



Revival of Religion



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Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad

Khalifatul Masih IV

Fourth Successor of the Promised Messiah^{as}

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About the Author

Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad was the fourth successor of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad(as) who proclaimed that he was the Messiah and reformer, promised by all the great religions of the world to the people of the latter age. His community is a dynamic, world-wide, missionary force in Islam.

Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad was born on 18 December 1928 in Qadian in India. He was educated in India, Pakistan and in the UK, at The London School of Oriental and African Studies. In 1982 he was elected as the Head of the world-wide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community following the demise of the third Khalifa (successor). The anti-Ahmadiyya ordinance imposed on 26 April 1984 by General Zia, the then dictator President of Pakistan, made it impossible for him to function as the head of his community while remaining in that country. After due consultation he decided to leave Pakistan immediately. Three days after the promulgation he took the plane from Karachi and came to London where he lived until his demise in 2003.

Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad widely travelled and often delivered addresses to audiences including people from all walks of life and widely differing cultures. His addresses and other

meetings were often accompanied by 'Question and Answer' sessions. He was always ready to respond to questions agitating the minds of his audience on any topic, religious or temporal, although his answers could not avoid the influence of his deep understanding of religion, which pervaded his thinking. He wrote many books in Urdu as well as some in English. "Murder in the Name of Allah" and "Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues" are two of his English publications, which the reader may find of interest. He also occasionally expressed himself in Urdu verse.

Revival of Religion

I address you today on the Islamic Philosophy of the revival of religions. Religions are always revived through Divine intervention. A reformer is sent by Allah the Almighty to turn the people away from materialism and return them to their Creator. Such a reformer invariably calls for immense sacrifices in the name of God. He invites people to toil and sweat; to persevere and be patient, and informs them that those who seek to live must be prepared to part with their lives. He prepares them for a long and painful struggle against blind opposition and persecution at the hands of those whom they love and endeavour to save. Indeed this is the only real and eternal philosophy of religious revival: every philosophy opposed to it is mere fantasy. I must mention though that all sects of Islam are not in unison on this subject. A large number of Muslims believe that a fundamental change has come about in the form of religious revival. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, on the other hand, believes that this historical process is constant and unchanged. Lest the difference of opinion amongst Muslims create a wrong impression, I deem it necessary to enumerate those shared fundamental beliefs which bind all the Muslims together, whatever denomination they

belong to.

Every Muslim, regardless of sect, believes in the oneness of God and in the prophethood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace and blessings). Every Muslim believes that Islam is the ultimate religion for the salvation of mankind. All Muslims believe that Islam will continue to fulfill all of man's spiritual needs till the Day of Judgement. All Muslims believe that the Law revealed through the Holy Prophet Muhammad is unchangeable and that the Quran is incorruptible and unalterable to the extent even of an iota or a dot. Muslims of all shades of thought believe that the edicts of the Holy Prophet Muhammad have validity and authority till the end of mankind. Muslims of every sect believe that it is only through a bond with the Holy Prophet Muhammad that the light of eternal truth may be perceived. These basic points of creed are shared by all Muslims without exception.

With so much in common, there still remains the fundamental difference which sets the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community apart from other Muslims-the difference on the issue of revival of Islam. All other differences emanate from this main issue.

How is the resurgence of Islam to come about? How is a new life and new vigor to be infused into it? Like the Ahmadiyya Community, all other Muslims, too, profess that the answer lies in the promised advent of Christ, Son of Mary, and in the appearance of the promised Imam Mahdi (the reformer appointed by God who would be divinely guided). This point of apparent concord when interpreted, actually generates two

diametrically opposed views.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community regards the prophecy of the advent of Christ as a figure of speech. It believes that the prophecies regarding the Imam Mahdi are also allegorical. We believe that the truly glorious import of these prophecies cannot be understood if they are taken at their face value. In complete contrast to this, the other sects of Islam insist on a literal fulfillment of these prophecies. This is the fundamental difference that distinguishes- and sets apart-the Ahmadiyya Community from other sects.

A Background to the Prophecies

The prevailing decline of the Muslims and their internecine strife are matters of which the Holy Prophet Muhammad was not uninformed. Through divine revelation, he prophesied fourteen hundred years ago that Muslims would split into seventy two sects. He described the pitiable plight of the Muslims in such detail as if a view of our era had been unfolded before his very eyes. The Prophet's Traditions contain a graphic description of our times. He said, 'Islam will have nothing left of it except its name. Mosques, though full of worshippers will be devoid of guidance. Their religious scholars will be the worst creation under the canopy of Heaven.' However, along with these terrible portents, he also gave glorious tidings. He said that in spite of this dire distress, the Islamic nation would not perish:

'How can my followers be destroyed when I am at their beginning and Jesus, Son of Mary, at their end.' (Masnad Ahmad: Kanzal Aamal Vol. 7, p. 203)

Then he said:

'How will you be when Mary's Son will descend among you; and he will be your guide from amongst you?'
(Bukhari: Book of Prophets)

And he repeated the news in these words:

'I swear by Him Who has my life in His hand that the Son of Mary will indeed descend among you, and he will arbitrate with justice.' (Bukhari: Book of Prophets)

The Holy Prophet also gave tidings of a great Imam - Imam Mahdi - who would appear along with Jesus, Son of Mary.

So, the Ahmadiyya Community is at one with the other Muslim sects in believing that the resuscitation of Islam and its global triumph are linked with the advent of Christ and the appearance of the Imam Mahdi. However, it differs from the rest in the interpretation of these prophecies. It insists that the prophecies be seen in the light of the divine law revealed in action and in consonance with the history of the earlier prophets. The other Muslim sects, on the contrary, assert that the prophecies have no inner, deeper message and adhere to their literal sense.

Non-Ahmadi Muslims' Concept

In all fairness to our opponents, I shall now endeavour to elucidate the view point of our opponents who equate Islam's renaissance with its economic and political dominance. There is perhaps an explanation for it. Lust for power and greed for gold have traditionally dominated human strife. The acme of national revival therefore would mean political and economic ascendancy. Divine favour would, according to them, fittingly manifest itself to bring about this result. This more or less, is the view held by many, concerning the revival of Islam. According to this belief, the advent of the Messiah will herald the era of Islam's political conquests while the appearance of the Imam Mahdi will bring about their economic dominance.

First, I shall outline their concept of the Messiah's advent. They believe that the very Jesus, Son of Mary, whom the Quran declares a prophet of the Israelites, will descend bodily from the sky. He will immediately set out with sword in hand and hack to death all enemies of Islam! His global sweep shall have three grand objectives. The first objective will be the destruction of the Cross. Not figuratively, but literally! He will set about destroying the symbol of Christian faith with such vigour that not a trace shall be left of it. There will not remain a single Cross to be seen in Church or home or around any neck.

According to them, his next important task will be the extermination of swine of every variety-domestic as well as wild! So, the followers of the Cross will then be left with neither a Cross for prayer nor a pig for dinner. Thus, Christ will deprive the Christians of the articles not only of their spiritual sustenance but also of their physical nourishment.

The third task for the Messiah will be the killing of 'Dajjal' the Antichrist. Now who is this Antichrist? According to Traditions, if taken literally, as some would have it, he will be a one-eyed Colossus who will come riding an ass of extraordinary proportions. He will be so tall that his head will stand higher than the clouds. All prophets have warned their followers against the evil of this Antichrist. Now, while the Antichrist is busy ravaging the earth the Messiah will descend from the heavens. He will engage the Antichrist in battle near Damascus and slay him. He will then conquer the entire world. Having done this, he will hand over its governance to the Muslims.

This, in sum, is their philosophy of the Muslims' political resurgence and ascendancy. It absolves the Muslims totally from waging any political struggle whatsoever. Now, those who are basking in the assurance that they will inherit the earth without moving a muscle can see no possible reason to concern themselves with political thought and action. They live in blissful oblivion of their decay and degradation. For, everything else apart, they know most assuredly that the happy hour is not far when a divine being will descend from the heavens and unleash a campaign of conquests. He will slay the swine. He will wreck the Cross. He will subjugate all Powers of the East and the West. Then, he will

beckon to the waiting Muslim masses and say, 'Come hither, ye soldiers of God; come here, O virtuous ones! Come and take this scepter of the kingdom of the earth.' This is the bellicose view of Muslim renaissance which the Ahmadi Muslims find abhorrent. They simply cannot subscribe to it in its crude literalism.

Next comes the non-Ahmadi Muslims' concept of the economic resurgence of Islam. The scholars of the other sects hold the view that the remedy of the economic plight of the Muslims lay not in struggle and sacrifice but in the appearance of the Imam Mahdi. This Imam Mahdi will be a contemporary of the Messiah. His most important act on arrival will be the distribution of limitless largess among the Muslims of the world. His bounty will be boundless; his generosity will defy description. This overwhelming wealth will far exceed the Muslim's capacity to garner it. Thus will come to an end all lust for goods and greed for gold. This is the panacea, as conceived by some, for the economic ills of the world of Islam. According to this belief, the appearance of Imam Mahdi is in itself the answer to the economic misery of Muslims. There is no need for sweat, tears and toil. There is no necessity to explore the earth's treasures, to peep into the heart of the atom and to seek out the secrets of space. Neither effort nor industry, nor inventiveness or application is needed. All that is needed is the arrival of the Mahdi. Again we differ and again we the Ahmadi Muslims find this concept childish, crude and unacceptable.

The Correct Interpretation According to Ahmadi Muslims

Although the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community does not in any way reject the prophecies concerning the descent of the Messiah and the appearance of the Mahdi, it does emphasise that to put a literal meaning on them is the height of naivete and ignorance. We believe that it is as a result of not grasping fully the exalted station of the Holy Prophet that such a serious error is made in understanding his deep and philosophical message. Men of insight and wisdom often use parables and allegories to outline subjects of such great import but the superficial eye cannot perceive their meaning.

The Ahmadi Muslims believe that the whole range of subjects covering the Messiah, the Antichrist and his ass is allegorical. The Messiah, therefore, is not that earlier prophet who was sent among the Israelites. The Ahmadi believe that Jesus Christ died a natural death after surviving the torture of the Cross. The Messiah of the prophecy was in fact to be a new person who was to be born amongst the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Because of some characteristics and qualities he was to share with Jesus, he would be given the title of 'Messiah, Son of Mary' in much the same way as a great dramatist is called

Shakespeare. The reference to the Cross, too, is a simile. The Messiah will not literally go around wrecking crosses: he will defeat the Christian faith with strong reasoning and powerful arguments.

The destruction of the Cross, therefore, stands for the ideological rout of Christianity. Similarly, the word 'swine' is not to be taken in the literal sense. It connotes the cultural filth of the western world which turns men into beastly beings. The word swine stands for the so called sexual anarchy sweeping across America and Europe. It stands for the disgusting debauchery which claims even innocent children as its victims. The Traditions most assuredly did not convey that the Messiah would hunt down herds of wild boar or domesticated pigs. This would be a strange image of a prophet of God. It would rather remind one of Ajax, a hero from Greek mythology, who cut to pieces herds of cattle and flocks of sheep in the mad belief that they were the Greek army's chieftains!

The Antichrist, too, like the Messiah, the Cross and the Swine is symbolic. He symbolises a great and powerful nation which rules not only the earth but also space. The Cross and the Swine are in fact symbols pertaining to this nation. The Traditions say that the Antichrist's right eye will be sightless but his left eye will be large and bright. This is a symbolic description of the fact that though this nation would be devoid of spiritual light yet its material insight and therefore material attainments, would be great.

Lastly, the Ahmadi Muslims consider the Antichrist's ass to be a symbol too - a symbol that was used to describe the means of transportation of the days to come. All the features describing this

ass are without exception identifiable with the fuel-powered vehicles invented by the West. Consider the salient features of the ass - as described in the traditions - it will eat fire, it will travel over land, over sea and above the air; its speed will be so great that it will cover a journey of months within the space of a few hours; the passengers will travel not on its back but in its belly which would be lit up; it will announce its departure and ask passengers to take their seats. The fulfillment of these things with such wondrous exactness is a glorious testimony of the truth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him.

According to Ahmadi Muslims, the prophecies relating to the advent of the Imam Mahdi are also symbolic. The wealth he will distribute amongst Muslims is the wealth of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, and not worldly wealth. The refusal of some to accept it further indicates what kind of wealth it was to be; for man is never satiated with material wealth: it is only the spiritual treasures that he spurns.

Thus Ahmadiyyat rejects the philosophy of Islamic renaissance as explained above and propagated by the other sects of Islam. It holds that this philosophy is at variance with the real intent of the Quranic teachings, at variance with the history of the prophets and most of all at variance with the demonstrated actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Ahmadiyyat shuns this ideological opiate which lulls nations into inaction and leads them into the world of make-believe and fantasy.

Ahmadiyya Philosophy of Revival of Religion

This philosophy is no different from the one that is the common heritage of all religions. This is the only philosophy which history supports. Although the Scriptures and the legends mention many who ascended to the heavens, there is not one instance or account, since Adam, of the bodily return of anyone of them to earth.

So, regardless of the difference in the manner of the professed ascent to the heavens by some, there is none who is reported to have returned to earth after a long disappearance. Reformers have always appeared from the ordinary stock of human beings and have always been rejected and scorned by man. No ceremonial arches are ever erected to welcome them. No garlands are offered. No lamps are lighted in joyous illumination. On the contrary, those who came in the name of God were persecuted for committing this 'crime'. Their paths were strewn with thorns. Dust was heaped on their heads and stones were thrown at them. They were crowned with the crown of thorns. Every conceivable torture was inflicted on them. You see them now, returning from the town of Taif bathed in blood from head to foot. You see them again, in the battlefield of Ohad, half-dead from their wounds, buried under the bodies of those who laid their lives for them.

You will find their followers suffering a similar fate. Every conceivable torment is practiced on them. They are dragged by their feet through rough alley-ways. They are made to lie on burning sands under a sizzling sun. They are thrown on live coals and held there till the embers die down.

They are thrown out of their homes. They are driven into exile. They are threatened with starvation. They are put to the sword. The husbands are taken from the wives and the wives from the husbands. Parents are deprived of their children. Every right that life bestows is denied to them. They are neither allowed to pray nor to build mosques. They are deprived of the right to announce their faith. They are not even permitted to name their own creed.

Thus is man granted a new spiritual life. This is the path that leads to the revival of religion. This is the phenomenon that we see at work in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and in the life of every prophet before him. It is by treading this perilous path that the prophets have ever revived their nations. This is the philosophy of the revival of religions since the days of Adam to the days of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him). When such is the case, how can we then accept that the Almighty has decided to change this inviolable and time-honoured practice? How can we then accept that the Muslims will inherit the earth without shedding a drop of their blood and without making a stroke of effort? How can we believe that they will succeed without treading the path of sacrifice? It did not happen before. It will not happen again. The Promised Messiah, the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, affirms this eternal and everlasting truth when he warns the

nation thus:

'There has not been a Prophet who was not laughed at. So it was to be that people laugh at the Promised Messiah.

The Almighty says:

Alas for My servants, there comes not a Messenger to them but they mock at him'. (Holy Quran 36 :31)

So it is a sign from God that every prophet is mocked. Now, who can mock a person who physically descends from the heavens in the company of angels amidst a waiting crowd? The wise, therefore, can see that the bodily descent of the Promised Messiah from heaven is false belief. Remember! no one will descend from the sky. All those who oppose me and are now alive will die and not one from amongst them will see Jesus, Son of Mary, descend from heaven. Then their children and their children's children, too, will die, and Mary's Son will still not have descended. Then will God fill their hearts with fear that the days of the ascendancy of the Cross are gone and yet Jesus, Son of Mary, has not come down from the heavens. The wise will then tire of this belief. And before three centuries have passed from this day. Muslims and Christians alike will discard this false creed in disgust and despair. Their shall be only one religion in the world and only one Guide. I have come but to sow the seed. This seed has been sown at my hand. It will now grow and bear fruit and there is no power on earth that can harm it.' (Tazkarat-ul-Shahdatain, p. 64-65)

Every fair minded person can see from this comparison that the Ahmadiyya view-point is based on the history of religions while the philosophy of its opponents is mythical and contradicts the history of religious revival. We learn from history that

everyone appointed by God was faced with a storm of opposition. All prophets came with the message of truth and eternal life but were opposed by those who preferred falsehood to truth, and spiritual death to spiritual life. This indeed is the process of the birth of religions. When impurities and corruption crept into religions, their rebirth also took the same course. The reformers sent by God also suffered as the prophets had suffered. Whenever the Almighty chose to revive a nation spiritually, it split into two groups - those who saw the truth and those who opposed it. And neither group ever changed its demonstrated attitude. The Holy Quran describes this oft repeated cycle in a most effective and moving manner. A study of the Quran shows that:

1. Religions are born and revived through divinely appointed reformers. Never have the scholars ever reformed a religion through conferences and consultations.
2. The divinely appointed reformers are invariably rejected by their people and treated with arrogance and disdain.
3. Such reformers are always opposed by violence. They are accused of corrupting the religion of their forefathers. They are branded heretics and held guilty of apostasy.
4. The creed professed by the opponents prescribes death or banishment as the punishment for apostasy. The reformers are offered a choice of either a return to the fold or exile, failing which they are threatened with death.
5. The reformers never advocate violence. Their followers demonstrate steadfastness of such a high degree that they

would rather be exiled or killed than recant.

6. The reformers do not entice people with promises of power and high office: they dispel worldly ambition. They do not lure people with wealth; they inculcate the spirit of sacrifice. The rich who believe consider it their good fortune to give their all in the service of God; the mighty shrug off the trappings of power. It is then that divine providence adjudges them fit to take over temporal power.

This is the process of religious revival of nations that the Quran and the Scriptures reveal. All prophets - from Adam to the Holy Prophet Muhammad - went through these stages. They gave their nations new life by leading them over the path of suffering and sacrifice. They taught love. They inculcated love of hard work, of sustained effort and incessant actions. It is this revolutionary spirit which breathes life into dead nations. This oft-demonstrated and unchanging divine law is in consonance with man's nature, conscience and intellect. It is this law that the Ahmadiyya Community acknowledges.

As can be seen, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's concept of revival of religions is not a new-fangled philosophy born of human intellect. It IS derived from that continuous and unaltered historical process which is preserved most accurately and truly in the Holy Quran. It is founded on those eternal principles and truths which are the basis of every true religion. For instance, the Quran declares:

"There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely,

right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking, And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.' (Al-Baqarah, Verse: 257)

'Alas for My servants! there comes not a Messenger to them but they mock at him.' (Yasin, Verse: 31)

'Surely Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their heart.' (Al-Ra'ad, Verse 12)

When the prophet Shu'aib was threatened by his people:

'We will drive thee out O Shu'aib, and the believers (that are) with thee, from our town or you shall have to return to our religion.' he merely replied, 'Even though we be unwilling?' (Al-A'raf, Verse 89)

Noah's people, too, threatened him with stoning if he did not desist.

They said, 'If thou desist not, O Noah, thou shalt surely be one of those who are stoned.' (Al-Shuara, Verse 117)

This treatment was not reserved for just a few prophets. The Quran summarises people's attitude to the prophets in these words:

'And those who disbelieved said to their Messengers, 'We will surely expel you from our land unless you return to our religion.' (Ibrahim, Verse: 14)

Abraham was punished for recanting from the religion of his

forefathers and for voicing the truth. The chiefs vented their wrath by declaring:

'They said? 'Burn him and help your gods, if at all you mean to do anything.' (Al-Anbiya 21, Verse: 69)

Jesus Christ was nailed to the Cross because he disagreed with the Jewish Scribes over the interpretation of the Bible although he avowed openly:

'Think not that I have come to abolish the law, and the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.' (Mathew: Chapter 5, Verse: 17, 18)

May I remind you that the central difference between Jesus Christ and the Jewish scholars was on the interpretation of the verse:

'And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (2 Kings; Chapter 2, Verse 11).

The scholars stuck to the literal and apparent meanings of the verse. They believed that Elijah would descend bodily from heaven before the advent of Christ. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, asserted that this was an allegory, that the language was symbolic and not literal. He declared that Zacharia's son John was the Elijah who was to descend from heaven. Jesus knew full well that John was born on earth and had certainly not descended from heaven.

In answer to the question 'Then why do the Scribes say that first Elijah must come', he replied:

'Elijah does come and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the son of man will suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.' (Mathew: Chapter 17, Verse 10-13)

Lastly and above all was the suffering of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). In his own words, 'No Prophet suffered as much as I did.'

Therefore, the history of religions teaches us that prophets have always been normal human beings. They do not descend from heaven like the heroes of some mythical tale. They have always suffered trials and tribulations. Their followers gain glory not through the toils of someone else but through their own sweat and blood.