

Cruelty

A cruelty that God loves from no one and approves for no one: the cruelty that descends upon peaceful and innocent people who have committed neither sin nor wrongdoing, placing between them and a contented life a thick impenetrable veil, severing the ties between them and hope itself.

A cruelty that God loves from no one and approves for no one: the cruelty a human being inflicts upon quiet and secure households, where women and children live beside the young and the old, until calm turns suddenly into agitation, reassurance into terrifying anxiety, and the smiles of children and youth into grief, silence, and despair that awaken anguish in the hearts of compassionate people.

Fathers and mothers become stricken with sorrow and fear. The sunrise brings anxiety to them, and nightfall brings distress. Their livelihood has been diminished or cut off entirely. They no longer know how to feed hungry mouths, clothe bodies unaccustomed to cold, heat, or rags, educate sons and daughters who cannot remain without learning, or preserve the social standing to which people cling more fiercely than to almost any other aspect of life.

Yes, a cruelty that God loves from no one and approves for no one: the cruelty that strikes teachers and students alike, suddenly cutting them off from the means of study, casting professors into immeasurable sorrow and students into endless confusion and grief.

A cruelty that God loves from no one and approves for no one: the cruelty inflicted upon innocent people who endure all this and more, though they had expected justice to touch them gently and increase the blessings already granted to them by God, enabling them to return to their families joyful and content, carrying news that would bring delight and happiness.

They had hoped to return the next day to their students renewed in energy, strengthened in purpose, and newly capable of research, teaching, and intellectual effort. Instead they were overtaken by this harsh and merciless fate.

Yes, an abominable cruelty that God loves from no one and approves for no one: the cruelty our friend al-Zankaluni reminds us of—and one we have never forgotten and never shall forget until God removes its evil, lifts its burden, and erases its bitter ■■■■.

A group of Egyptians, many of them past seventy years of age or approaching it, had devoted

themselves faithfully and sincerely to their work, serving both themselves and society with honesty and dedication. Suddenly, without warning or expectation, disaster descended upon them. Their connection to work was severed, just as their connection to hope and livelihood was severed.

They returned to their families unable to think or even speak. Their faces alone revealed the sorrow, despair, anguish, and terror within them—expressions of grief so deep that words themselves cannot adequately describe them.

And those who unleashed these calamities upon them were Egyptians like themselves: men who would themselves dread losing their work, their hope, and their livelihood; men who pray morning and evening that such misfortune may never strike them or force them to return to their own families with darkness spread before their eyes and despair covering their faces.

A group of religious scholars had devoted their lives to studying religion and teaching it. The circumstances of Egyptian life—and especially Azhar life—had given them no profession except this one. They gave themselves to it sincerely, trusted in it, and accepted their modest portion from it.

Then suddenly they were driven away from it, cast aside into the streets where they could find neither work nor direction. And those who inflicted this injustice upon them were themselves fellow scholars of religion who pray after every prayer that God may preserve the blessings they themselves enjoy and maintain the security of the lives they continue to lead—lives that were suddenly stripped away from these unfortunate scholars.

Our friend al■Zankaluni reminds us of all this in words that no sincere Egyptian can read without heartbreak and grief. No honest man among the religious scholars who participated in this tragedy can read them without remorse filling his soul and pain melting his heart.

He would wish that what had happened had never occurred. He would wish that time itself might return so that he could repair with his own hands the harm he caused. He would wish to spend the rest of his life sorrowful, repentant before God, repeating the prayer once uttered by al■Jahhaf ibn Hakim al■Sulami as he circled the Kaaba: “O God, forgive me—though I scarcely believe You will.”

Al■Jahhaf had widowed women and orphaned children. It is true that these men did not literally widow women or orphan children, but they made women live as though widowed and children as though orphaned, forcing them into narrow and miserable lives without deserving such suffering in the least.

The men who once sustained these households were suddenly cast from competence into helplessness, from comfort into deprivation.

This is the terrible cruelty our friend al-Zankaluni reminds us of—a cruelty we must neither forget nor ignore. Its horror is deepened by the fact that it continues still. No one has tried seriously to remove it. Those who caused it show neither remorse nor visible pain nor any effort to repair the wrong they committed.

The victims remain exactly as their harsh superiors intended them to remain when they were cast into unemployment and deprivation: unable to find work, unable even to secure the means to endure this suffering, though we know of no crime that made them deserving of such punishment.

What truly pains Egyptians is that some of us can be so cruel toward others at a time when everything in this dark age calls instead for compassion and gentleness among people.

And what pains Muslims especially is that men of religion can be cruel toward one another while religion itself commands them to counsel one another toward goodness and patience, to cooperate in righteousness and mercy rather than in sin and hostility.

What pains humanity itself is that one person can inflict such suffering upon another, while religion, custom, and morality alike all command justice, forbid oppression, call for mercy, and insist that love and kindness remain the foundation of human relations.

Yes, what truly pains the soul and destroys faith in human justice is that such a tragedy should occur in a country whose religion is Islam, whose constitution guarantees justice and fairness, and whose laws regulate punishment for wrongdoing and reward for virtue—yet this evil remains unlifted and these unfortunate victims continue suffering without knowing for what cause they were sacrificed.

Yet these people endured what was imposed upon them with dignity and patience, and in that dignity and patience they possess their noblest consolation for all the sorrow and suffering they endure.

If there are any people truly deserving of pity and compassion, they are those who had the power to prevent this injustice before it occurred yet failed to prevent it, and who still possess the power to

remove it afterward yet refuse to do so.

Those men are the ones for whom the victims themselves ought perhaps to pray for forgiveness. And God alone can aid each person against every hardship, grant justice between people, reward the patient and struggling with the best reward, and hasten for Egypt the day when Egyptians no longer wrong Egyptians and when men of religion no longer show cruelty toward one another.