

False allegations that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was hostile to non-Muslims, against their freedom to criticise Islam, and encouraged Muslim extremism

Ludicrous article by Pakistani-origin academic

Response by Dr Zahid Aziz

An article was published earlier this year on the anti-Islamic website known as Jihad Watch, putting forward the entirely false allegations that I have summed up in the above headings. The writer is an academic of Pakistani origin in Canada, Dr Afzal Upal, who is described as “a cognitive scientist of religion with expertise in Islamic movements, countering violent extremism”. According to the Wikipedia page entitled [Afzal Upal](#), he was educated in Rabwah in the school and college of the Qadiani Jama’at, and in 1995 “he became the founding president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Students' Association” at a university in Canada. In view of his article, in which the present-day Qadiani Jama’at as well as Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad come in for criticism, it can only be presumed that he left the Qadiani Jama’at at some point. Here is the link to his article as published on the Jihad Watch website:

www.jihadwatch.org/2015/02/why-moderate-muslims-balk-at-je-suis-charlie

He begins by informing us that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at (i.e., the Qadiani Jama’at), while it is considered to be an example of moderate Islam, in contrast with present-day Muslim extremism, has called for the banning of the ridicule against religious figures in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons controversy and appealed to people to boycott this magazine. He then tries to analyse: “why haven’t we been able to convince moderate Muslims such as Ahmadis to stand with us in the battle for the freedom of expression?” This he traces to the teachings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, to which analysis the rest of his article is devoted.

In this response we are not concerned with the statements and stand-point of the Qadiani Jama’at as quoted by Upal, but with his grossly distorted presentation of the mission of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. His statements about the work and approach of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, while dressed up in academic language and the terminology of sociology, are not only misleading but simply baseless and untrue.

Causes of Muslim downfall

Afzal Upal's very first statement about the mission of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad betrays a lack of understanding:

“Ahmad argued that while the West had material wealth and individual freedoms, Muslims had spiritual wealth and strong family ties.” (underlining ours)

The point we have underlined, i.e., individual freedoms being a bad thing as against strong family ties being a good thing, is not mentioned anywhere by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement as related to his mission. In fact, as he was founding a new movement, a movement based on establishing new religious ties, individual freedoms work *in his favour* by allowing individuals to join his movement while existing strong family ties are more likely to hinder people from joining it!

Afzal Upal continues to display his misunderstanding by then saying:

“Ahmad argued that adopting inferior non-Muslim values was what caused the downfall of Muslims in the first place. The only way for Muslims to restore the lost glory of the past was to double down on their points of distinctive strength, namely, their religiosity and family values.”

This is a complete distortion. The downfall, he said, was caused by Muslims ceasing to care at all about their religion, whose teachings were under heavy attack from outside, and being concerned only about their narrow material welfare. As he wrote in a poem:

“All this disgrace Muslims suffered, because their energy failed to equal their feeling for their religion. ... Every moment they spend in concern about this despicable material world, and spend their wealth on their women and sons.”
(Poem at close of *Fath-i Islam; Ruhani Khaza'in*, v. 3, p. 46)

Far from asking Muslims to “double down” on “their religiosity”, he told them again and again that it was their concept of religiosity which was wrong. He wrote that their observance of religion was merely a performance of lifeless rituals, on which they laid great emphasis, but it did not create moral virtues within them. In fact, one key argument in his claim to be the like of the Messiah was that Muslims of his time had developed the same evil traits as those which Jesus found prevailing among the Israelites, primarily that they laid excessive stress on the ritual forms of the religion while utterly ignoring the spirit, purpose and meaning. He wrote:

“The times in which we live is an age in which worship of outward forms, remoteness from the real essence and spirit, lack of honesty and integrity, abandonment of truth and moral purity, and predominance of greed, meanness and materialism, have become as widely rampant as these were among the Jews at the time of the appearance of Jesus. ... Most of our *Ulama* are no less than the legalists and Pharisees of those times. ... They perform lengthy prayers, but in their hearts there exists no love or reverence for the real One Who is to be worshipped. From the pulpits they preach very heart-moving sermons, but their inner practices are quite different. ... So God the Most High sent for them out of His perfect power a teacher of faith who is the like of the Messiah.” (*Fath-i Islam; Ruhani Khaza'in*, v. 3, p. 8–10)

“...the moral condition of the Jews had deteriorated completely — they had strayed very far from real piety, virtue, mutual sympathy, unity and true godliness, their knowledge and thought was confined merely to formalism and letter-worship, and in their worldly position they had become weak and humiliated ... Precisely this is the condition of the Muslim people at this time, and events before our eyes are plainly testifying that in reality this people and its divines are following in the footsteps of the Jews of the time of Jesus. And they resemble the Jews of that time not only in having lost virtue, piety, spirituality and the ability to see the truth, but worldly misfortune is also with them, as was the case then.” (*Shahadat-ul-Quran; RK*, v. 6, p. 356–357).

Writing upon writing of Hazrat Mirza, his speech upon speech, shows the complete falsity of Afzal Upal’s description that his message to Muslims was “to double down on their points of distinctive strength, namely, their religiosity and family values”.

Teachings on Jihad

Continuing with the gross distortions which saturate his article, Upal writes:

“Agreeing with most of his contemporary Indian Muslims leaders, he said that Jihad of the sword against the British was not a viable option because its necessary preconditions were not present at the moment. Far from asking Muslims to give up Jihad and live in harmony with other religions, Ahmad called on his fellow group members to fiercely engage in an offensive Jihad through their pens and their tongues to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Unlike Sir Syed who argued that it was uncivilized to violently attack people simply because they are of a difference of faith, Ahmad argued that in the current

conditions, a Jihad of the pen is the most effective way to rid the world of false faiths.”

The words I have underlined contain absolutely false allegations by Upal. He seems to be unaware that there were three separate aspects of the matter as regards Jihad. One was the common Muslim belief that Jihad consists of overcoming non-Muslims by force, killing them or coercing them to accept Islam. This was rejected and denounced by Hazrat Mirza sahib as being completely in violation of Islamic teachings, and never conducted by the Prophet Muhammad, or to be conducted by the coming Mahdi. The second aspect was the Jihad of war which took place during the Holy Prophet’s time. Such a Jihad of force and fighting was allowed to Muslims in self-defence after they had suffered brutal persecution from their enemies which they tolerated for years. It was this Jihad of war whose preconditions, as stipulated by Islam, did not exist under British rule in India. The third aspect of Jihad was that it is a spiritual struggle for self-purification, and a struggle to convey the message of Islam by word and pen, and this form of Jihad is a permanent teaching of Islam to be followed in all conditions. Hence Hazrat Mirza sahib urged Muslims towards this Jihad.

Moreover, as we show later on under the heading ‘Relations with other religions’, while he was conducting a jihad by the pen against other faiths for certain reasons, he also stressed that Muslims must live in harmony with followers of other faiths. Jihad by the pen does **not** preclude living in harmony with people of other faiths.

Regarding Jihad, Hazrat Mirza sahib declared:

“Look, I have come to you with a commandment, and that is: now *jihad* with sword is abolished but the *jihad* of cleansing your soul continues. This is not from me; rather it is the Will of God. Ponder over that hadith of the Sahih Bukhari where it is written about the Promised Messiah that when he comes, he will terminate religious wars. Therefore, I command those who are included in my army to retreat from such thoughts, cleanse their hearts, promote feelings of human mercy in themselves and become supporters of the compassionate. Spread peace on earth for this will propagate their religion and wonder not how it shall come to pass.” (*The British Government and Jihad; Ruhani Khaza’in*, v. 17, p. 15)

“Remember, the doctrine of *jihad*, as understood by the present day Muslim scholars, who are called Muslim priests, and the form in which they state this doctrine to common people, is absolutely incorrect. Its result is nothing except

that they, through their passionate sermons, turn the men of brutish qualities into venomous beasts dispossessed of all pious virtues of humanity. Thus, so it happens. I know for certain that the sin for all the brutalities and unjust bloodshed that results at the hands of these ignorant conceited persons, who are quite unaware of why and for what reason, in its early period, the necessity for war arose for Islam, rests on the shoulders of these Muslim priests who secretly keep teaching such doctrines, which lead to such sorrowful bloodshed.” (*Ibid.*; v. 17, p. 7)

“First, those Muslim priests part of whose belief is that the murder of a person belonging to another religion and especially Christianity is the source of great heavenly reward and it entitles them to receive those magnificent blessings of Paradise that are not attainable through prayers, *Hajj*, *Zakat* or any other virtuous deed. I know it full well that these Muslim priests privately keep delivering such sermons to the masses. Hearing these day and night, a great impact is made on the hearts and minds of such people between whom and the animals there is hardly any difference. They become wild and not a speck of mercy is left in them. They shed blood so mercilessly that one trembles.” (*Ibid.*; v. 17, p. 19–20)

Plainly, openly, unequivocally, unambiguously and indisputably, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has declared it as uncivilized and inhuman to attack people violently because they are of a different faith. What else does he mean when he calls the perpetrators of such bloodshed as “brutish”, “venomous beasts dispossessed of all pious virtues of humanity”, “hardly different from animals”? Thus Upal is absolutely wrong in saying that “unlike Sir Syed”, Hazrat Mirza sahib did not condemn such killings on grounds of humanity. Besides the above extracts, Hazrat Mirza sahib also wrote:

“This callousness and immorality make many a Muslim appear little different from beasts of the jungle. A Jain or a Buddhist is afraid of and avoids killing even a mosquito or a flea, but, alas! there are many among us Muslims who, while they commit murder unjustly and kill an innocent man, are not afraid of the powerful God, who has declared human life higher than that of all the animals. ... As no sermons are delivered in our country to stop such evils — and if there is any such preaching it is done hypocritically — the common people accept such malicious ideas. Accordingly, taking pity upon my own people, I have compiled several books in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, in which I have stated that the popular notions, prevalent among Muslims, of Jihad, of the

expectation of a blood-thirsty Imam (Mahdi), and of entertaining hatred for non-Muslims, are all errors inculcated by short-sighted Ulama..." (*Jesus in India; RK*, v. 15, p. 3–4)

Afzal Upal's comment, quoted above, that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad held that "Jihad of the sword against the British was not a viable option because its necessary preconditions were not present at the moment" again conveys a distorted impression. It portrays him as an opportunist who said to Muslims: Jihad by force is not a viable, i.e. practical, option at the moment but when it becomes viable then just claim that the preconditions for it are met and start fighting! However, he clearly explained:

"...the Muslim rulers have lost their country due to their own extravagance and indulgence in unworthy luxuries. They had no competence left to run the country, so God handed it to the British who, having taken it over, did not do any injustice: they did not stop anyone from the performance of prayer or fasting, nor prevent anyone from going to the pilgrimage in Makkah; rather, they established public peace and liberty. As they were benefactors, how could God the Merciful order the raising of the word against them? Does He only have the physical sword for the propagation of the faith, and not the spiritual sword? Moreover, at this time faith cannot rely upon the sword. The British have not converted anyone to their religion by means of the sword, in which case the sword would have been the reply; instead, people have been destroyed by means of modern philosophy and science, and the doubts raised (against Islam) by Christian preachers. The response to this should be to prove the truth of Islam, not to use the sword against people. Hence it is that God Almighty, in accordance with the condition of the Muslims, sent for them a reformer like Jesus, without sword or spear, and He gave this reformer only heavenly weapons with which to defeat falsehood." (*Shahadat-ul-Quran; Ruhani Khaza'in*, v. 6, p. 374–375)

This is a perfectly reasoned argument, and not the work of an opportunist.

Relations with other religions

Afzal Upal continues to show his utter lack of correct knowledge and history by writing:

"Ahmad's message was warmly received by many Indian Muslims and funds poured into Qadian to publish anti-Hindu and anti-Christian literature and distribute it in India as well as the West."

He has managed to work several distortions into just a short sentence. In fact, Hazrat Mirza sahib faced severe opposition from Muslims generally, and a few were those who made tremendous sacrifices to support his cause. But the whole reason for publishing this “anti-Hindu and anti-Christian literature” is concealed by Afzal Upal. Islam and its Holy Prophet were being subjected to the most vile attacks by Christian clerics and Arya Samaj leaders in their speeches and books which they were circulating among Muslims. Hazrat Mirza sahib wrote in reply to them. This history is indicated in some of the tributes paid to him by leading Muslims when he died:

“The incomparable books which he wrote in refutation of the Arya Samaj and Christian creeds, and the shattering replies he gave to the opponents of Islam, we have not seen any rational refutation of these except that the Aryas have been hurling abuse at the Founder and the teachings of Islam in an uncouth manner, without being able to give a sensible reply.” (Mirza Hairat of Delhi)

“As Mirza sahib, with his forceful speeches and magnificent writings, shattered the foul criticism of the opponents of Islam, silencing them forever and proving that truth is after all the truth, and as he left no stone unturned in the service of Islam by championing its cause to the full, justice requires that one should condole the sudden and untimely death of such a resolute defender of Islam, helper of the Muslims, and an eminent and irreplaceable scholar.” (Newspaper *Sadiq-ul-Akhbar*)

“The literature produced by Mirza sahib in his confrontation with the Christians and the Aryas has received the seal of general approval, and for this distinction he needs no introduction. We have to acknowledge the value and greatness of this literature from the bottom of our hearts, now that it has done its work. This is because that time cannot be forgotten nor effaced from the mind when Islam was besieged by attacks on all sides, and the Muslims... were lying flat sobbing in the aftermath of their shortcomings, doing nothing for Islam or not being able to do anything for it. ... Then began that counter-attack from the side of the Muslims in which Mirza sahib had a part.” (Newspaper *Wakeel* of Amritsar)

Afzal Upal’s allegation that Hazrat Mirza sahib did nothing but express antipathy towards other religions is disproved by many events, one of which we mention here. In 1896 a Hindu, Swami Shogun Chandar, along with other intellectuals of Lahore, proposed the holding of a multi-faith conference in which each participant would

speak only about the virtues of his own religion, without attacking other religions. He went to Qadian personally to request Hazrat Mirza sahib to participate. As we read in his biography:

“He (Hazrat Mirza sahib) therefore lent the conference his full support, and assured Shogun Chandar of his wholehearted cooperation. In fact, Hazrat Mirza had the first set of flyers announcing the conference printed in Qadian for Shogun Chandar. In this announcement, *Swami* Shogun Chandar called upon the Muslims, Christians, Arya Hindus and followers of all other religions to send their leading religious scholars to present papers in the conference. Hazrat Mirza also agreed to write an article for the conference. In addition, he appointed one of his disciples to help *Swami* Shogun Chandar with organizational matters.” (*The Great Reformer*, v. 1, p. 577)

Why would a Hindu approach Mirza Ghulam Ahmad if he was the notorious author who was writing venomously against other religions? Why would Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, if he was the kind of man portrayed by Upal, so fully support this conference as related in this extract? And the paper Hazrat Mirza sahib wrote for this conference became later one of his most famous books *The Teachings of Islam*.

We may also mention here that in May 1900 Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad put forward a proposal to his community of followers which included the construction of a room in Qadian for the following purpose:

“This room should accommodate at least one hundred people and be used for religious speeches. I intend that once or twice a year there should be a religious conference in Qadian, at which representatives of Muslims, Hindus, Arya Samaj, Christians, and Sikhs should speak on the merits of their own religions. However, the condition would be that no participant should attack another religion, but he may say whatever he wishes about his own religion, and in support of it, with politeness.” (*Majmu‘a Ishtiharat*, v. 3, p. 296–297)

It is clear from these references that he wanted Muslims to live in harmony with followers of different faiths, and Upal’s allegation (“Far from asking Muslims to give up Jihad and live in harmony with other religions...”) is entirely misconceived.

Death of Jesus

According to Afzal Upal’s imaginary history, Hazrat Mirza sahib:

“revived the idea of Jesus’s natural death originally advocated by Sir Syed. Unlike Sir Syed, who made rationality and God following his own laws of nature as a lynch-pin of his argument, Ahmad argued that Jesus’s death was needed to revive Islam. ... Unlike Sir Syed, who made Western notion of rationality as the reason for the change, Ahmad argued that Jesus had to die to restore Islam’s superiority over Christianity.”

Upal is unable to distinguish between cause and effect. The need to revive Islam or to establish its superiority over Christianity is *not the cause, not the reason*, for believing in Jesus’ death. It is the *effect and result*. The cause or reason for believing in his death, as forcefully argued by Hazrat Mirza sahib in great detail, is that it is clearly and categorically proved from the Quran. Upal presents it as a strategy only, stating nowhere how Hazrat Mirza sahib proved the death of Jesus.

At one point, where Upal writes that “Sir Syed argued that” Jesus had died, he has made these words into a hyperlink as a reference. Interestingly, this link is to chapter 6 in the Lahore Ahmadiyya publication *The Death of Jesus*, written by Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad and translated into English by myself (Zahid Aziz)! That link is: www.muslim.org/islam/deathj-6.htm. Apparently, it did not occur to Upal that if we had copied this belief from Sir Syed, we would not be publicizing in our literature prominently that he held this belief! Nor did Upal glance at the top of this webpage where he would have seen the list of chapters, beginning “1. Quran | 2. Hadith”, a reading of which would show that the Quran is the first and primary source, followed and supported by Hadith, for Hazrat Mirza sahib’s belief in the death of Jesus.

If Hazrat Mirza sahib proposed it merely as a stratagem and a ploy that Muslims should alter their belief and come to believe that Jesus is dead, how was it that he invited leading Muslim *Ulama* to debate with him **from the Quran and Hadith** the issue whether Jesus was alive or had died? In one such instance he wrote:

“The third condition for the debate is that the topic must be whether Jesus is dead or alive, and no person should go outside the Holy Quran and Hadith. Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim must be given precedence over all other books of Hadith, and Sahih Bukhari be given precedence over Sahih Muslim ... I promise that if it is proved by these means that Jesus is alive I will relinquish my *ilham* [i.e., revelation that Jesus has died] because I know that no *ilham* can be correct which is against the Quran. There is no need to debate separately my claim to be Promised Messiah. I declare on oath that if I am proved to be

wrong in a debate on the death of Jesus I will abandon my claim and care not for all the signs which support my claim because there is no greater argument than the Holy Quran.” (Announcement in Delhi, 2 October 1891; *Majmu‘a Ishtiharat*, v. 1, p. 235–236)

He is prepared to discontinue his entire mission if it can be proved on the basis of the Quran that Jesus is alive and not dead!

The worst distortion — allegation of advocacy of blasphemy law

Perhaps what is the worst part of his article in terms of misrepresentation and distortion, Afzal Upal leaves to the last:

“To demonstrate his credibility to those Muslims who doubted his intentions, Ahmad had to emphasize his love for Muhammad and the strength of his belief in Muhammad’s superiority over all other prophets. Part of this strategy implied that when Muslims perceived a slight against the Holy Prophet by non-Muslims, Ahmad and his successors had to take the lead in expressing their disgust.... Thus on 22 September 1895, Ahmad published a circular demanding that the government amend Indian Penal Code 298 to make blasphemy against any religious founder a punishable offense.”

It is true that the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement had the deepest love for the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, it is utterly baseless falsehood that he called for “blasphemy” to be made a punishable offence. We note in passing that, while making this fake argument, Upal obviously faced the problem that he could not afford to accept that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s love for the Holy Prophet was true and genuine, as this admission would be offensive to the anti-Ahmadiyya Muslims. So he presents that love as being a mere show to gain credibility and a strategy. His attack on Hazrat Mirza sahib’s sincerity is clear proof that his article is not an objective, academic analysis based on cognitive science and sociology, the field of his expertise, but false propaganda against Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad based on his own prejudices. His article has the same academic value as, for example, researches by white supremacist scientists to prove, pseudo-scientifically, that black people have inferior intelligence.

The facts regarding this circular are that Section 298 of the Indian Penal Code already long existed, and it provided that if anyone does an act “with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person” he shall be punished with imprisonment or a fine. Scurrilous literature against Islam and the Holy Prophet Muhammad abounded on a vast scale in India and was distributed to Muslims.

Muslims, including Hazrat Mirza sahib, were handicapped in replying to such literature, especially that produced by Christians, since, as he writes in the same circular, “every Muslim loves Israelite prophets as much as the opponents love them” and could not attack their prophets in return.

Therefore Hazrat Mirza sahib suggested how to distinguish between genuine religious criticism and words written “with the *deliberate intention* of wounding”. His proposal was that two conditions must be observed by anyone who criticises someone else’s religion: (1) No objection should be raised against another religion if the same objection applies also to the books and founders of the critic’s own religion, and (2) No objection should be raised against a religion which is not based on books which are recognised by that religious community as its authoritative books and a list of which has been published by that community with the declaration that these are its recognised books.

If either of these conditions is violated, that would prove “deliberate intention of wounding”. It can easily be seen that someone violating the first condition is a hypocrite and someone violating the second condition is indulging in misrepresentation. Perhaps Afzal Upal sees nothing wrong with criticism based on hypocrisy and wilful misrepresentation. Adhering to these two conditions still leaves a vast field open for criticising Islam and even for what is called “blasphemy”.

In a later petition in 1897, addressed to the government, he has given details of the manner in which Christian and Arya Samaj propagandists were hurling abuse at the Prophet of Islam:

“At this time in British India there are many Christian clergymen whose constant occupation is merely to abuse our Prophet, ... Now I give a detailed list of books in which Christian clergymen, and similarly under their influence the Aryas among the Hindus, have heaped the worst abuses on our Holy Prophet and the religion of Islam and its honoured personalities”. (*Kitab-ul-Bariyya; Ruhani Khaza’in*, v. 13, p. 120, 122)

After quoting the abuses, with references to book, author and page, he writes:

“These are the abusive words and insulting and derogatory statements that the Christian clergymen and the Aryas have used in their books concerning our leader and master, the chief of Messengers and the Last of the Prophets, on whom be peace and the blessings of Allah. Most of these books have been

printed and published several times in the Punjab as well as throughout India, and are always given to the students of Christian mission schools for study, and are read out in streets and market-places. Christian women appointed for preaching carry them into the homes of Muslims.” (*Ibid.*, p. 152)

And this was not mere criticism of a religion:

“... what constitutes abuse and severity is to refer to the sacred founder of a religion extremely disrespectfully and to make false accusations against him of depraved actions and low morals. This is the path adopted by the Christian clergymen and the Aryas. They attribute to our Holy Prophet, entirely by way of fabrication, groundless accusations not supported by any standard, authentic Islamic book.” (*Ibid.*, p. 153)

In another notification of 1897, addressed to the government, which is also included in the above book *Kitab-ul-Bariyya*, he explains that in response to such abusive literature he too had to use harsh words but “whatever was written in harsh language was a reply to vituperative words, but far milder than the language of the opponents”. He explains why he had to reply in that manner:

“Firstly, so that the opponents, finding their strong language replied to in harsh terms, change their attitude and speak with civility in the future. Secondly, so that the Muslim masses do not become incensed at the extremely insulting and provocative writings of the opponents, and finding the reply to the harsh words also to be somewhat strong they might console their excited minds with the feeling that if strong words were used by the other side, they have also received a reply with some severity. This way they will abstain from violent retaliation.” (*Ruhani Khaza'in*, v. 13, p. 11)

But he says he realizes that giving such strongly-worded replies to abuse is “not very commendable; rather, it devalues the spiritual effect of the writings, and at the least the harm it does is to cause bad behaviour to spread in the country.” He adds:

“A better method for participants in debate would be that they should not raise baseless objections against a religion; rather, they should present their doubts based on its standard and reliable books in a civil manner. They should spare themselves the use of mockery, ridicule and insult, and adopt a scholarly attitude in discussions. Nor should they raise objections which are applicable to their own books.” (*Ibid.*, p. 15–16)

As long as deliberately vituperative literature continued to be published against Islam, Hazrat Mirza sahib would reply to it, using mildly harsh language. (Perhaps Afzal Upal's concept of freedom of expression is that Islam and its Prophet can be abused but Muslims should have no right of reply to it in words.) But all the consequent unpleasantness and communal disharmony could be avoided if writers agreed to, or had to by law, abide by the reasonable standards proposed by Hazrat Mirza sahib.

Hazrat Mirza sahib opposes banning of anti-Islamic book

In this connection an incident occurred only three years later in 1898, which has escaped Upal's notice. A Christian author wrote a highly scurrilous book against the Holy Prophet, entitled *Ummahat-ul-Mu'minin*, or 'Mothers of the Believers', and it was sent unsolicited and free of cost to many Muslims. A Muslim association, the Anjuman Himayat-i Islam of Lahore, appealed to the state government of the Punjab for this book to be banned. Hazrat Mirza sahib wrote a memorial, addressed to the Governor of the Punjab, in which he opposed the standpoint of this association for the banning of this book. I quote some extracts from it below:

"It is true that the author of *Ummahāt-ul-Mu'minīn* has used deeply offensive language, and it is to be regretted even more that despite these strong and foul words he could not substantiate his allegations by referring to any reliable sources of Islam. Nonetheless, we must not, instead of explaining to this mistaken person in a polite and calm way and replying to this book in a rational way, adopt the method of persuading the government to stop its publication, and believe that this would give us victory. This would not be a real victory. In fact, to run after such ways and means would be an indication of our defeat and helplessness, and we would be guilty in a sense of using force to suppress someone's voice.

Even if the government had this book burnt or destroyed, or took similar action, we would forever be liable to the charge that, being unable to reply to it, we asked the government to intervene, and we behaved like those who are overcome with anger and are incapable of replying. Of course, after replying to the book we can respectfully appeal to the government that all religious parties should be required to give up the inflammatory technique employed these days and not to depart from civility, good manners and politeness.

It is essential to keep open the door of freedom of religious criticism to some extent so that people may progress in knowledge and understanding ...

Everyone has the right to discuss any religion with sincere motives and thereby give himself and other people the benefit of finding out how to find salvation according to his thinking. ...

We most certainly do not wish that instead of us replying to this book the government should take the Christian writers to task on our behalf or destroy their books. On the contrary, after we have published a refutation of this book, couched in calm and measured terms, this book will lose all value and standing, and in this way it will perish by itself....

We assure the government that we hold fast to patience with a painful heart in the face of the abusive and harsh words used by the author of *Ummahat-ul-Mu'minin*. We certainly do not wish to subject the author and his associates to any legal penalty. Such a response is not worthy of those who claim to be well-wishers of humanity and to be zealous to bring about real reform.

It is also worthy of stating before the government that although my Movement has some differences of a secondary nature on certain matters with other Muslims, but on this issue no sensible Muslim disagrees with the point that we have not been taught to display rage and fury in support of our religion. On the contrary, the Quran instructs us: *Argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best* [29:46], and in another place: *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation* [16:125] ...

But to seek the help of the government or to show fury and rage ourselves is not by any means beneficial for our real purpose. These are ways of fighting worldly disputes, and true Muslims and followers of the Islamic path do not approve of them because these ways cannot produce results that are of benefit in guiding mankind." (*Majmu'a Ishtiharat*, v. 3, p. 41–43)

He further supports this from the Quran by quoting 3:186 and explaining:

"Its translation is that God will try you by sending tribulations in respect of your properties and lives, and you will hear from the People of the Book and the idolaters much hurtful talk. But if you are patient and guard yourself from taking unworthy action then God will regard you as a people of great resolve. ... This was undoubtedly a prophecy for the present age and has been fulfilled...

According to this prophecy of the Quran it had to happen that a time should come when a Holy Prophet, whose followers extend over a large part of the

world, should be verbally abused by Christians, who lay claim to being civilized, and he should be called by them by the worst possible epithets. ... Even a Christian, who is sensible, can realise ... what painful hurt this must cause to Muslims and how grieved they must feel...

Nonetheless, in the above verse we are emphatically told that upon hearing such foul words which hurt our feelings we must have recourse to patience. There is no doubt that approaching the authorities forthwith is a kind of impatience. ... God the Most High has also taught us in the Quran that there is no compulsion or coercion in religion, as He says: 'There is no compulsion in religion' [2:256] and 'will you compel people till they believe?' [10:99]. But such means [asking for the book to be banned] are included in the meaning of compulsion and coercion, which bring a sacred and rational religion like Islam into disrepute." (*Ibid.*, p. 44–45)

In the light of the above protestations by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, just read the concluding statement by Afzal Upal about him:

"His championing of Muhammad led him to make repeated calls for punishment of even the slightest perceived blasphemy against the prophet. Other Muslim leaders competing with him for adherents had to outdo him in their rhetoric against insulting the prophet."

It is perfectly clear that Afzal Upal's allegation against Hazrat Mirza sahib is entirely baseless, opposite to the real facts, and devoid of the least grain of truth. Also, Upal does not specify what punishment, he believes, Hazrat Mirza sahib called for. The words punishment for blasphemy would doubtless convey the impression of the death penalty, as that is what is understood by this punishment these days. This is a most despicable and under-handed way of planting false ideas in the readers' minds.