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THE OUTLINE OF ISLAMISM AND TURKISH REFORMATIONS*

NEŞET ÇAĞATAY

I believe that you are interested in the main principles of Islamism, in the manner of our worship and in the life of the prophet, Muhammed. No doubt, you are also interested in the institutions and in the civilization of Islam and in the last phase of the Ottoman Empire: that Empire, which held the leadership of the Moslem world for four hundred years—that is— from 1517—1924. For almost four hundred years the Ottoman Sultans held the title of Caliph, a word which signifies— Successor of Muhammed, Moslem chief civil, and religious ruler. Then with Turkey's triumph in the War of Independence and the resurgence of Kemal Ataturk, our first President of the Turkish Republic, a reformation both in our civil and religious organizations took place.

In the short time at my disposal, I shall not be able to touch on points such as: The problem of good and evil deeds, the Day of Judgement and God's predestination of good and evil, etc. Should any one wish discuss these points, you are welcome to come to the Ilahiyat Faculty and I'll do my best to answer any questions or clarify any statement which may seem obscure.

Let me begin, then, with a brief synopsis of the life of the prophet, Muhammed, the development of Islamism, the principles of Islam and the reforms made by Kemal Ataturk.

THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET, MUHAMMED

You all know that Arabs lead a nomadic way of life in the desert. They had many wives, they had a lot of male and female slaves and in many cases they treated them badly. As there was no such thing as a state government, they lived in tribes or clans and were ruled by chiefs. These tribes were often at war with each other, so life was uncertain and insecure. Moreover, in that period, no moral code existed, so that drunkenness, injustice and other vices were rife.

Muhammed grew up in one such community; He hated his countrymen's absurd religious beliefs, customs and ceremonies.

When Muhammed was about forty years of age, some of his contemporaries, such as the poet Umayya, who lived in Taif, a town next to Mecca, were content with a general form of monotheism; Muhammed embraced asceticism and succumbed to broodings about his soul's salvation. He spent many nights on Mount Hira, near Mecca, pondering on this vexing question of salvation. His insight into the emptiness of his countrymen's polytheism posed for him the problem: how long was God going to leave them in disbelief, since he had, after all, revealed Himself to other peoples through his prophets.

* The above Lecture was given on the 13th January, 1961 at the request of the American Women's Association in Ankara.

It was his practice to retire without his family for one month of every year to a cave in the desert for meditation. His place of retreat was Hira, a desert hill not far from Mecca and his chosen month was Ramazan (the month of the fast). It was there one night toward the end of his month's retreat, that the first revelation came to him, when he was forty years old. He was asleep or in a trance when he heard a voice say: "Read", He said, "I cannot read". The voice again said: "Read" And again he answered, "I cannot read". A third time the voice, more terrible than before, commanded, "Read". And Muhammed asked, "What shall I read?" The voice said, "Read: In the name of God the Creator, who created man from a clod. Read: and it is God the most beneficent, who teaches by the pen, teaches man that which he knew not".

When Muhammed awoke the words remained as if inscribed upon his heart. He went out of the cave on to the hillside and heard the same voice say, "O Muhammed! You are God's messenger, and I am Gabriel". Then he raised his eyes and saw the angel, in the likeness of a man, standing in the sky above the horizon. Muhammed stood quite still, then he turned his face away from the brightness of the vision, but whithersoever he might turn his face, there always stood the angel confronting him. He remained thus a long while till at length the angel vanished, when he returned in great distress of mind to his wife Hatice. She did her best to reassure him saying that his conduct had been such that God would not let a harmful spirit come to him and that it was her hope that he was to become the prophet of his people.

From that day on, the revelations continued. His wife at once believed in his divine mission. His daughters, too, and these were followed by his cousin Ali, his slave and freedman Zeyd, his friends Abu Bekr and some others were converted to a belief in his preaching.

As the upper class pagans of Mecca feared to lose their superiority which they derived through their pagan ceremonies, they started to raise objections to Muhammed's preaching; and scenting a danger to their general welfare in the spread of the new faith, they tortured the moslems who professed adherence to Muhammed. The prophet made up his mind to withdraw at least a part of his community beyond the reach of their persecutors through flight; he referred his followers to the Abyssinian negus. This emigration took place in the fifth year of his prophetic mission. The emigrants eighty-two men and five women, included the prophet's daughter Rukayye and her husband Osman, the future third Caliphe.

Meanwhile the community remaining behind in Mecca gained valuable new members. The opponents of the new religion proclaimed a boycott against Muhammed and all his followers and shut them up in their quarter in the ravine of Abu Talib. This desperate situation gave the prophet the idea of seeking his salvation outside Mecca. He met some Arabs from Medina and they accepted Islam; they returned home and became active on behalf of the new faith, and they were aided by one of the Moslems who had previously emigrated to Abyssinia. In 622 quite a substantial number of new believers from Medina were already coming on pilgrimage and now Muhammed formally had his uncle Abbas take out his clan into the protection of the new believers at another meeting near Mecca. Very quietly, the summer of 622 Muhammed's followers left Mecca and proceeded to Medina. The prophet himself, accompanied by Abu Bekr, did not follow them until the autumn, since he had first to settle some of his followers business affairs. The safe arrival of Muhammed at his

destination marks the turning point in his career, which now became one of almost unbroken success.

As soon as the Moslem community in Medina became strong, Muhammed decided to fight paganism, particularly that of the Meccans. There were several pitched battles before Muhammed conquered them.

Once victorious he sent official notices to all known sovereigns and potentates, promising them safety if they embraced Islam.

THE PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM

What does the Koran, the Holy Book sent by God, the book the prophet used when preaching, contain? First it deals with "faith" this comes under two headings: a) The foundations of worship, b) The foundations of the faith. But first of all, I must draw your attention to the fact that it is a mistake to call a Moslem –a Mohammedan. A Moslem dislikes the terms– Mohammedan and Mohammedanism, which seem to them to carry the implication of the worship of Muhammed; as Christian and Christianity imply the worship of Christ. Muhammed is a messenger of God. One cannot worship Muhammed, for he was just a man similar to ourselves.

a) *The foundations of worship are :*

1. The recital of the creed; 2. The performance of divine worship five times a day; 3. The fast in the month of Ramazan; 4. The payment of legal alms; 5. The pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.

1. The Moslem creed: –There is no God but God– Muhammed is the messenger of God.

2. The performance of divine worship five times a day. The first at dawn or just before sunrise. The second just after noon. The third, before sunset. The fourth, just after sunset. The fifth, at close of day. The prayer is preceded by the lesser ablution, consisting in the washing of the face, hands and arms as far as the elbows, and the feet in the prescribed manner. Complete washing of the body is required only after legal pollution, that is: after sexual connection. The worshipper must turn his face in the direction of Mecca.

Women are exempt from worship during their monthly periods and are not obliged to go to the mosque. In fact, a moslem, man or woman can worship anywhere: in the house, in the mosque, in the field or on the mountain side. Five times a day and before each prayer, the Muezzin calls the people to worship. This call translated runs: –

God is most great (four times)

I testify there is no God but God (twice)

I testify that Muhammed is the prophet of God (twice)

Come to prayer (twice)

Come to salvation (twice)

God is most great (twice)

There is no God but God.

To the morning prayer, the following sentence is added: –

Prayer is better than sleep (twice)

3. *Fasting*: Moslems are required to fast during the month of Ramazan where in the Koran was revealed. But if one is on a journey or sick, he may fast for a number of days only; and if he is able to fast and doesn't, he may redeem himself by feeding a poor person. The fast means, complete abstinence from food and drink from sunrise to sunset each day of the month of Ramazan.

4. *Alms*: Alms are of two kinds: 1) the legal and determined; 2) voluntary of the value of goods and of money, a fortieth is prescribed. The carrying out of these prescriptions is left to the conscience of the believers, who pay the alms to any needy person.

5. *Pilgrimage*: The fifth religious duty of the Moslem is the pilgrimage to Mecca which should be performed once by every Moslem if he is able, that is, if he can provide or obtain the means to support himself on pilgrimage and his family during his absence, and if he is physically fit.

b) *The Foundations of the Faith*:

The Moslem creed is, "There is no God but God (Allah), Muhammed is the messenger of God. The acceptance of this faith is held to imply belief in God, and the angels, the inspired books (including the old and new Testament), the prophets (all the prophets who are mentioned in the Koran, including Moses and Jesus), the day of judgement and God's predestination of good and evil. The creed must be recited at least once a lifetime, aloud, correctly and with full understanding of its meaning and with heartfelt belief in its truth.

Some other matters in Islam, which are forbidden and regarded as sinful are: to lie, to attack property belonging to others, to attack the life and honour of others, to drink alcoholic drinks and to gamble.

I think that it will be interesting for you if I say something about marriage and the veiling of women. Prior to the religion of Islam, an Arab could marry as many women as he pleased—there was no limit—. Moreover he could have as many women slaves and concubines as he wished. These slaves and concubines were regarded as part of his property and the owner could sell, employ in heavy work, hit and he had even the right to kill them if he so desired. The religion of Islam reduced the number of wives a man could have at one time to four.

However, to marry more than one women was so difficult that it was almost impossible, because, if a man married more than one woman, he was compelled by his religion to treat them equally—and that as you know, is well nigh impossible. The prophet, Muhammed, himself did not marry more than one woman until after the death of his first wife. With her he spent more than twenty-five years. When he was over fifty five, he married four women; by this, his aim was to secure some relations among the tribal chiefs, to spread the Moslem religion, and to satisfy the desire of his close friends who wanted to be related to him.

The view which is held by some western historians, that Muhammed married to satisfy his sexual desires is not correct. If this view were correct, then Muhammed could have married when he was young as many women as he wished, for there was no restriction on the number of wives a man could have, furthermore, his four wives were all old and widowed before he married them.

I must emphasize another point. The veiling of women is neither a religious custom nor is it a custom belonging to the Arabs. It has nothing to do with religion.

It was accepted years after the death of the prophet and is a result of Byzantine influence. Unfortunately this bad custom still continues in Moslem countries all over the world except in Turkey.

TURKEY AND MOSLEM COUNTRIES

Turkey proscribed Islamic law in 1926 and since then monogamy is practised in our country. Of all the Moslem States only Turkey has separated politics from religion and accepted the principle that religion belongs to the conscience of each man. As you know, in Turkey, politics are regulated by secular laws. In other Moslem countries politics and religion are often fused, and though polygamy is still accepted as a consequence of the change in social, economic and cultural conditions; polygamous marriages are gradually decreasing.

The religion of Islam has also caused a great change in the position of slaves. No Moslem can be a slave. He can maintain slaves provided that he had them before Islamism. War captives are also regarded as slaves. However, the religion of Islam ordains that they should be treated justly and as an equal member of the slave owner's own family. To free a slave is esteemed a very good deed; in this way religion encourages the abolishment of slavery.

After the rise of the Moslem religion some wars took place. Yet Islamism is a peace-loving religion. Generally the wars were against pagans. The wars with Persia and Byzantium aimed at uniting different peoples under Islamism and creating world peace. The armies of Islam which fought with the Persians and Byzantines offered to convert them to Islam or to pay a special tax, in order to maintain their own religion. This special tax was collected for the protection of the life, honour and property of non-moslem subjects. Non-Moslems were also excluded from military service.

With its high moral and legal principles, Islamism spread from Central Asia to Spain; science and technical knowledge flourished and a great civilization was born. In this period great universities were established and European scholars studied in Islamic universities in Spain.

But after the 11th century the principles of the religion of Islam degenerated, this was caused by superstitions and false beliefs.

Statesmen and scholars of Islam, departed from the ways of justice and science. They did not follow scientific developments in Europe and in the end reactionary forces dominated the whole Moslem world and so the Islamic countries became backward.

In the beginning, the Ottoman Empire expanded quickly in the spheres of science, politics and culture. After the capture of Istanbul by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 the Ottomans established the greatest university in the world. However, at the beginning of the 18th century the Ottoman Empire started to decline for the same reason which caused the weakening of Islam. She lost the following countries which she had conquered during her rise to power: The southern parts of Russia and Poland, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Albania.

During the 19th century Greece, Bulgaria, Algeria, Tunis, Lybia, Egypt and after the First World War Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon either became independent and were taken from Turkey by the great powers. At the end of the First World War, the English, French, Italian and Greek armies occupied a

great part of Turkey. Kemal Ataturk after defeating the invading armies, proclaimed Turkey a Republic in 1923. The caliphate (the leadership of all Moslems) was abolished in 1924. Western laws were promulgated in 1926 and in the following years. In 1928 the Turks started to use Latin letters and the percentage of literates increased from five to fifty per cent in the following thirty years. The western calender took the place of the Islamic calender which had its beginning in the year of the prophet's emigration from Mecca to Medina. The Islamic week-end holiday, Friday was changed to Sunday as in Western countries. To dress in the European manner was made compulsory. To wear the veil was forbidden. The full equality of men and women was recognized. In Turkey any woman can become a state official, judge, member of Parliament, even an officer in the army.

But old fashioned, illiterate, conservative elements in Turkish society didn't want to recognize the rights of women and the leaders of the deposed democratic government, in order to gain more votes partly favoured this reactionary movement. This tendency slowed down the speed of the Ataturk reforms. However, the intellectuals, the army and the youth of the country followed this policy carefully. As you know, the revolution of the 27th of May 1960 aimed at restoring the reforms of Ataturk and so once again, Turkey is on the road to a future of progress and enlightenment.
