they were fighting a 'moral war' which would weaken Islam from within, and in such a war a book like this was a blow struck at Islam.⁴⁹ To the discussion he also contributed a long and comprehensive treatise on the caliphate. This was published at the time when the new Turkish government set up a figurehead of a caliph, without power and with purely 'spiritual' functions. Rida, like most other Muslims, did not approve of this act: it took no account of the purpose of the caliphate, which was to ensure the application of the *Shari'a*; it was no more than a political gesture, springing from national feeling and general Islamic feeling, and comparable to the political demonstrations organized in Egypt in favour of Zaghlul.⁵⁰ No real caliphate now existed, and it was necessary to restore one. But this could only be done in two stages: first, the establishment of a 'caliphate of necessity', to co-ordinate the efforts of Muslim countries against the foreign danger, and then, when the time was ripe, the restoration of a genuine caliphate of *ijtihād*. For both these tasks, however, certain conditions must be fulfilled. One was the restoration of good relations between Arabs and Turks, who together formed the central bloc of the Islamic world. For all the bitterness generated by the policy of the Young Turks and then the Arab revolt, Rida was convinced that Arabs and Turks needed each other and the *umma* needed both. The Arabs had preserved the true spirit of Islam, and the knowledge of Arabic; the Turks alone had the political cohesion

⁴⁹ *al-Manar*, xxvi (1925–6), 100.

⁵⁰ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, p. 67 (Fr. trs. p. 114).

and power of leadership which the *umma* needed.⁵¹ Rida had at that time a great admiration for Mustafa Kemal: a great man, he remarked, who unfortunately knew nothing about Islam. If he had known what Islam really was, he would have been just the man who was needed.⁵²

The other condition was more important still: it was, that 'those who bind and loose' should work together actively for the restoration of the caliphate:

The *umma* as a whole is responsible for [restoring the imamate], for it is sovereign in this matter, as we have shown above. The representatives of the *umma*, 'those who bind and loose', must work actively to this end, as it is they who are responsible for all the interests of the *umma*, and for the question of the supreme authority in particular. They are the guides and leaders of the *umma*: it trusts them in matters of knowledge and action and essential interest, and follows them in what they decide in respect of things religious and worldly.⁵³

But where were such people to be found? They could scarcely be found among the Muslim nations which were subject to the European Powers, since among them leaders usually represented only the foreign authority which had appointed them (although of course there were exceptions like 'Abduh and his 'spiritual son' Zaghlul in Egypt, Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in India). Nothing much could be hoped for from the recognized religious institutions, the great homes of learning like the Azhar in Cairo, the Zaytuna mosque in Tunis, or the Deoband seminary in India. Their social and political standing had been destroyed by despotic governments, and their shaykhs were in no sense leaders of their people as were the great scholars of the Shi'i cities. At the other extreme, nothing could be expected of the 'westernizers' who had dominated public life for the last few generations; their principle was that religion was incompatible with modern society, and so they were creating institutions and laws which had no roots in Islam. In their view, national or racial sentiment should be the basis of law, not Islamic conviction; but in fact they were destroying the moral foundation of society.⁵⁴ Somewhere between the two extremes however stood

⁵¹ *al-Khilafa*, pp. 70 ff. (Fr. trs. pp. 117 ff).

⁵² Arslan, *Rashid Rida*, p. 315.

⁵³ Rida, *al-Khilafa*, pp. 57-58 (Fr. trs. p. 98).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 62 ff. (Fr. trs. pp. 105 ff).

a middle group, the 'Islamic progressive party': they had the independence of mind necessary to understand at the same time the laws of Islam and the essence of modern civilization,⁵⁵ they would accept the changes which were necessary but relate them to valid principles, in other words they would reconcile change with the preservation of the moral basis of the community. They could only do this however if they were strong, that is to say, if they were united; and positive unity was more easily to be attained in the modern world than ever before. For the improvement of communications made it possible for men of like mind to meet each other: even a real *ijma'* was possible nowadays, since for the first time all the '*ulama'*' of the age could be brought together in one place.⁵⁶

Supposing these two conditions were fulfilled, what could be done? There were several ways, thought Rida, of setting up a temporary 'caliphate of necessity'. The rulers of the Arabian Peninsula might proclaim one of their number as caliph—for preference, the Imam of the Yemen, who possessed most of the qualifications required—; or Egypt could take the lead in nominating a caliph, since the other Arab countries liked to take their lead from Cairo; or the Turks might be persuaded to set up something more substantial than their puppet caliphate. However it was established, the question where its seat should be was important. It could not be in the Hejaz, because its ruler was dependent on a non-Muslim Power and also because of the character of the king and his family (we shall return to this later); it could scarcely be in Turkey because of the attitude of the government towards putting power in the hands of a caliph, and towards the Arabic language, and in spite of the arguments on the other side, the quality of leadership shown by the new Turkish government and the aptitude of the Turks for the arts of warfare; it might be in some intermediate place like Mosul, on the borderline between Turks, Arabs, and Kurds.⁵⁷ (At that time the fate of Mosul had not been settled: although it was administered as part of Iraq, the Turks were still putting forward a claim to it.)

This could only be the first step, however. At the same time, the 'Islamic progressive party' should set up a seminary to train

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 62 (Fr. trs. p. 104).

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 102 (Fr. trs. p. 172).

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 78 (Fr. trs. p. 131).

real masters of *ijtihad*. The students should study the principles of international law, universal history, sociology, the organization of religious institutions like the papacy, in a word, all the subjects which were necessary for a valid application of Islam in the modern world. So they would form a new body of '*ulama*' who could preserve the fabric of the *Shari'a* and the unity of the *umma*; but they would do more than that, for among them would be Arabs of Qurayshi stock, and in the fullness of time one such might be chosen by electors of all Muslim countries, and be formally invested by 'those who bind and loose' as a genuine caliph and restorer of that true Islamic government which was the best of all.

It was the best for Muslims, Rida had no doubt; but was it also the best for Christians and Jews living in Muslim countries? He argued that it would be so. The position of minorities in an Islamic State would be better than in a secular State, for an Islamic State would be based on justice, on a law which gave rights and freedom to Christians and Jews, while the secular State was based on a purely natural solidarity which was not the ground of a moral system. Justice created a link, while solidarity divided: the hatred between those who worshipped their own communities and had nothing else to worship was far worse than between those who had different religions. If there had been persecution in the Near East, it was because of the decline of Islam; a proof of this was the outburst of hatred which followed the revolution of the secularist Young Turks in 1908.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *al-Khilafa*, p. 108 (Fr. trs. p. 183).