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Why Muslims must now turn away from Hadith

This article is reproduced from Malaysia's THE SUNDAY STAR of June 22, 1986 (Page 13). It was written by Dr. Kassim Ahmad, renowned Malaysian Leader, Prominent Muslim Scholar, and, first and foremost, a true Muslim who raises the banner of true Islam as originally preached by God's final Prophet Muhammad. There is no doubt that God and His invisible and invincible soldiers are supporting Kassim in his current historical stand against Satan's feeble troops who call themselves "Ulama" (Muslim Scholars!!!). See Qur'an 22:40, 37:171-173, & 40:51. (The Editor)

By Kassim Ahmad
THE Muslims have two sets of 'authentic' collections of Hadith, compiled reported alleged sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, firstly, by Sunni ('orthodox') and, secondly, by Shia ('heretical') compilers between 250 and 350 years after his death.

Although these compilers adopted what they considered were 'fool-proof' methods against errors, the authenticity of the Hadith has been a subject of endless controversy down the centuries. The majority of Muslim orthodox theologians and jurists since that time had decreed that any Muslim not upholding the Hadith as a source of guidance and law puts himself outside the fold of Islam.

In a nutshell, this is the greatest dilemma facing the Muslims today: Will they continue to uphold the Hadith in spite of its self-contradictions, as their theologians have taught, or undertake a critical re-evaluation in the face of strong opposition by the conservative ulama?

The critical re-evaluation is absolutely necessary in order to remove

what I consider to be the greatest impediment to the development of Muslim thought and social progress in the modern world. Anyone who examines the Hadith objectively and dispassionately would find many of them contradicting the clear teachings of the Quran, contradicting itself and contradicting science and history and common sense.

In my small book, I have given examples of such Hadith. In short, the Hadith is anti-science and contrary to Quranic humanism. This is the basis of my argument that the Hadith impedes the development of modern Muslim thought and social progress.

As history has recorded, the early Muslims were world leaders in empire-making, just administration, intellectual and scientific culture and military strategy and warfare.

This was the time when they were wholly inspired and fully imbued by the liberating message of the divine Quran, the only scripture and teaching brought by Prophet Muhammad to the Arabs and mankind.

When, beginning from the Third Century of Islam onwards, the Muslims began to turn their minds to other sources of guidance, particularly the Hadith, the downward slide started. As everybody can see, the Muslims today are badly split, warring against each other, one group ever ready to quarrel with another and differing with one another on the smallest of issues, such as purdah and mannerisms in prayer, and consequently, occupying the bottommost position in the international community.

In spite of this, most of the ulama are quite complacent and feel self-righteous about the state of their religion. They view any attack on them or any attempt at a critical re-evaluation of their teachings as an attack on Islam itself.

They have in fact arrogated to themselves the role of custodians of the religion. They assert that there is nothing wrong with the state of Islam as taught by them; the error lies in its non-application by politicians.

They therefore are now clamouring for a greater role for themselves in

government. PAS is in fact proposing to set up such a dismal medieval theologian-led state in Malaysia.

The trouble is that the majority of the ulama is no longer the learned of the Ummah, as their name implies.

Since the time they assumed the form of a priestly class about the Fifteenth Century and devoted themselves purely to the "religious" sciences, their knowledge froze and along with it Muslim science and thought. Since nature abhors extremes, the extremes wing of the religious intelligentsia gave rise to the extreme wing of the secular intelligentsia who severed the connection between religion and politics.

This is the root cause of the alienation of the ulama from modern knowledge and contemporary society.

This explains their near-hysterical reaction to my book and their inability to confront its scientific challenge rationally.

Unable to confront the book's scientific challenge rationally, they resorted to character assass-

sination and mystification, with such remarks as the author was a former socialist leader, that having rejected the Hadith he is now an 'apostate', that he does not read the Quran in Arabic, that he uses Orientalist sources and not primary sources and so on.

Such arguments, of course, cut no ice with the enlightened, but their target is the unenlightened.

The aim of their campaign is to confuse the people as to the true contents of my book, whip up public support for their untenable position and pressure the authorities to ban it.

All of these go to show their great fear of the people's rejection of the Hadith. They even irrationally argue that a rejection of the Hadith means a rejection of the Quran, when they very well know that the Quran is a protected divine scripture standing separately by itself.

On closer examination, this fear is linked to the fact that most of the so-called authentic Hadith cannot be said to originate from the Prophet, since they contradict the teach-

ings of the Quran which he brought, and many of them in calculate superstitious faith in the *ulama*.

It is thus in the interest of the *ulama* to uphold and protect the *Hadith*. It is in fact their teaching that the *Hadith* be considered as a source of law along with the Quran. Definitely it is not the Prophet's teaching.

The Quran categorically forbids it, and the Prophet is also reported to have forbidden the writing down of anything from him except the Quran. Since this report supports the Quran, it can be safely regarded as a genuine *Hadith*.

The teaching that the *Hadith* is a primary

source of Muslim jurisprudence was first formally stated by the great classical jurist, Imam Shafi'i (d. 820 A.D.) some two hundred years after the Prophet's death.

The *Hadith* of course existed in oral form from the earliest generations of Islam, though not in such stupendous numbers as existed at the time of the official compilations, but prior to the acceptance of the Shafi'i jurisprudential theory, they were simply regarded as precedents.

Right from the time of Shafi'i's enunciation of the theory in his book, *al-Risalah*, strong objections were advanced against it by the Muslim Rationalists on the grounds that

the Quran was perfect, complete and detailed and the *Hadith* mere guesswork.

The historical circumstances at that time were such that Shafi'i's theory eventually gained general acceptance and the opposition movement suppressed.

However, it persisted as a minority suppressed movement in the Muslim community down the centuries until today when, to my mind, conditions are ripening for its general acceptance.

The anti-*Hadith* movement can in no way be taken as a movement to denigrate the great Prophet Muhammad or to

do away with the divine scripture, the Quran, that he brought to mankind, as the upholders of *Hadith* would have the people believe.

Muhammad, being God's final prophet to mankind during the Earth's era of scientific and technological advance cannot teach such superstitions as are embodied in a great many *Hadith*.

The aim of the anti-*Hadith* movement is precisely to clear the great Prophet of the false teachings attributed to him. As to the Quran, it is the grand, spiritual, rational, humanistic, liberating message that he brought to the Arabs and the

whole of mankind, already lifting the Arab and Muslims in the first three centuries to great heights, and, of course, as capable of accomplishing similar feats for the whole of humanity in the future.

The Quran is far, very far above the jumble of so-called prophetic *Hadith* that the conservative theologians wish to associate it with.

This is the universal, social and philosophical dimension of the anti-*Hadith* movement and the movement back to the Quran, the sole, original and true teachings of Prophet Muhammad to the world. It is of far-reaching world significance.

New Sunday Times, June 22, 1986

SCOPE

EDITORIAL

FROM THE BAHASA PAPERS

Berita Harian

□ NOW that the Religious Affairs Division in the Prime Minister's Department has made known its views on Kassim Ahmad's book, there will certainly be increasing pressure to ban it. The editorial regretted that those who are loudest in seeking a ban on the book are also the ones who have been reluctant to have an open debate with Kassim to discuss his book. The open-mindedness of Abim in responding to Kassim Ahmad's challenge is to be applauded. The *Berita Harian* added that perhaps the publication of the book could have been inspired by the fact that Encik Kassim was denied the use of a public forum at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia some months ago as a result of a directive by the Selangor Religious Affairs Department. The reason for preventing Kassim from holding the *ceramah* was that he is not an *ulama* and is not an expert on the *hadith*. "It is clear that the UKM was reluctant to hear the views of a man whom they regard as 'ignorant' simply because he stands outside their field of expertise."

"Who knows, perhaps if the *ceramah* had been permitted, its effect might have been more positive than what are facing now". It is unfortunate for the Malays and Muslims that there are still people who consider themselves experts in a certain field but are afraid to hear the views of others who do not share their discipline?

The paper urged the *ulama* to have the "courage" to listen to other people's views.

Religious issues should not be exempted from open debate even though there might be occasions when the *ulama* or the experts in a particular discipline feel that their credibility is challenged. If the *ulama* take pride in the revival of Islam, they should be brave enough to cope with developments resulting from such revival.

It is useless to take pride in the revival of Islam if the right to discuss an issue of relevance to Islam continues to be regarded as the sole prerogative of the *ulama*.

It is odd that our *ulama* often make use of their position to ban this and that, and are prone to criticise the writings of other people while they themselves do not express their ideas in writing.

Is it the duty our *ulama* merely to act as sources of reference or as agents whose responsibility is to hand out *haram* or *halal* judgments? Why should Kassim's book be the sole object of inquiry whereas the books written by Joseph Schact or Goldziher which Kassim used as his sources of reference are still sold in our bookshops?

The paper expressed the hope that "the *ulama* would accept Kassim's invitation that the controversy be solved in a more judicious and convincing manner."

Utusan Malaysia

□ THE Utusan Malaysia editorial commenting on Kassim Ahmad's book called upon the *ulama* not to rely solely on their authority as religious leaders to act against Kassim Ahmad's book. It would be more dangerous for the *ulama* merely, to resort to conventional measures.

"Muslims now are generally less inclined to submit themselves to the authority of the *ulama*," the Utusan added. Kassim Ahmad's book poses not only a challenge to the credibility of the *ulama* but also to their scholarship in rebutting his arguments in a rational and convincing manner, the paper said.

"What is urgently needed is for the *ulama* to prove that Kassim Ahmad's views are wrongly based on scientific arguments as the present generation of Muslims is more critical in their attitude and thinking," the editorial said.

"It is a heavy task for our *ulama* but it is a responsibility which they must fulfil as the emergence of groups questioning Islam in the past was partly due to the failure of our *ulama* to adjust their methods of explaining Islam in terms that are relevant to the changes in the Muslim world."

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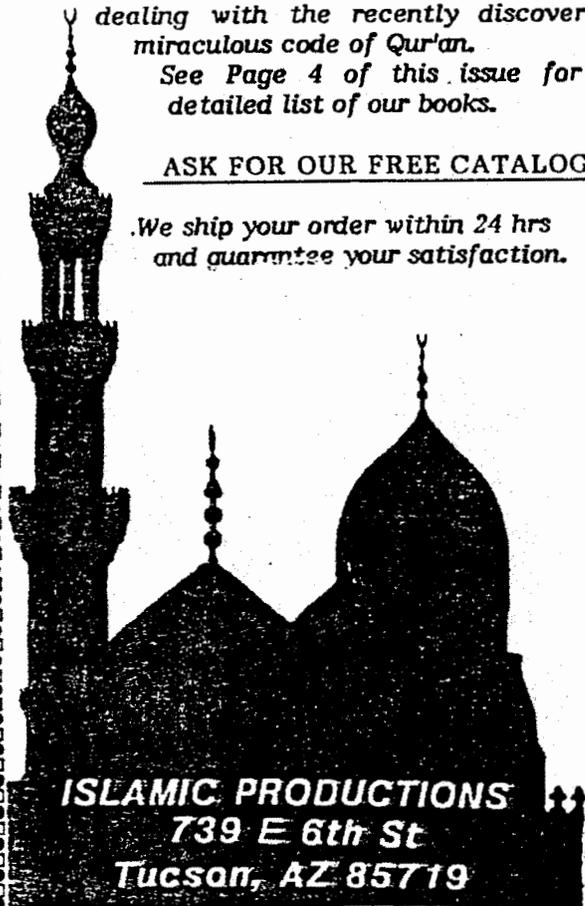
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*Invite others to the way of your Lord with wisdom and gentle admonition and debate with them in the best possible manner.*²⁵

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