

Uncalled for remarks on Islam and its culture



By Dr . B. Ch.

For a number of years now and particularly after September 11, 2001, willful rumors on Islam and the Islamic culture have been circulated. One can find them in books, newspaper articles and television programs. The purpose of these assertions is not to make Islam known through its founding texts, its symbols or pertinent studies, based on creditable documents. It is rather to distort facts to the maximum possible extent and to level grave accusations without ever grounding them rest on an objective analysis or supporting them with accurate references. The objective sought by such reports seems to be to tarnish a respectable religion, embraced by over one billion and two hundred million people throughout the world.

At a time when the matter is to foster dialogue between cultures and civilizations, such an attitude of prejudice or open hostility is baffling. It demonstrates an intellectual myopia that reason and the car for truth both reject. It appears necessary to us briefly to bring to the fore such statements and to submit them to security, eschewing any sterile polemic approach, the purpose being scrutiny without resorting to sterile arguing. My purpose is to inform the general public who might be misled by individuals who have little qualms about shedding confusion in the minds.

1-Systematic disparagement

The thing that first strikes the impartial observer is the systematic disparagement that can be found in a major part of the writings and speeches that frequently target Islam as a religion, as well as its sacred texts and its Prophet (PBUH). Among the most recent

publications, suffice it to mention Michel Houellebecq's book Plateforme "Platform" (Paris: Flammarion, 2001). In this novel, one of the characters brutally attacks Islam of which he knows almost nothing. The protests of numerous Muslim organizations and adepts of Islam led the publisher to apologize. However, in a recent interview to the press, the author renewed his assault. He was showed open belligerence against Islam. So much so that a lawsuit was filed against him in France. One will have to wait and see whether the trial could gratify those who decided to seek justice from the courts.

A second book toed this line. It is entitled Aphorismes subversives "Subversive Aphorisms". Maurice Rajsfus, (Paris: Mediterranee, 1999) dismisses the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. According to him, they should all be rejected as he claims that their texts are apocryphal ! (p.138). Attacking Islam, he states that the prophet (PBUH) dictated the Koran (p.68). In other words, the Koran was not revealed!

The Prophet himself is the object of serious charges (p.70). Finally, a third work not overtly hostile to Islam, is the work of Anne-Marie Delcambre's book. Its title is Mahomet, la parole d'Allah (Mahomet, the word of Allah) Desclee de Brouwer publishing, Paris, 1999). It contains appendixes with extracts from books of 18th century authors such as Bayle, Diderot, and Voltaire. They are mentioned to point out how misunderstood Islam was at the time.

The newspaper **l'Echo d'Oran** published those extracts without situating them in their proper context. This has generated heated reactions in this region and triggered polemic with another daily newspaper in the same city. The Board of Religious Affairs in Oran looked into it. In turn, the Higher Islamic Council faxed its clarification on the matter to the said newspaper, which published it in extenso.

2-A layman is attempt at analysis through ARTE channel

The television channel ARTE dedicated several programs to the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), entitled **Un homme nommé Mahomet**, (a man named Mahomet) and were broadcast in January 2002. This series purported to establish a balance between legend and critical history with the help of experts who attempted to avoid an apologetic or provoking style. They took into account the fact that their public knew little about Islam, its texts and its Prophet (PBUH). ARTE used testimonies that are more or less reliable and even storytellers!

This channel resorted mainly to anthropology without referring accurately to the kuranic text and to the history of the Prophet's life as related by the Muslim tradition. One of the experts acknowledged it easily: "we quickly made the choice to get rid of the sacred history of the Prophet by entrusting it to the people". This is an aberration.

To justify his position, this expert explained that the Koran mentions that the Prophet is "only a man"! Taking this verse out of its context, he said that he was rather interested in the man, which leans towards ignoring Mohammed's prophetic mission, a mission inspired by God. Such a vantage point evidently limits the scope of this series of programs through this endeavour has been positive on a few points. Indeed, in order to be creditable in the eyes of the believer, such attempts as this one should be based essentially on the Koran, the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) and acknowledged research by the great scholars of Islam like Al-Tabari, Al Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Abduh, Ibn Badis and many more.

Muslims would find Islamic science, or Islamology, more acceptable if the latter rid itself completely of its prejudices derived from scientism by moving closer to the authentic Islam. The Higher Islamic Council precisely seeks to assist towards a better knowledge of our religion, by providing precise definitions of the key concepts underlying it and providing a corrective to the errors so frequently circulated about it within circles that are alien to it, by

avoiding invective and sterile polemics. Firmness and courtesy, such is the method we have opted for.

* Professor, University of Algiers, former Minister for Communication and Culture, President of the Higher Islamic Council.

By the same author:

- Le probleme de la liberte humaine, (The Problem Of Human Freedom), pub. Librairie Philosophique Paris, Vrin :1978
- Ibn Rushd Fasl-al-maqâl (Ibn Rushd, The Decisive Treatise), pub: SNED, Algiers, 1978
- Panorama de la pensee islamique (A survey of Islamic Philosophy (with Louis Gardet), pub: Sindbad, Paris 1984.
- Collaboration a l'Encyclopedie philosophique (Contribution to the Philosophy Encyclopedia), edit. P.U.F., Paris, 1992.
- Les Scouts Musulmans Algeriens (the Algerian Muslim Scouts),(in collaboration), pub: Dar al-Umma, Algiers, 1999, (in Arabic and in French).
- Dictionnaire des Maghrebins illustres (Dictionary of Famous North Africans); (collective publication), pub: Universite d'Alger, 1995; 2eme pub: Dahlab, Alger, 2001.
- L'Emir Abd-el Kader, resistant et humaniste (Emir Abd-el Kader, a Resistant and a Humanist), edit. Hammouda, Alger, 2001

Various articles:

- Ibn Badis. Apercu sur l'homme et l'oeuvre (Ibn Badis, A Glimpse at the Man and his Work); Saint Augustin et le donatisme (Saint Augustine and the Donatism); Ramon Lulle et l'Islam maghrebin

(Ramon Lull and North African Islam; Charles de Foucauld a Tamanrasset (Charles de Foucauld at Tamanrasset}...

- L'Algerie coloniale par les textes (Colonial Algeria Through Texts (in collaboration), being printed, edit. Hammouda, Alger,2003.
- Tawfiq al-Hakim, Dialogue du sage avec sa canne (Tawfiq al-hakim, the Wise Man and his Walking stick, French translation; (in collaboration), under press.
- Vers une culture ouverte, memoire d'un universitaire-chercheur (Towards an Open Culture, Memoirs of a Scholar and Researcher),being printed.