

Islam and Christianity; or should it be, Islam and Christendom? In the difference between the connotation of the words Christianity and Christendom lies the explanation of one of the most essential differences between the two faiths. For Islam is a way of life, and perhaps, in selecting 'Christendom' in preference to 'Christianity' in the context of comparing the two religions, the tendency is evinced to seek a term referring to Christianity as if it, too, were a way of life in the same, all-embracing way that Islam set out to be. But Christianity is a religion; in some respects an institution that happens in spite of terrestrial life, although a life which it does not inform is death. Christendom remains a territorial concept, so that, though it does in a sense express an antithesis which the existence of Islam called into being, it cannot be used to mean what Islam meant – to refer to the way men worshipped, wrote, thought, practised the law, washed themselves, devised systems of finance that would not break the law and so forth. Christendom was a place; Islam a complete and monolithic concept of human conduct.

Christianity was never a way of life to the same degree because, for one thing, its founder, Jesus Christ, had not been at pains to legislate for this world, only to save it by symbolical and actual death to it. He had preached its unworthiness and left no doubt that what is God's is what counts, not what is Caesar's. In fact, when this particular distinction was drawn, the greatest divergence of all between Islam and Christianity was already established. When Muhammad the Prophet preached his revelation two hundred years subsequently, he did not grasp nor show any comprehension of the Christian notion of the dichotomy between what is God's and what belongs to Caesar. In Islam, therefore, there was neither Church nor State, for the basic dichotomy not having been conceived, there were no grounds for any difference being conceded between the religious and the secular function. The Faith was supreme and every Muslim equally a potential exponent of it; a class of what might, rather loosely, be termed divines only grew up as the necessity emerged for trained canon legists, which was what these turbaned and robed figures were; not priests. The faith reposed in Allah, to whom all belonged. The faithful were God's people.

In the Quran the devil is principally referred to as *Shaitan*, one who is 'far from the truth', his name being derived from a verbal root in which the

ideas of opposition, tension and being entrammelled are implicit. *Iblis*, the 'wicked one', is used only nine times in the Muslim Scripture, in contrast to the fifty-two times when the word *Shaitan* occurs; a fact which is mentioned because *Iblis* seems to denote a more devilish sort of devil, in Christian terms, than does *Shaitan*.

Shaitan is, in short, the Fallen Angel *par excellence*: the rebellious one, made fast in his denial of truth. The Satan who tempted Christ was a far more positive and responsible individual; one who could speak of dividing the world. The interference may be that the world was his to mete out: *Iblis*, or *Shaitan*, the error from the truth or even the wicked one himself, were neither of them much more than brethren of the genii; and they were only differentiated from the angels by their rôle of prompter of evil and the gad-fly of the vulnerable, while the angels were protectors and taught the truth.

In a valuable discussion of several aspects of Islam¹ Canon Cragg sums up the rôle and status of angels, and of their erstwhile associate, as follows: 'Angels, as presented in the Quran, have their great rôle in the mediation, or *Tanzil*, of the Holy Book (Surah 2.97, 98 and 66.4), but they have also protective functions in relation to men and take the soul at death (Surah 6.61). They are exempt from the dignities of man as a creature of moral freedom and responsibility – a status probably betokened in their being called upon to prostrate themselves before the creature Adam (Surah 7.11, *et al.*). The Devil, or *Iblis*, in refusal to do so indicates his disapproval of the divine "risk" in confiding so high a rôle to so fickle a creature, Thus the very "fallenness" of the Devil consists in his quarrel with the dignity of man . . .'

And indeed, in that later, and doubtless Christian-influenced development of Islam, Sufism, it is this aspect, the rebellion of the force of evil against God's command to obey Adam, which is emphasized; for Sufism was an assertion, not of the 'mystic's' unworthiness, but of his human dignity as God's chosen means of manifestation of his love and splendour. Sufism strove to encompass the synthesis of the Christian sense of the dignity of man with the Quran's revelation of man's divine rôle and primal contract with God, to the exclusion of the angels and to the chagrin of Satan.

In Muslim tradition the devil was not so much the Arch-Fiend, forever and almost dualistically set over against God, as the familiar of men. The Prophet is reported to have said: 'There is not one amongst you but has an angel and a devil appointed over him'. His Companions said, 'Do you include yourself?' The Prophet replied, 'Yes, for me also; but God has given me victory over the devil . . .' Again, he is reported as declaring, 'There is not one of the children of Adam, except Mary and her son, but

¹The Dome and the Rock, by Kenneth Cragg (*S.P.C.K.*, 40s)

is touched by the devil at the time of his birth, hence the child makes a loud noise from the touch'.

This is not the way in which the devil of Christianity could be described at all. The purpose of this digression has been, not particularly to argue a point of difference between Christianity and Islam, but to suggest an avenue of investigation, on the assumption that in their respective treatments of the theme of Satan much may be discovered about in what and how far the two faiths differ, especially in respect of their approach to the human situation.

The difference here will, however, turn out really to be one of degree. Certainly the renewed exploration, which is characteristic of modern times, of the relationship and, not rivalry, but, rather, failures of communication between Islam and Christianity, tends increasingly to display that the differences are far less radical than had for a long time been supposed; though, as differences of degree only, they are assuredly the most unsusceptible, because of their very subtlety, of resolution and even clear understanding. Like the famous 'language barrier' difficulty cited by George Bernard Shaw, there is too much of a common language for issues to be as plain as they might otherwise be.

On the theme of the devil, the thesis could be advanced that Christianity was the more tinged with the dualism of Iran than was that later preaching, that Muslim Faith which was almost, as some Byzantine bishops before the arrival of the Crusading Latins seem to have thought, an offspring of Christianity; certainly a heresy rather than another, utterly alien creed. But a war, both a hot and a cold one, intervened, and resulted in the drawing of the opposing forces in terms that were blacker and whiter than in reality they were. War requires this accentuation of differences and, with its own ghastly logic, ignores the shadings and the gentle and compassionate meetings and recognitions of kinship, that can quicken human contacts once swords are sheathed. It was thus that the Crusaders divided the Levant; very nearly, the world, with the help of their Turkish contenders.

Division served to bring out into full light that essential difference which this article took as its starting point; the way of life versus the religion, religion as something separate from purely mundane affairs. Out of the postulation of this difference in the two Faiths arises the attempt to compare their attitudes towards the devil; for the principle of Evil can be equated with the snares, the *knowledge* (in the carnal sense) and the deceitful beguilements of the world, and in one of the two religions this equation was made. In the other, the world is accepted, not rejected and contemned; hence the Islamic devil is the less awful.

A great deal has been said about the tensions and conflicts within Islam. Pointed at as a religion which tried too much to be a way of life, and whose adherents' laws are all canonical, while the religious institu-

tion attempts to cater for man's every need so that even taxes are not the unsanctified rendition of revenue to secular powers, but a divinely ordained and regulated pooling of resources for the benefit of God's community: seen as the Faith in which the words 'spiritual' and 'lay' had no meaning, all being, in submission (*Islam*), God's, it is easy to write up a whole series of tensions, infeasibilities, unattainabilities and the ultimate inevitable failure of Islam.

But for a change we may look at the agonies of Christianity, and wonder at the strains imposed on a great religion which in essence, rather than arranging for the institutional accommodation of the world, implied its rejection: to be left to its own devices, the soul of man being saved while his perpetually fading, evanescent carcase was to be suppressed. The progress down the Manichaean way, was, of course, stopped with rigour; but the degree of integration, between the faith on one side and the world on the other, that was a feature of Islam, was never attained in Christianity, nor seen as a great and laudable aim. Had there not been war between the two religions, a matter on which to pause and think is that there might perhaps have been an instructive study of Islam, whereby, though the Prophet's misunderstanding of Judaeo-Christian issues, and the perverted doctrine with which the heresy or ignorance of some of his informants in the remote Arabian cities provided him might become the more obvious, nonetheless some of Christianity's problems, and points of weakness, might have been elucidated; and not elucidated simply in the negative way in which weaknesses are discovered under the challenge of attack, but in the way of complementing that comes of synthesizing and mutual awareness. Thus the offshoot, preached and fashioned by Arabs so much more pragmatic than the denizens of more fertile lands to the north of them, might have deepened men's capacity to realize that original message of Christ himself, for which the Muslim Prophet entertained so much reverence.

A debt is owed, not only to the pioneering effort of Dr Norman Daniel (*Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*), but to Professor Kritzeck, for his systematic study of one of the West's greatest impresarios of Islam, Peter the Venerable,² in a work which includes a newly edited text of the *Liber contra sectum Saracenorum*; while Professor G. M. Wickens has recently done what that twelfth century Abbot of Cluny would have delighted in seeing done: he has translated a central work of Muslim ethics, a complete attempt to rationalize 'the way of life', the *Akhlaq-i-Nāsiri* of the Persian, Nāsirū'd-Dīn of Tūs.³ These scholars are providing the material which should accompany that reappraisal of the Muslim-Christian situation to which Kenneth Cragg has,

²*Peter the Venerable and Islam*, by James Kritzeck (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 60s)

³*The Nasirean Ethics*, translated and edited by G. M. Wickens (Allen and Unwin, 45s)

in a series of personal contacts and encounters, been devoting himself for the past several years. Now it is time that the historian also made himself more noticeable in the ranks of this gallant band.

The historian will observe one striking phenomenon which, in the terms of the thesis adumbrated here, can be related to the Islamic attempt to achieve integration of the spiritual with the secular life, and the Christian difficulty over non-acceptance of the possibility of such an integration with the world *as it is*, fallen from grace. He will have much to concern him; not least the vital question of the freedom of will issue in Islam. But, looking at the contemporary scene, the historian will (after Sir Hamilton Gibb) perceive that through the conquest of Islam by the West the catastrophe has occurred of the destruction of Islam's sense of integration – a grave spectacle thus presents itself to the observer and the philosopher.

Islam has failed to hold together the community of Allah's people and failed to give them continued reassurance in their faith. Christianity has failed to make men abandon the world of the devil, of materialism, of hunger for gain and power. Then Christianity has breached the ramparts of the *Dāru'l-Islām*, Islam's Abode, and caused Muslims to think their vulnerability due to their non-possession of some 'secret' of the West, which they must learn. And so, values that in great measure are the indices of Christianity's failure were taken over by Islamic lands, to upset Islam's sense of the integration of the spiritual and the material. A conquest far more invidious and destructive than any which the Crusaders could have conceived of has taken place.

When scholars sit down to study and comment on the errors of the 'Toledan Collection' and other such historical questions, the shambles of today cannot be ignored, because at no time more than ours could the necessity of a closing of the ranks between Islam and Christianity, a coming together, be more pressing.
