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ŞEYH-ÜL İSLÂM MUSA KÂZİM EFENDİ'S IDEAS ON STATE AND SOCIETY

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to describe and analyze the ideas of one of the Ottoman Empire's last *şeyh-ül islâm*s — Musa Kâzım Efendi; It is not very often that we are fortunate to have a *şeyh-ül-İslâm* who has left such a wealth of writings and of whose social and political ideas we can learn so much. Musa Kâzım wrote extensively in the press of the period, and most of his articles, as well as other essays are readily available in a collection of his works published after his death¹. In the case of Musa Kâzım we are also dealing with a *şeyh-ül-İslâm* who held that position for a number of years during the Young Turk period, and was an active member of the Committee of Union and Progress. In the scholarly literature he is described alternately as a conservative and a liberal². In any event, his affiliation with one of the more modernist and even secularist political groups of the time makes Musa Kâzım all the more interesting, and it is for this reason alone that a closer look at his ideas is perhaps a worthwhile undertaking.

Musa Kâzım was born in 1858 in the province of Erzurum, where he received his elementary education³. He moved to Balıkesir where he had a brother and continued his studies there until finally making his way to Istanbul and to the highest medreses. In 1888 he began teaching in Fatih and in 1900 went on to teach (particularly the Law *Mecelle*) at the Law School, as well. He also gave courses at the Galatasaray, Dar-ul-Muallimin and the University. In 1907 he was appointed as the first secretary, and later also as a member, of the Publications Control Commission affiliated with the Office of the Şeyh-ül-İslâm. By that time he had also begun his writing, and particularly interesting was his attempt to write (together with Ahmet Midhat) an interpretation to the Koran in pure Turkish.

¹ *Külliyat-i Şeyh-ül-İslâm Musa Kâzım: Dinî, İctimaî Makaleler*. Istanbul, 1336.

² E.g. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1961), p. 229; Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal, 1964), p. 388; Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, Cilt II, Kısım IV (Ankara, 1952), p. 372. Both Berkes and Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *İslâmcılık Cereyanı* (Istanbul, 1962), have scattered references to Musa Kâzım's ideas.

³ Short biographies of Musa Kâzım are to be found, among, other places, in Abdülkadir Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları* (Ankara, 1972), pp. 233-237; Sadık Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması* vols. 4-5 (Istanbul, 1981), pp. 157-158.

Following the 1908 revolution, Musa Kâzım joined the Committee of Union and Progress and was appointed to the Senate. In July 1910, he was appointed for the first time as *Şeyh-ül-İslâm* in İsmail Hakkı Paşa's cabinet and continued to fill the same post in the succeeding cabinet of Said Paşa - until December 1911. After an interval of a few years, he became *Şeyh-ül-İslâm* once again in Said Halim Paşa's cabinet in 1916 and retained his position under Talât Paşa until the downfall of the Young Turk regime at the end of the war. He thus kept the highest office of the ulema class in his hands for a total of some four years. Along with other leaders of the Young Turks, he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in jail with hard labor. However, due to his religious standing, his age and his failing health, he was allowed to go into exile to Edirne where he died in January 1920.

As *şeyh-ül-İslâm* Musa Kâzım was responsible for a number of reforms introduced into religious institutions. All along he continued his writing, too, and made public his ideas on social political and religious matters. According to several sources, he was a Bektaşî and was influenced by the Nakşibendi Order, as well⁴. During his first term of office he encountered fierce criticism accusing him of being a Free Mason, but he vehemently denied the accusation in a special declaration⁵.

Religion and Faith

Theological and philosophical questions occupied an important place in the thinking and writing of Musa Kâzım, and it seems that to some extent, at least, this was a result of the fierce attacks made on religion or on Islam specifically by advocates of various anti-religious doctrines (such as naturalists, materialists etc.) prevalent at the time. It is also interesting to point out that his writings on religious questions are more typical of the Hamidian period than of the Young Turk one. This may be attributed in part to the fact that during the Hamidian period it was much more difficult to discuss social and political issues than was the case under the Young Turks. Furthermore, during the Hamidian period Musa Kâzım was more of a teacher and scholar than a public man, while later the situation reversed.

A thorough examination of Musa Kâzım's theological and philosophical ideas is out of place in this context, but a brief summary of his concept of religion may help us to understand his social and political views⁶. His belief in the place of religion in the lives of individuals and societies is unshaken. It is the purpose of all civilizations to lead man to prosperity and happiness, but these

⁴ Altunsu, p. 234; Lewis, p. 402; Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur, *The Young Turks* (Princeton, 1957), o. 113.

⁵ Altunsu, p. 234.

⁶ The following relies particularly on articles appearing in sections entitled "Medeniyet-i Sahiha - Diyanet-i Hakka" and "Mütenevvi Makalat", *Külliyat*, pp. 5 - 112.

are unattainable except through the high virtues of justice, honesty, cooperation, and brotherhood. These virtues, in turn, can be properly instilled only by religion (and not by any sort of humanistic doctrine) which sets social and moral norms of conduct and imposes certain restrictions on the actions of man. It is sonley religion, again, which can lead man to perfection and give him strength in times of crisis.

In order to implant religious faith in human beings, God has sent them prophets who taught them articles of faith, ethical principles, and religious and social laws. Articles of faith, as well as general principles, were basically shared by all the prophets, but acutal laws varied according to time and place. Islam, which followed Judaism and Christianity, adopted some of their laws while rejecting others, and it represented the highest form of perfection reached by any religion. The Koran is itself the proof of the truth of Islam for it cannot be imitated.

Musa Kâzım fiercely argues with those who maintain that religion is contradictory to reason, and with those who question some of the basic assumptions of religion. He argues that early philosophers actually strengthened religious faith and it was only the later ones who weakened it. As for Islam, nothing within it stands in opposition to reason and science. Conversely, it actually supports reason and science and demands of its followers to seek them wherever they are. The Koran is unique also in the fact that it contains within it the basic elements of science as it later developed.

Musa Kâzım also vehemently denies the notion that human progress came with the decline of religion as demonstrated, for example, by Europe. According to him, religion played a vital role in the prosperity of Europe, and if there was indeed an abandonment of religion among Europeans, this would no doubt have an impact on them in due course. It is similarly not Islam which caused the decline of the Ottoman Empire. It is Islam, after all, which once led the whole of the Islamic world to power, prosperity and glory, and the weakness of Islam stems rather from deserting Islamic laws and values, not from upholding them. It is, of course, the natural conclusion of Musa Kâzım Efendi that the restoration of Islamic power is bound with a true return to Islam.

The state is a fundamental part of Islam. The Islamic state, through its values and rules, guarantees man his prosperity and happiness and this is also why the Islamic state is the most perfect and most exalted of states. According to Musa Kâzım, the divine rules are divided into two categories — those which pertain to the other world and those which pertain to this world. Each of these categories is in turn divided into basic laws and secondary laws and those of this world are accordingly divided into those which pertain to the state and those which pertain to individuals. The basic directives for the establishment of the Islamic state are contained in the Koran, but it is not the excat form of the

political regime which is considered to be important but, rather, the principles guiding it. These principles served as a model for the Prophet when he set up his state and the early Caliphs followed in his footsteps.

Among the principles which Musa Kâzım lists, with a great many references to the Prophet and the early Caliphs, are justice, freedom and equality. He explains that neither freedom nor equality could ever be absolute and they were always restricted by laws. But granting of full rights to all individuals on the basis of equality was the established rule in early Islam and distinguished it from other civilizations. During that period it was the principle and practice of consultation (in itself a principle mentioned in the Koran) which restricted the power of the rulers and guaranteed justice and the well being of the state and the people. As time went on, tyranny engulfed the Islamic world, disrupted the principles and values which served as the foundation of the state, and led to many disasters. Tyranny also tended to support wrong notions of Islam which prevailed in the West.

It was to Sultan Abdülhamid's credit — Musa Kâzım writes at the beginning of the constitutional period — that he first promulgated an Ottoman constitution. Although traitors forced the sultan to suspend it, he was finally able to bring about its restoration. For Musa Kâzım, the real constitution of the Islamic state is embodied in the Koran, but he supports the Ottoman constitution for upholding the very principles contained in the Holy Book. It seems that he grew somewhat disappointed with the course of events during the period. He laments, for example, the spread of hypocrisy and dissent under the new regime. But he often refers to the constitution when explaining or justifying his ideas.

One other guideline or directive brought up by Musa Kâzım is fraternity. Fraternity stands behind solidarity and cooperation among members of society, and it is also the foundation of political unity, the source of state power. Those who cause dissent are guilty of weakening the state, and evidence of this is to be found throughout Islamic history. Musa Kâzım does not exactly define the basis of the Ottoman political community as he sees it, but it seems that he accepts all citizens of the state as members. Uppermost in his mind is, however, Islamic unity, whether it is unity between various Islamic peoples or unity between various Islamic denominations. While he accepts the division between different ethnic entities (*kavims*) he attacks the idea of ethnically based nationalism (*kavmiyet*) as leading to dissent. He hardly ever mentions the Turks by name.

An important point in the thinking of Musa Kâzım is the principle of "strength building". It consists of providing all the necessary means, including political, military, economic, and educational, towards the acquisition of power in the face of a possible enemy. In this context he extolls the value of work and

diligence, which in his view were at their best during the early period of Islam, only to be replaced later by idleness and apathy. During World War I, Musa Kâzım was among those who stressed the importance and urgency of Jihad, although he equally stressed the restrictions which were imposed on its practice. Jihad became necessary at the time of the Prophet in the face of the opposition that he encountered, and it was thanks to it that Islam spread in the world. Now Jihad was necessary since the Ottoman Empire was obliged to defend itself and other Muslims against the aggression of European powers like Britain, France and Russia. Jihad was dependent on ability and Musa Kâzım insisted that the Ottoman Empire was strong enough and had strong allies. It was therefore incumbent on all Muslims to fill this holy religious duty⁸.

Society and Culture

Among the social issues discussed by Musa Kâzım, a special place is devoted to the status of women. Significantly, he touches on this topic in the context of his discussion on freedom. As has already been pointed out, he sees freedom as something bound to be restricted by laws which are answers to the needs of society. Since man is a spiritual being, as well as physical, and his conduct is oriented toward the other world as well as this one, there are religious laws, too, which must be observed. In the case of Islam, these laws are embodied in the Shariah.

Musa Kâzım deals with three separate topics which have to do with the status of women and are all subject to the rulings of the Shariah — the veil, polygamy, and divorce⁹. He defends the existing laws and finds the main support for them in the constitution. The constitution declares Islam the official religion and sees the Shariah as the source of all law. Therefore, it is necessary to follow the guidelines of Islam on these issues. But to this Musa Kâzım adds a myriad of other reasons in an attempt to demonstrate the logic of Islamic rules and the actual advantage Islam has in this respect over all other religions. All along he emphasizes that he sees women as equal in their rights to men and elaborates on the scope of activities in which they are allowed to indulge.

The veil, for example, is a shield protecting the modesty of women and ensures harmony between man and wife during marriage. A woman is not required to go to all the public places, because her task is mainly to give birth to children and look after them, whereas the man is the one who provides the livelihood for the family and must consequently mingle with others. Still, a woman has the right to go out, work, study, and be publicly active. All of

⁷ This chapter relies on articles appearing in the section entitled "Siyasiyat-i İslâmiye", *ibid*, pp. 243 - 285.

⁸ On Jihad see "İslamda Cihad", *ibid*, 310 - 321. The essay appeared originally as a pamphlet, Istanbul, 1333.

⁹ "Tesettür-i Nisvan", "Taaddud-i Zevcat", "Talak", *Külliyat*, pp. 253 - 270.

these activities are permitted, although they are not required, and they, in fact, contradict the natural division of labor between the man and the woman. If the woman chooses, in fact, to engage in these activities, she must observe the rules which provide for separation between her and men according to both religious and national mores (*edeb-i dinî ve terbiye-i milliye*).

Polygamy is justified, among other things, by the obligation to be fruitful and multiply, which also enhances the power of the state, and by the fact that not all marriages actually result in childbirth. There are also more men in the world than there are women. With all that, Musa Kâzım adds, the Shariah binds polygamy with stiff conditions and restrictions and never actually requires it. There is consequently nothing in the Holy Law which contradicts humanism and modern civilization.

The Islamic form of divorce is also accepted as a must. Marriage and family life are holy, but there are unfortunately cases of hostility and lack of harmony between man and wife that can only lead to aggravation and suffering. The right of divorce is accorded the man simply because the man has the responsibility for the household and because he is more cool-headed than the woman. The Islamic procedure is more appropriate than the one which requires the couple to go to court, because in court women might act irrationally and because procedures there can easily become humiliating. This might later prevent the woman from continuing to live an honorable life. Musa Kâzım emphasizes the common sense and wisdom which guide the Shariah in these matters. The overall responsibility of the man toward the woman is, in his eyes, a guarantee to the protection of women's rights.

It should be noted, that while the preservation of the Holy Law as the basis of society is uppermost in Musa Kâzım's mind, he also upholds what he calls the "admired national customs" which every nation possesses and which determine its conduct and ways of life. The Shariah itself sanctions these customs when it stipulates that what the believers regard as good is good also in the eyes of God. What is important to him, it seems, is that the nation should know how to preserve its culture which is part of its very identity and being (*kendi mevcudiyet*). From Europe he proposes the adoption of sciences and technology, which are shared by all peoples. Culture, however, should conform to the national heritage, and good examples are the veil and modes of dress. He praises the Japanese people for having done just that — they adopted European civilization without sacrificing their culture and own particular mode of life¹⁰.

¹⁰ "Âdat-i Müstahsene-i Milliyemizi Terk ile Avrupayı Taklid Esareti Mucibdir", *ibid*, pp. 270 - 273.

Education

Already in one of his earliest articles, Musa Kâzım voices his support for the study of Arabic — probably taking part in the great debates over the position of Arabic in both the state and the Ottoman language which were prevalent in the Hamidian period. Arabic is for him the richest of all languages and most expressive. This is not totally accidental, because it was the way God paved the way for the advent of the Prophet and the delivery of the Koran. It was the richness of Arabic which induced all the peoples who adopted Islam to prefer Arabic over their own tongues. Musa Kâzım laments the neglect of Arabic in his generation and explains its importance thus: It is the language of religion and morals; it is the source of most of the scientific terms; it is part and parcel of the Ottoman Language; and it is the common property of all Muslim peoples helping Islamic unity¹¹.

The propotion of Arabic and the improvement of the methods of studying Arabic are part of Musa Kâzım's plan to reform the *medreses*. He expresses his view against the tedious study of the commentators, and instead supports the study of the actual classical Arabic works. Interestingly, he indicates that the knowledge of Arabic is important also for translating the Koran and that consequently the ulema must master this language¹².

In his plan for *medrese* reform, Musa Kâzım is prepared to go to great lengths and adopt the kind of changes that were introduced at the same time in the curriculum and methods of instruction in al-Azhar. He supports the introduction of modern sciences, at least five or six of them, into the curriculum. He also believes in the teaching of European languages, since there is no link between language and religion. It is true, he says, that Arabic is the language of Islam, but is the use of any other language prohibited?¹³

One more subject taken up by Musa Kâzım is the need for new books on *kalam*, or theology. He extensively reviews the reponse of *kalam* to the philosophical schools in medieval Islam, but says that they are no longer relevant to his age. "What we need most urgently is to compose books of *kalam* according to contemporary needs", and for this it is necessary, first of all, to learn the views of one's opponents without any sort of fanaticism¹⁴. One other task connected with this is to bring about Islamic unity, which is a requirement of Islam itself. It is necessary to bridge the gaps between the legal schools without any show of hostility. All *ictihad* is basically a matter of opinion, and there is no absolute truth in any one of these schools. The Shiis, too, should be approached

¹¹ "Vasita-i Medeniyet ve Lisan-i Arabî", *ibid*, pp. 68 - 71.

¹² "Medreselerde Tedrisatı İslahi", *ibid*, pp. 298 - 301.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 300.

¹⁴ "Kütüb-i Kelamiyenin İhtiyacat-i Asra Göre Islah ve Telifi", *ibid*, pp. 289 - 293.

with understanding and good will, and an attempt must be made to bring them into the fold¹⁵.

Conclusion

No doubt remains that Musa Kâzım Efendi was a faithful and genuine Islamist who believed both in the need and the ability of the Ottoman state to base itself on the Shariah and Islamic values. Not only was it the requirement of faith and not only was Islam the most noble and perfect of religions; but this was also the best guarantee for the success of the state and conformed with its basic interests.

It is, however, difficult to see in Musa Kâzım a sheer conservative and some of his ideas betray a clear orientation toward a modernistic outlook. He was not a reformist in the sense Muhammad Abduh was and he did not try to elaborate a new system by which Islamic law could be brought up to date. But it seems that, for the most part, he was interested less in the stipulations of laws themselves, that in the preservation of the link between society, state and Islam. He was not interested in the form of the Islamic state, not even in the Caliphate, but rather in its guiding principles; he was an advocate of the constitutional order; he supported equality between Muslims and non Muslims, and in Islam itself betrayed an ecumenical spirit aimed at eliminating divisions within it; he believed in adopting sciences and technology from Europe and was willing to change the curriculum of the *medreses* accordingly; and even if his ideas on women strike us as conservative, he was willing to go a long way in according them rights and liberties others would have frowned upon. In his discussion of these and other ideas, Musa Kâzım demonstrates not only his knowledge of Islamic sources, but also a fairly good familiarity with contemporary European currents of thought.

For the mostpart, Musa Kâzım seems to represent a type of a progressive *âlim*, of the type already familiar in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century. Not always, so it seems, were the people grouped under the term "Islamists" necessarily conservatives or fanatics, and he may well serve as yet further evidence to support Berkes's statement that Islamists in one place are sometimes called reformists in another¹⁶. Musa Kâzım seems, indeed, to have been influenced by his Sufi syncretist inclinations, but then the actual interests of the state in his time must have had no less an influence upon him. The Young Turk period, the last decade of the Ottoman Empire's existence, certainly called for a last minute effort at modernization. Likewise, with the Turks and Arabs forming the two last major national communities within the state, the reliance upon Islam as the only effective binding link between them was also inevitable. In this sense, Musa Kâzım Efendi might have not differed greatly from his more secular colleagues.

¹⁵ "Beyn-ül-Muslimin Mezahib-i Muhtelifinin Tevhidi", *ibid*, pp. 293-298.

¹⁶ Berkes, p. 363.