

**SOME SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE
MUSLIMS IN THE PHILIPPINES***

by

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As might be expected, Muslims all over the world, both individually and communally, would have common problems. These problems are oftentimes related to the Islamic way of life with all of its prescriptions, injunctions and expectations. At the same time, different Muslim communities expectedly have problems peculiar to themselves as a function of their geographical locations, their relations with their neighbors (both Muslims and non-Muslims), their historical development and other political and social forces within and without. Consequently, to understand the problems of the Filipino Muslims, it is necessary to assume certain facts: (1) that the Muslims in the Philippines are divided into at least twelve ethnolinguistic groups with some of them separated by different islands and most of them belonging to separate politically administrative units;¹ (2) that, although they form the second largest religious community in the country, they constitute a minority amidst a population that is overwhelmingly Christian, mainly Catholic;² (3) that they manifest some differences in their customary laws (*'adat*) as well as in their adherence to elements of Islamic personal or family law as exemplified in the *Shari'a*; (4) that their contacts with the other Muslims in Southeast Asia, have historically speaking, varied in intensity, with the Tausug and Samals, basically maritime peoples, relatively more exposed to outside influences than others. This reason, among others, partially explains why they have had "independent" historical experiences from each other. (5) that their economic bases show marked diversities, i.e. some are maritime peoples while

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others basically agricultural. Even among the rice producing ones, some practice wet-rice planting while others indulge in upland rice farming: (6) that for more than three hundred years of Spanish presence in the Philippine archipelago, the varied Muslim groups were never part of the Spanish colony called "Filipinas" and, therefore were subject to separate historical transformations from the other Christian groups with whom they are now co-citizens in a modern state; and (7) that the state to which the Muslims now belong is, from the constitutional point of view, a secular state where religious freedom and tolerance are ideally adhered to but where the religious motive still plays a large role in the life of many of the citizens.

It is nevertheless important to note, regardless of all the above, that the Muslims in the Philippines identify themselves as such. They all recognize each other as Muslims. Muslims, pray in each others' mosques, and affirm that they all belong to a wider religious community that transcends differences in *'adat*, language, race, region and nation. They are all acutely aware of their cultural differences from the Christians as well as other non-Muslim groups who live side by side with them. Historically, members of their ruling families have intermarried — mostly for purposes of political advantage or mutual economic benefits. All these, however, have not prevented them from fighting each other on account of dynastic rivalries or conflicts in the collection of tributes and other economic reasons.

The Advent of Islam

The arrival of Muslims in the Philippine South was a consequence of the international maritime trade which extended from North Africa to China and which gradually fell into Muslim hands around the eighth century. Although there was a decline in the Muslim trade with China near the end of the ninth century due to unstable political conditions in China, this trade started to pick up about a hundred years later. During this interim, Kalah in the Malay Peninsula became an essential entrepot of the Muslim merchants who were mainly Arabs and Persians, and who possibly included Indians. It is around this time that historians have noted the rapid rise of a local trade in Southeast Asia involving mainly the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian islands. As early as the 10th century, Borneo became known to Muslim traders. Their knowledge of Sulu and then Mindanao soon followed. Archeological findings demonstrate that there were already Muslim visitors in Sulu by the end of the thirteenth century and, if local traditions are to be relied on, visitors were already in Mindanao by the 14th and 15th centuries.

Obviously, the arrival of Muslim traders does not spell the arrival of Islam, much less its spread. A few Western Orientalists have offered various theories to explain the phenomena of Islam's expansion in Southeast Asia and, although caution must be exercised in accepting them, much can be learned from their

varied perspectives. For example, the view that the ruling families of not a few maritime principalities adopted Islam for political and economic reasons as well as to seek for a principle of legitimacy, with the subjects later on accepting the faith of their rulers, can explain some instances of conversion but does not serve as an explanation for the phenomenon in the whole of Southeast Asia. The other view that economic changes generated by the international maritime trade caused, in turn, an ideological vacuum that was readily filled up by Islam, is an attractive one but requires more evidence. Another idea that the arrival of Europeans with motives of conversion to Christianity stimulated Muslims to counteract and vigorously spread their Faith, while serving as an explanation for additional conversions to Islam in the sixteenth century, cannot, in any manner, explain the fact that Islam had already been established in some principalities in Sumatra and Sulu at least two hundred years earlier. One explanation, however, transcends all the above views.

One explanation, that transcends all the above views and appears to be the most solid and which has not yet been falsified is that Islam was introduced and spread by the teachings of Muslims who came from "above the winds". This is the explanation supported by most if not all local traditions in the region of the Malays from Sumatra to the Philippines. Whether these Muslims came with the original intention to teach or not is another matter; what the traditions emphasize is that they taught and preached. But when it is noticed that some of these traditions ingenuously reveal that these teachers were actually Sufis, then the intention to teach might have been there all the time. Admittedly, this is something that must be looked deeper into by Malaysian scholars. A Sulu tradition illustrates the advent of Islam as follows. According to legend, the first Muslim teacher in Sulu, called Makhdum Karim, besides having the power to talk by means of paper, also had the ability to walk on water. As is well known, Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani was supposed to have had this ability and he is the "patron saint" of sailors. Might not the tradition then actually say, in a folk manner, that the makhdum belonged to the Qadiriyyah *tariqat*? Is not this tradition complementary to those narrating the coming of different *auliya* to Indonesia and Borneo? Obviously, the teachings of these *auliya* would not have succeeded the way they did were it not for the fact that Islam satisfied deep aspirations and spiritual needs of not so much the upper classes of the island societies but of the masses as well. It is this spread of Islam among the common people that guaranteed its entrenchment.

The assertion that Islam was originally brought mainly by Arab teachers should not allow us, however, to disregard the fact that the natives themselves, once Islamized, played a great role in further spreading the Faith. It is enough to recall the role of the native courts in patronizing missionaries and the existence of pious and inspired converts to Islam who would like to share the message with others. All this mean that a time had come when the local Muslims had come to look up at Islam not as something foreign but as something that belonged to them as a cherished value. With the internalization of this value, it would not be long when influence of the *Shari'a* would gradually increase in the conduct of social relations. Furthermore, political institutions historically associated with older Islamic nations would also be adopted.

Hence, at the beginning of the 16th century, the world of the Malays in Southeast Asia could be viewed as a constellation of Muslim principalities, maintaining political and trade relations with each other as well as with older Islamic countries. The sudden appearance of Western imperialism and its attempts at Christianization fragmented this world into different spheres of Western influence; but not without having rendered Islam as an element of identity or force to resist the above intrusive element.

The Effects of Islamization

In varying degrees, among the different Muslim groups in the Philippines, it can be maintained that Islam brought the following effects or processes which are still existing. First of all, Islam introduced a new theological and ethical view of life and the universe. In proportion to the seriousness, dedication and the number of people adhering to it, Islam drove out the old gods, spirits and idols. A concept of revelation was introduced. Principles governing the relations between the creature and the Creator as well as those among individuals themselves and their families came to progressively fall within a totality in accordance with the belief in the Oneness of Allah. The compartmentalization of the diverse activities of man gradually diminished. Intentions and deeds came to be viewed as correlated in terms of Divine prescriptions and injunctions. Second, elements of the *'adat* diametrically opposed to the Qur'an began to weaken while other elements were allowed to exist. The progressive introduction of more *Shari'a* elements was effected by the development of a relatively sophisticated *'ulama*. Third, the Arabic script was introduced and the different languages of the different ethnic groups came to be enriched by Arabic terms, especially theological, moral, legal and technical ones. To be observed at this point is the gradual spread of Malay among the Muslims in the Philippines which also served as one of the agencies for the spread of such terms. Fourth, new art forms and novel literary devices (with corresponding terms) borrowed from older Islamic countries came to further enrich an indigenous art. Certain headgears and costumes associated with Islamic tradition were also adopted. Fifth, political institutions, not necessarily Islamic, but associated with some older Muslim countries, began to be implanted or grafted on older institutions. Sixth, the Muslims began to be gradually more aware that in spite of the facts of linguistic, racial and geographical differences, they formed part of a wider community — Muhammad's people. Seventh, the Muslims began to look at Islam as an instance of Allah's Mercy and that their community, as such, as well as their history, reflected a manifestation of Allah's workings in the created order.

It must not be imagined that all the above took place all at once and at one given place. The Muslim groups adopted Islam at separate times and manifested its institutions in different degrees. Indeed, even in a particular community, Islamic consciousness among individuals also varies in accordance with their intellectual capacities, their educational opportunities, their contacts with other Muslims, the quality of their teachers, the nature of their *'adat* and other multiple factors.

As mentioned earlier, some of the effects of Islam's coming represent a process which is still going on in the Philippines.

The gradual acceptance of Islam, presumably like all forms of acculturation process, brought about some tensions or at least some mechanisms of adaptation. Conflicts between some elements of the *'adat* and the *Shari'a* were bound to ensue with the traditional chiefs defending the former as against the sultans and the *'ulama* supporting the latter. Undoubtedly, the element of power was involved in all these conflicts since more Islamization could spell the centralization of the powers of the sultans at the expense of the powers and privileges of the traditional chiefs who claimed a power link with the pre-Islamic past. To be noted, too, is that Islamic institutions were often manipulated to strengthen the vested interests of certain groups. Depending on the level of ignorance of Islam, many non-Islamic practices and institutions began to be considered Islamic or at least were **sanctioned** by what was conceived to constitute Islam. Moreover, Muslim attitudes toward neighboring tribes that did not adopt Islam but remained loyal to the older religion began to change. What is meant in particular is that relations between them began to be viewed as falling under Islamic principles in a manner that the slavery of non-Muslims was rationalized as justified by Islam. Of greater consequence to the lives of the Muslims is that after the Spaniards came in the last half of the sixteenth century, most of the inhabitants of the islands in the North, namely, Luzon and the Visayas, became Christians. A result of this was that the natural tendency of Islam to spread upward in a northern direction was now blocked. More than this, the Christianized natives were utilized by the Spaniards to fight and conquer the Muslims in the South in behalf of religion as well as the extension of the material domains of the Spanish Monarch. It had been often said that if the Spaniards did not arrive at the time they did, Islam would have secured a better and more secure foothold in the other islands. In Manila, at least, there was already a principality ruled by Muslims with many of their followers evincing Islamic practices, at least in their rituals and dietary laws. In any case, when the Spaniards arrived, many of the Muslim groups in Mindanao were still in the process of becoming progressively more Islamized in different intensities. Islam was spreading slowly and, generally, in a peaceful manner. But history was to take an unexpected turn with the presence of the Christian West on Philippine shores.

The Spaniards vs. the Muslims

When the Spaniards came to the Philippines in 1565, they brought with them the dual aim of Christianizing the inhabitants while extending the imperial domains of the Spanish Monarch. By means of different techniques — force, persuasion, threats or gifts — they were able to accomplish these aims in Luzon, the Visayas and parts of Mindanao. But they met bitter resistance in the Western part of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago where at least three sultanates were already well established — those of Sulu, Maguindanao and Buayan. Whereas the other

inhabitants of the country were mainly at the *barangay* level, that is, living in independent settlements consisting of a dozen to a hundred families, the sultanates represented political entities consisting of dozens of settlements, some of these found in different islands. Thus the fall of one Muslim settlement to the Spaniards did not spell the destruction of a sultanate.

The long series of wars between the Spaniards and the Muslims, extending for a period of more than three hundred years, had been called the “Moro Wars” by historians. The effects of these wars had left deep scars on the Muslims up to the present and constitute part of their problems. A major effect of the wars was that the slow but progressive movement of Islam to the north of the Archipelago was definitely checked and thus Islam became confined to parts of the South. On the economic sphere, many Muslim islands were depopulated with scores of settlements totally destroyed as part of a deliberate Spanish policy. The time-honored commercial activities of the Muslims were disrupted with hundreds of their sea-crafts destroyed as part of the same policy. All these were to cause the economic backwardness of the Muslims *vis a vis* the other inhabitants of the islands who came to benefit from the introduction of Western techniques to better agriculture and increase production.

Adding to the economic problems of the Muslims was the fact that their trade with the Indonesian islands was later on restricted by the commercial policy of the Dutch. The imperialistic policies of the Spaniards, the Dutch and, later on, the British, helped bring about a gradual isolation of the Muslims. An ensuing provincialism started to creep in among them due to the weakening of contacts with other Muslim peoples — slightly moderated by the return of a few hadjis and occasional itinerant Muslim traders from the Asian mainland. Some pre-Islamic institutions begun to surface with additional force — principally the *datu* system. Under stress of continuous wars and large scale destruction, it was to be expected that artistic expression and other cultural activities would suffer some decline or remain at a stand still. The declared policy of the Spaniards to extirpate Islam, as well as the Muslim refusal to abandon their Islamic heritage and traditional values and customs, led to Islam becoming their mark of identity. So much so, that even some pre-Islamic values were defended on the principle of Islam. Many customs and institutions became identified with Islam, at least in the minds of many Muslims. The defense of the family and land as well as loyalty to the chiefs became part of their Islamic duties. As it were, Islam began to provide the elements of an elementary form of nationalism.

The Spaniards looked at their wars against the Muslims as an extension of their wars against the Moors. Significant was that they called the Moors and the Muslims in the Philippines “Moros”. They taught the Christian inhabitants to hate and fight the Muslims as enemies of their Faith. Year after year, they featured certain morality plays as part of the festivals in all the major towns where the Muslims were portrayed as ugly, vicious, treacherous, etc. (These plays were played in many town festivals even up to the eve of the Japanese Occupation in 1941

— more than four decades after the end of the Spanish regime in the Philippines). In return, the Muslims looked at their Christian neighbors as mere tools of foreigners to enslave them and as a people doomed to infidelity and perdition.

The effect of these plays which had, in effect, become to some extent a part of the folk lore of the Christian population cannot be overestimated. It had generated in the past a mentality that had even penetrated into the educational programs of the past administrations in the country while placing psychological obstacles on the recruitment of Muslims into political offices, the civil service and the armed forces.

The Moro Wars have left a terrible heritage of mistrust, suspicion and even fear between two religious communities otherwise related by racial and linguistic ties and a common cultural matrix that is pre-Islamic and pre-Christian. It is a heritage which for many years had served to obstruct the integration of the Muslims into a new body politic in spite of the fact that the principle of religious freedom had become part of the fundamental laws of the land. Fortunately, this heritage does not appear to be found anymore among the young. But it had already done a great harm.

To be observed is that the major sultanates were really never successfully incorporated into the Spanish colony in the Philippines that ended in 1898. Thus the Muslims had, for all practical purposes, independent historical experiences from others in the Archipelago. Contacts between them were mainly that of war or temporary truces. It is true that in the last quarter of Spanish rule in the Philippines, the policy toward converting the Muslims was abandoned. All that the Spanish government desired was to transform them into loyal subjects of the Spanish Crown. Yet, not a few Spanish priests argued that it would be easier for the Muslims to become a Spanish subject if he was first baptized a Catholic. Nevertheless, the newly declared Spanish policy of religious toleration, inspired by republican ideas then flourishing in Western Europe, induced some Muslim chiefs to accept Spanish sovereignty when resistance had appeared hopeless or suicidal. There is no doubt that the defense of Islam had provided a major reason for resistance to Spanish domination. But it cannot be denied, too, that the independence of the Muslims also signified the perpetuation of the powers and prerogatives of the traditional chiefs and their families whose preservation of Islam while appearing to them as having an intrinsic value also served as a guarantee for the preservation of their dynasties.

The Muslims During the American Occupation

The American occupation of Muslim lands which commenced at the turn of the century was met by a fierce resistance on the part of the Muslims who were led, in most cases, by traditional chiefs who were afraid that they would lose their former positions of power as well as their time-honored rights to collect tribute.

Undoubtedly, part of the resistance was caused by fear of the loss of independence and a traditional way of life greatly influenced by Islam on the part of other leaders and followers. American superior fire power and their guarantees that Islam was to be left untouched as well as a policy of attraction eventually enabled them to occupy all Muslim traditional lands – but not without a great loss of Muslim lives and properties. The American occupation did not do much to erase the old prejudices that the Christians had of the Muslims although it brought the benefits of better sanitation, more educational opportunities and job openings for Muslims in the constabulary and police force. Originally, American Indian fighters were actually sent to pacify the Muslims. In time, American attitudes changed when they came to see a people with a different culture, a more sophisticated political system and who had been influenced by one of the greatest cultures the world had ever produced. In any case, the Americans did not do much to dislodge the traditional leaders; neither was there an attempt to create another leadership based on a criteria.

Although the Americans generally followed their principle of religious freedom and toleration, they did not object to the coming of Christian missionaries to traditional Muslim areas while they made it hard for foreign Muslims, especially Arabs, to come and visit or live among the Muslims. The Americans, too, declared most of the Muslim ancestral lands as public land, since the Muslims did not have titles to their lands, and started to introduce Christian settlers from other provinces. A premise of the Americans was that with more Christian settlers among the Muslims, the latter would, in time, acquire some of the habits and attitudes toward government of the settlers, thereby facilitating the process of integration of the Muslims into the colonial body politic. They hoped, too, that the Muslims would eventually acquire some of the skills of the settlers, who, strictly speaking, were only slightly more advanced technologically than the Muslims.

The Muslims Under the Philippine Commonwealth

The Philippine Commonwealth, established in 1935, following the American colonial policy of bringing more settlers to traditional Muslim lands, completely showed a disregard of Muslim aspirations and expectations on the matter. It ignored the traditional leaders without making any effort to create a new leadership. It could not do otherwise since the political leaders of the Commonwealth themselves belonged to the traditional elite in the Christian areas. The Muslims, too, were confused on the issue of independence. Some of their leaders desired it while others preferred to remain under an American protectorate, a desire encouraged by some American military officers but vehemently objected to by Filipino national leaders. In any case, Muslim problems on the political, economic and cultural levels were left the way they were. The fact was that the fear of war with Japan, the agrarian problem in the central provinces which were quite close to the capital, the anticipation of independence and the jockeying for political positions on the part of the national leaders as well as their unawareness or misunderstanding of the problems of the Muslims, led the national leaders to disregard the Muslims. Thus, when

independence was declared in 1946, the Muslim people, with social institutions and a culture different from the majority of the Filipinos, found themselves bound with the latter in a new political entity with a direction which they had practically no hand in formulating.

The colonial heritage was too obvious. There was a general fear among Muslims about the loss of their traditional values and customs and they tended to look at the government as a mere successor of the colonial governments. Alongside the coming of additional settlers, there was an unevenness between the economic development of the Muslims as a whole and that of the Christians. Nevertheless, the traditional leaders utilized the democratic processes to have themselves elected in office. In this, they had to compete with non-Muslim candidates. Muslim leaders joined the different national parties and ended competing with one another in their own regions. This was a pure contest for political power although the candidates did not hesitate to use the issue of Islam to gain more votes. But the election of Muslim officials did not necessarily imply the enhancement of Islam or additional benefits to the bulk of the Muslim population. It only signified the further strengthening of the power, prestige and economic status of those Muslim officials and their families, especially if they were associated with the political party in power, as against those of their followers.

In the meantime, more opportunities for education, more communication and the opening of the professions to Muslims, however limited these might have been, gave rise to a group of young professionals who were generally coopted to the powers that be. Eventually there came about another emerging group of young Muslims who aspired to greater opportunities for education, more access to the professions and increased participation in political processes that signified some participation in decisions that would determine the destiny of the Muslims. They desired more involvement in the process of modernization, and in eliminating any obstacle that would prevent Islam from becoming more operative in their religious and social life.

The Muslims and Martial Law

The degeneration of the system of political parties, the abuses of politicians, widespread graft and corruption, the existence of private armies, student activism, ideological conflicts, threats of secession from the South, fear of subversion from other quarters and a slow but gradual breakdown in law and order coupled with the emergence of an atmosphere of general disregard for the duly constituted authority led the President of the Republic to declare Martial Law in September 1972. The government order for the disbandment of all private armies and the giving up of all arms by unauthorized citizens was bitterly resisted by those Muslims who had private armies as well as by those who did not want to give up their arms. In general, Muslims feared that if they were left unarmed, they might fall prey to non-Muslims who coveted their lands. Due to their historical experience, they feared

that the government might not do enough to protect them from their antagonists. This fear, added to past grievances, led to a coalition of Muslim forces to raise their arms against the new government.

In its aim to create a New Society, the government finally came to realize that it was time to study more deeply the problems of the Muslims and to muster whatever resources it had to allay Muslim fears as well as to give way to many of their social aspirations. The President refused to accept the principle that the Muslim problem could be solved only by force. He boldly and unequivocally admitted the errors of past administrations and revealed that the country had "never really bridged the cultural gap between the Filipinos and our Muslim brothers, and it is for us now really to bridge it . . ." On another occasion he emphasized that the nation could not be a strong one if one of its segments remained neglected and weak. What was needed was to strengthen all the segments to produce a cumulative result that would help and benefit the whole. As he put it:

We can begin to work our way toward this ideal national community only after we breach the barrier – a tragic legacy of our colonial period – that has tended to divide the Filipino nation between Christian and Muslim. In the revolutionary reconstructing of Filipino society that we are embarked on, we recognize the tremendous source of social energy that lies in the Muslim Filipino Community, which has by its courage and cohesiveness already made an invaluable contribution to our struggle for political independence.

The President then assured the people that the government was to serve the Muslims with the same vigor and zeal as other Filipinos while giving them all opportunities to serve the nation in a manner which would make "their cultural heritage and their religion, which is Islam, . . . forever be part of the Filipino contribution to world culture and civilization."

There is no doubt that for the first time in the history of the Filipino people, there is now a determined effort to rectify old ills while reconstructing Filipino society in such a manner that the Muslims will feel, and like to be, part of it. But this will involve a process that will take many years. Actually what is called the Muslim Problem depends on who defines the problem. And even from the point of view of Muslims, such a problem is not one but actually a conglomeration of various problems.

An Attempt to Define the Muslim Problem

In the last few years, much has been written on what these problems are, what the government expects of the Muslims and what the Muslims want for themselves. In the past, what the government defined as the problem did not necessarily coincide with what the Muslims considered the problems to be. Furthermore, even among the Muslims themselves, their definition of the problem or problems was often colored by their educational background, their social status, their profession,

their level of religiosity, their immediate needs, their Islamic sophistication, etc. A real problem is that there is no single person or institution among them all that can truly claim to speak authoritatively for them all. As is well known, the Muslims do not have a hierarchy or a monolithic institution that can speak for all of them. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover the varied aspirations of Muslims and recognize certain common factors among them.

Articulate Muslims have pointed out that a main problem of Muslims in the Philippines is how to preserve Islam in a country where they are a minority but where, nevertheless, the fundamental law of the land provides for a secular form of government. Clearly, this is a problem of most religious minorities. It can also be a problem for a majority religion if the state is purely secular. A few conservative Muslims insist that if Islam is to be preserved in any country, not only must the majority be Muslims but that political power must be in their control. This view is open to question. In the first place, there are countries where the majority of the population is Muslim but where Islamic law does not hold sway. On the other hand, there are countries where a Muslim minority is allowed to be governed by the personal and family laws of the *Shari'a*.

Even among Muslims, one must make a distinction between "a Muslim leader" and "a leader of Muslims". The first represents one who exerts efforts for Islam while the latter has, statistically speaking, Muslims for followers on issues representing power or politics which may have nothing to do with Islam. Hence, at most, political leaders can speak only for their regions.

The main problem of Filipino Muslims is initially not so much the preservation of Islam but a need to know more about Islam and then practice it. For what is the meaning of preserving something that one does not fully understand? Often the term "Muslim" has been used to identify oneself not so much in the positive sense but as a technique to differentiate one from others. While it can be truly asserted that in the Philippines there are numerous Muslims who are really knowledgeable in the Faith and other less sophisticated ones but truly pious, there is also a large number among the young who do not even practice the basic ritual requirements of the Faith or who do not know much about Islam except the name. It is also true that, historically speaking, many Muslims have fought for a Faith they understood; but it is equally true that others have died fighting for the protection of their ethnic group or in defense of their leaders and what all these signify without realizing that they were not really fighting for Islam but for a system which they had come to believe represented Islam. Needless to say, however, this situation had never been a monopoly of a society of Muslims.

Another phenomena observed in the big urban areas in the Philippines is the existence of some Muslim youth who in their chronic fear of being different from a non-Muslim population begin to abandon Islamic rituals in their process of adjustment. In their fear of being different from the others, they forget the Qur'anic statement that Allah had created different communities and that, therefore, Muslims, in so far as they are Muslims, cannot but be different from non-Muslims.

Other young Muslims become so blinded by Western institutions and are so impressed by the technology associated with the West that they begin to agree with the detractors of Islam that Islam signifies backwardness and fosters an anti-scientific spirit. They then begin to blame Islam for all the economic ills they left behind in their poor communities. Again they forget that Islam requires as a religious prescription the extension of the frontiers of knowledge while extolling the virtues of work. Others wish to keep their Islamic identity but easily fall prey to many of the temptations that form part and parcel of life in a big city and end up confused with terrible pangs of conscience. They forget that Islam fosters discipline, decency and propriety.

Toward the Preservation of Islam

It is the deeper understanding of Islam and its ensuing practice that will determine its preservation. But the creation of such an understanding can only come about by many factors which are all interrelated. First of all, the teaching of Islam must begin with childhood. Parental discipline and proper example are imperatives. Muslim teachers, too, must help set the example. As the saintly Shaikh Muhammad ibn al Habib said in one of his Ramadan discourses:

A man should ask his son, "Have you done the prayer or not?" When he comes in, say to him, "Have you come from school, did you say the prayer there?" If he replies, "No, I haven't" tell him, "You know that on the Day of Rising you will be asked about the prayer." If he finds his father insisting day after day about the prayer, it's inevitable that he will do it. But if he comes in and no one asks him he will never say the prayer. Now in our time there's great laxity. We need teachers who command and fathers who are firm with their children. If the man who teaches commands, and the father says to his son who comes home, "Have you prayed or not," he will undoubtedly be aware of his Din and he will undoubtedly say the prayer. However, if, for instance, the teacher prays but doesn't tell his pupils to and similarly a father doesn't ask his son, he will grow up without a scrap of the Din and will never say the prayer.³

And when the child grows up into an adult, he must make efforts to refine his knowledge of Islam, its institutions and history, while going into a deeper study of the life of the Prophet. He should by this time be disciplined enough to often read the Qur'an even in translation if there is no other alternative.

Needed, too, is the upgrading of the qualifications of the teachers in the madrasahs and the improvement of the curricula as an unending process. The *'ulama* must always try to improve themselves while exemplifying the virtues of humility and love of learning. They must always foster a deepened consciousness of the community or *ummah* as against personal or family interests.

Attempts at a Solution

But, as is well known, Islam is not confined to the performance of individual

duties to Allah; it involves the regulation of social relations. In brief, it demands the existence of a community. Yet, needless to say, such a community cannot truly exist unless certain basic elements of the *Shari'a* govern it. This is an aspect in the lives of the Muslims in the Philippines where the element of government, on the principle of religious freedom and tolerance, enters. On August 1, 1973, the President of the Republic issued Memorandum 370 creating a research staff to help codify Philippine Muslim laws. After this work was terminated, the President issued Executive Order 442 on December 23, 1974 creating a Presidential Commission to review the work and come up with a better product. The Commission terminated its work after consulting Muslim lawyers and members of the *'ulama* and the code it prepared is presently awaiting the President's signature.

This Code is confined to Muslim personal laws and does not involve criminal law. It also provides for a system of Muslim courts as part of the national system of courts. Actually, a great deal of Muslim personal law, especially on matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, is now operative among Filipino Muslims. But the work of the Commission and the President's signature will signify the formal recognition of Islamic Family Law as part of the national laws of the land although applicable only to Muslims. The formal recognition of such laws coupled with the gradual evolution of a system of Islamic jurisprudence in the Philippines will go a long way in the Islamic education of the Muslim masses. Hopefully, also, the application of more *Shari'a* elements will reduce the influence of some old customs which tend to strengthen kinship relations in such a manner that makes nepotism possible. It might also create more consciousness of the community such that one will emancipate himself from purely personal or family interests and be able to conceive of a greater good — that of the *ummah*.

In accordance with its declaration that the Islamic heritage is to be considered as part of the patrimony of the Filipino people, a Presidential Decree in October 1973 as well as a Proclamation on October 26, 1973 recognized Muslim holidays while allowing the adjustment of the working schedules of Muslims to enable them to fast on the month of Ramadan. Thus it can be said that for the first time in the history of the Filipino people, many obstacles to the practice of Islam have been dramatically eliminated while positive measures to enhance it had been provided. Of great importance is the Letter of Instruction dated April 28, 1973, authorizing the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction in schools and areas that so need or desire it.

In the last so many decades, the Muslims, as a group, have lagged behind most of the other Filipinos in their educational and economic progress. Their provinces have the lowest rates in literacy. Of the Muslims who enter primary schools, not more than 2% finish their secondary education to enter college. To rectify this situation, the Mindanao State University has opened feeder schools to increase this percentage. It also enables Muslims to study in the University on a big number of scholarships. The government has also dramatically increased the number of scholarships to enable Muslims to get into other universities and work for the professions.

But the problem of madrasahs must, in the long run, be in the hands of Muslims. They inevitably require the public support of Muslims since the government is bound by certain laws preventing it from supporting religious institutions. If the madrasahs are well run and keep up with the required standards, there is no reason why their graduates cannot easily transfer to public secondary schools and easily compete with other students. Presently, there is the King Faisal Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Mindanao State University which counts among its faculty a few dozen Filipino graduates from Al Azhar and other Muslim universities. It has a few hundred enrollees. At the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies in the University of the Philippines, there is the new Institute of Islamic Studies which offers courses in Arabic and Islamics for Muslim students in Manila who desire to acquire more sophistication in their knowledge of Islam as well as non-Muslims interested in Islamic culture and institutions. A few scholarships for needy but qualified Muslim students are offered. These two above-mentioned universities are state universities.

A comparison between Muslim areas and Christian areas adjoining them generally shows that the latter have better roads, better schools, better irrigation systems and better marketing facilities. Reasons for these are numerous among which are the relatively higher level of education and technology among the Christian settlers, easier communication between them and national leaders, poor leadership among the Muslims coupled with a lack of bold imagination and past Muslim indifference to if not mistrust of the government. There are very few industries in Muslim areas and even these have non-Muslims as a majority of the employees. But this situation is now slowly changing. Many Muslims have seen the differences in economic levels between Christians and themselves and have the desire and will to lessen these differences. Many are trying to develop those skills necessary to compete with others. But not much can be accomplished unless the government first takes the initiative. The President, very much aware of the economic roots of the trouble in the last few years, has said: "We must build with haste in the Muslim areas the conditions that will accelerate the development of these areas, for as in other parts of the country, the peace in our Muslim South will endure only on the basis of social justice." The idea of the government, too, is that a strong Muslim South can eventually serve as a pillar of strength for the entire national community.

As much as possible, the Muslims have held fast to their traditional lands. This is not only on account of historical emotion but more so because land represents to them the last economic asset for survival. To assure them that they will not be displaced, Presidential Decree 410 dated March 11, 1974, declared that all ancestral lands occupied and cultivated by the national cultural minorities were to be inalienable and not disposable. However, details about the extent of these lands still have to be spelled out. Other proclamations have to do with the resettlement of Muslim refugees, relief and welfare projects and liberal trade policies for Muslims. The Philippine Amanah Bank, created on August 2, 1973, aims to create a class of Muslim entrepreneurs and help in the rehabilitation and development of Muslim areas while serving as an institution to train Muslims in banking or to acquire

economic skills. With more opportunities in the professions and more employment in industries, the present emphasis on land, among Muslims, might be reduced.

In a very important sense, the problems of the Muslims are part of the national problems. What is meant in particular is that there are also many non-Muslims in the country who are way behind others in educational and economic development. There are some Christian provinces that have poor roads and means of communication, that need more and better schools and have low literacy rates. The problem of the Muslims along such lines will thus have to be solved within the context of the whole country. That some priority had been given to Muslim areas had been due, it must be admitted, to the blood that had been shed there in the last few years, to the government's will to rectify past discrimination and injustices and to the concern shown by other countries.

The Need for a New Muslim Leadership

The economic uplift of the Muslim masses will have to be intimately connected with the rise of a new leadership among them. At present, the prestige of many Muslim traditional leaders especially the politicians among them have suffered. Rightly or wrongly, many of the young Muslims blame them for many of the social ills. They are often charged with having concentrated on their dynastic interests or the increase of their political power rather than the general welfare of the people, as having been unable to stop previous massacres in the old society, as having wasted their energies on too much "politics" and as having used Islam often for personal political purposes. Added to these is the charge that their chronic political rivalries and squabbles had served to divide their followers rather than to enable them to pool all their efforts for communal betterment. In brief, they have been charged as having acted more as leaders with Muslim followers rather than Muslim leaders.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the traditional leaders in the past had served a valuable function in the resistance against foreign invaders, principally the Spaniards. Even at present, in remote areas, where the influence of national political and administrative processes are not yet universalized, they still are needed to give some modicum of order among the people. However, with more links with the national government, the gradual granting of autonomy to various Muslim areas with younger leaders chosen from the professional or technical group, and a progressive modernization accompanied by the destruction of the old political parties will lead to the further decline of the power of the old traditional families and politicians. Some scions of the old families will no doubt maintain some form of leadership in the future; but this will come because of their skills or expertise and function in a new order and not by virtue of origin. If the political and social tendencies in the Muslims areas follow its present course and the govern-

ment pursues its long-range plans, the future leadership among the Muslims will be with a new group of professionals, managers and technocrats, who, while loyal to a larger entity which is that of the nation, will also be nourished by their Islamic roots. It is hoped, too, that then the national situation will be one where all segments participate equally in its benefits and where there is mutual accommodation of all religious differences in an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance. It is then that peace will fully reign in a land that has witnessed so much poverty, discrimination, pain and blood.

For many reasons, some possibly traceable to the dim pre-Islamic past, power or authority had been a value among Muslims in the Philippines. What results these values were intended to achieve is another matter. But they explain, to a large measure, why Muslims had always agitated for more offices at the national level and in the civil service and armed forces while aspiring to become ambassadors and heads of offices. True enough, if Muslims were to hold positions in the upper levels in the government, they would be in a better position to bring to the attention of the government and explain existing or emerging problems involving their respective communities. But holding positions as such is no guarantee that they would work for their communities rather than their personal or family interests — unless they were first of all imbued with the Islamic spirit and had developed a high degree of social consciousness.

In this sense, the need for a new Muslim leadership reiterates the necessity for Muslims, in all levels, to know more about Islam and its fundamental principles and implications, and practice it. If all Muslims practiced the Islamic virtues of honesty, patience, steadfastness, love of knowledge, industry, bravery, decency and community consciousness, while frequently invoking the *dhikr* of Allah, then all these would constitute, in effect, the preservation of Islam in the Philippines. For all of these is equivalent to the internalization of Islam among Muslim individuals — and what is imprinted in the temple of the heart is not easily eradicated. According to a *Hadith*, Allah said: “Neither My Heavens nor My earth can contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant contains Me.” This internalization is the real Islam and not the mere wearing of a headgear associated with Islam and shouting to the whole world that one is a Muslim, while on the side making money out of religious activities like the Mecca pilgrimage and taking advantage of the religiosity of other Muslims.

Whereas it is obviously desirable that the non-Muslim majority in the Philippines erases a great deal of its ignorance about or prejudices against Islam and Muslims, it is just as imperative if not more imperative for Muslims themselves to serve as a model community exemplifying the above-mentioned virtues. Then and only then will the rest of the Filipinos realize that the Muslim community in their midst is an asset from which they can learn a great deal. The Muslim community will then serve as a witness to the Message of Islam and make operative the Qur’anic verse:

Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. (Sura III, v. 110)

FOOTNOTES

¹The Maguindanaos (550,000) and the Maranaos (450,000) in Mindanao Island, and the Tausug (325,000) and Samals (160,000) in the Sulu Archipelago constitute the four major groups. *Philippine Yearbook 1975*, p. 132.

²According to the Philippine Bureau of Census and Statistics, the Muslims, in 1970, numbered 1,584,938 or 4.32% of the total population. It is estimated, at present, that Muslims number at least 3 million out of a total population of about 42 million Filipinos.

³“The Ramadan Discourses of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al Habib” *Islam: A Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1396 A.H. (England), p. 30.