

Crooked

Yes—crooked indeed, deeply twisted and winding is that path by which a man announces to the people that he is walking toward goodness, charity, righteousness, and public virtue, only for them to discover, after he has traveled far along it, that he was never journeying toward goodness at all.

Instead he was merely advertising himself, spreading propaganda for the image he wished others to hold of him, pretending to the people that he was compassionate toward them when in truth he cared only for himself; pretending to seek their welfare while pursuing his own advantage; pretending to serve them earnestly while actually striving to deceive them and distract them from the labor and reform they themselves ought to undertake.

He persuades them that he will accomplish these things on their behalf and spare them the burden of effort and responsibility. Then, once they trust him and grant him the confidence and support he seeks, he turns away from them and from their hopes, doing nothing at all for them—as though he had never promised anything and never entered into any covenant with them.

Yes, crooked and deeply twisted are these methods followed by certain men who proclaim that they seek the face of God, while in reality they pursue ends pleasing neither to God nor to humanity, but rather obscure ambitions and hidden desires unworthy of honorable people.

How frequently men follow such crooked paths whenever public life grows corrupt and people lose sound judgment in political, moral, and social affairs. At such times opportunists emerge, exploiters of circumstance appear, and manipulators of minds flourish.

The public good then becomes nothing more than a pretext, a deception, a means of satisfying private interests and securing personal desires. Corruption spreads and deepens. Selfishness gains power over hearts and souls. Concern for the common good weakens, and people cease to honor or protect it.

Men become isolated individuals concerned only with themselves, each seeking to repel evil from his own life and draw benefit toward himself alone. National spirit weakens, solidarity dissolves, and people forget their collective identity and unity.

Then every ambitious oppressor becomes capable of humiliating them further, exploiting them more completely, and using them for his own purposes without fear of restraint or accountability.

This is one of the characteristic symptoms of public life in every country afflicted by the political, moral, and economic crises from which Egypt now suffers.

You may observe this phenomenon clearly in many aspects of Egyptian life today. How vast is the difference between what many people say and what they actually do, between what they outwardly display and what they secretly conceal.

Everyone, when speaking, appears full of love for Egypt, tenderness toward her, and willingness to sacrifice for her. Yet when you examine people's actions, many prove to love only themselves, to pity only themselves, and to place themselves above everything else—including Egypt herself.

Had this hypocrisy not spread so deeply throughout our social life—this gulf between what people say and what they do—Egypt would never have descended into the miserable condition from which she has suffered for so many years.

We had hoped that one particular group of Egyptians would remain free from these twisted methods, because such behavior does not suit the dignity of their position or the expectations people place upon them. We wished that the path of the religious scholars would be the straightest of all paths, the furthest removed from distortion and deception, and the closest to sincerity, honesty, and faithful counsel to God and to Muslims alike.

For a long time the religious scholars remained silent and inactive, and people reproached them for this silence. Then they began speaking and acting energetically, and people praised them for it, hoping that their words and efforts would produce great benefit.

But what benefit has actually come from the words of these sheikhs and from their activity?

More than a month and a half has passed since the Council of Senior Scholars rose in defense of religion and in service to the cause of God. During this time the sheikhs have gathered repeatedly, spoken repeatedly, and acted repeatedly.

Yet Muslims today ask what practical result has emerged from all this. They recall the saying of Abu al─Ala' al─Ma'arri when he listened to a poet from Islamic Spain and remarked afterward: "It is as

though I hear a mill grinding horns”—meaning that he heard much noise but saw no flour.

Likewise Muslims hear many speeches from the sheikhs of Al-Azhar and witness great activity from them, yet they obtain from all this little real benefit.

The Council of Senior Scholars knows perfectly well that Muslims appeal to it urgently concerning this Muslim woman, Nazla Ghoneim, who remains subject to non-Muslim authority and beyond the reach of Islamic law because a ruling issued by the English communal council stands in the way of Islamic jurisdiction and prevents her return to her Muslim family.

The Council hears of this every day and reads of it every day, while continuing its meetings and discussions. We therefore wish to know what practical action it has taken to enforce the laws of Islam in a Muslim country, especially since these laws contradict neither the constitution nor the civil law, nor expose Egypt to any danger.

We wish to know what efforts the Council has made with the Ministry to defend these sacred principles, and what response it has received. Was it met with acceptance or rejection?

If the answer is acceptance, then why has this Muslim girl not yet been returned to her family? And if the answer is rejection, then why has the Council not openly declared its inability to defend Islam and absolved itself publicly of a burden it cannot fulfill?

The matter is far too serious for it to be answered merely with speeches and prolonged silence. Muslims have the right to know how sincere the Ministry truly is in defending Islam, and how sincere the Council of Senior Scholars truly is in fulfilling the mission it has assumed.

It is said that negotiations are taking place between the Ministry and the High Commissioner's office concerning legislation to regulate missionary activity and missionaries themselves. We asked the Ministry to clarify the matter, but it ignored our request entirely.

We therefore wish to know: is the fate of this captive Muslim girl to remain suspended until such legislation is issued? And might that legislation itself contain provisions that deliver her permanently into the hands of missionaries? Or will her case be settled beforehand in accordance with God, the law, and the constitution?

This question awaits a clear and immediate answer from the Council of Senior Scholars, from its executive committee, and above all from the Grand Sheikh of Al■Azhar and the Grand Mufti of Egypt.

For much has been said on this matter, and silence has lasted too long. The public has the right to know whether the issue of missionary activity and missionaries is being treated seriously or merely as a matter of empty performance.

There are two paths before us. One is clear and straight: openly striving to enforce the laws of Islam or openly admitting inability to do so.

The other is crooked and winding: delay, evasion, silence, endless speech, and little action.

And it is obvious that we fervently hope—and sincerely wish—that our Ministry and our religious scholars will choose the straight path, for we hold both our Ministry and our sheikhs in too high esteem to imagine them willingly descending into such crooked and twisted ways.