

Struggle

Kawkab al-Sharq, 30 May 1933

The striving of our scholars in the path of God is well known, and their self-abnegation for God's right is well known, and the tribulation of our scholars in this cause casts no shadow on them — for the sign of this is that the word of Islam is supreme: not in Egypt alone, not in the Islamic East alone, but in countries where other religions hold sway as well. For if something within Islam is exposed to harm by anyone, the Muslim scholars of the Azhar rise to its defence — they have never ceased to argue for it, debate over it, and press its proof upon the offender until he is driven to submission and the laying down of arms. And if someone is exposed to Islam — whether doing it a little wrong or a great deal — in a way that contradicts its foundations or disputes its principles, the scholars of the Azhar rise against him and rebuff him and confront him, and enlist the authority of the state against him and set the state's men and women upon him until he repents, or is visited with what transgressors deserve.

The Islamic scholars of the Azhar exert themselves strenuously in this, bearing patiently through the long nights and enduring what is painful and distressing — it burns in their hearts day and night, melts their hearts out of jealousy for God's religion and indignation in its defence, wears down their bodies protecting the religion of God with devotion, until the signs of this exertion appear upon their faces and their frames, and all the marks of distress appear in their persons. And they are wholly given over to this striving — spending their nights in prayer, guarding the Quran, appointed as wardens of prayer; living for nothing but God, devoting themselves to nothing but God, fearing in what they dedicate themselves to no one's reproach; there is no overpowering authority, no colossal force — and they are at ease in their duty and settled in their dignified station. The eye falls upon one of them and is filled with nothing but reverence and awe, and the soul is filled with love for him and admiration and esteem. They are gripped by that which has stirred bravely in the throats of the eloquent and struck painfully in the interiors of hearts. They are the heroes of sincere devotion to religion in this modern age, beyond all doubt. Look at them, for the Council of Sheikhs met yesterday — and what they examined was among the matters examined for religion — a matter on which the ruling is clear, the doctrine evident, and there is no scope for disputing it.

The law submitted to the Council of Sheikhs yesterday was one that the sheikhs wished to nudge somewhat away from the authority of religious law and incline toward the right thing, according to their own assessment of the right thing. When the matter of this law became known among the Islamic scholars, they were displeased and rejected it, gathered in companies and went to see their Grand Sheikh, pressing him hard to be resolute, urging him to go to the Council of Sheikhs and send from his angry tongue the thunderbolts of warning and caution until the ministers withdrew the law from the sheikhs and rejected it.

The scholars' companies had put themselves to this exertion in vain — for what did the Sheikh need — may God support him — to be reminded of his duty? He spends the white hours of his day and the darkness of his night as a wakeful watchman, a vigilant observer, keeping track of doubters and complainers and the unstable and the treacherous, driving away the plots of plotters and the machinations of schemers, warding off their harm from the necks of Islam, and guarding Islam from the evil of its enemies. He was — may God honour him and set him right — receiving the scholars' delegations that called on him one by one, saying to no one from those delegations anything other than: Blessed be you — we have indeed rallied and not slumbered, roused ourselves and not been heedless; go back rewarded, remunerated, and abundantly repaid!!

Until yesterday evening came, and the Sheikh arrived, and around him the scholarly colleagues who participate in the work of the Senate, faith's serenity on their faces and the intensity of righteous anger upon those faces. When they entered the Council and the non-scholar members looked upon them, those members' hearts filled with love and dread! Then the law was submitted for debate — and the Sheikh had barely begun to rise to speak when the Minister of Justice leapt up, agitated and bewildered, as though seized by vertigo, and announced in a trembling voice full of fear that he could see on the face of the Sheikh and his companions — may God preserve them as a treasure for Islam, a source of strength for Muslims — a rejection of this law; he was therefore withdrawing it with an apology for having submitted it, and a pledge not to return to anything like it, entreating the Sheikh and his companions; whereupon the Sheikh lowered his gaze in humility and dignity and satisfaction, the members applauded, God spared the believers from fighting, and there was no more striving, no more struggle — only moving on to the next item on the agenda.

As for the other members besides the scholars, they had approved this law unanimously — and as for the Minister of Justice, he came out victorious with his law, which the two Chambers had approved for him. This is what Al-Ahram said this morning; as for Al-Sha'b, it was silent about the absence of the Grand Sheikh and the withdrawal of the Grand Mufti and his companion, while it mentioned the objection of the Sheikh who neither left nor withdrew.

People read all of this and were baffled and confused. Should they believe Scheherazade? In that case, Al-Ahram must be prosecuted for having insulted the scholars of Islam and the ministers of the state by saying what they did not say and did not do. Or should they not believe Al-Ahram? In that case, Al-Ahram must be prosecuted for having given people a false impression and depicted their scholars of religion and men of religion as men who perform their duty on best form and in best manner, feeling no fear and no alarm, not retreating and not fleeing — but arriving, then denying, then attending, then denying once more. Likewise is how Al-Ahram depicts for Muslims the affair of Muslim scholars, filling their hearts with trust and reassurance — until the morning comes and in its light Al-Ahram arrives, saying the opposite of this, and hopes are dashed, and the situation worsens, and people's trust turns to complaint, and their reassurance to fear. They should prosecute Al-Ahram. Perhaps they should, somewhere in the country — and perhaps in Baghdad, the city they are so fond of!!

Now, do you know this law that caused the Sheikh to absent himself, two sheikhs to withdraw, and a fourth sheikh to refuse to approve it — a refinement of certain provisions of the Penal Code on the matter of offences against the honour of boys and girls?

The Penal Code used to punish the offender who committed such offences with the consent of the boy or girl up to the age of fourteen. It was amended to punish this offence with the consent of the boy or girl up to the age of sixteen — so it was therefore tightening the protection of boys and girls against such aggression. But when the boy or girl exceeded this age, sixteen, then whoever committed offences against them with their consent was not punished!!

Here is the point of divergence between the rulings of religion and the provisions of the law. For religion punishes every violation of honour regardless of age, and regardless of whether the sin was committed with

the wronged party's consent or not.

The sheikhs wished, beyond doubt, to subject the laws of the age to the rulings of religion — but some of them attempted this and then withdrew, some among them rejected it, and each of them has done his duty. Whoever was unable to change the wrong with his hand, let him change it with his tongue; and whoever was unable to change it with his tongue, let him change it in his heart — and that is the weakest of faith, as the tradition says.

Woe to the circumstances that compel the senior sheikhs to be content with the weakest of faith.