

MODERNIST ISLAM, 1840–1940

A SOURCEBOOK

Edited by CHARLES KURZMAN

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Lecture on Islam

Sayyid Ahmad Khan (North India, 1817–1898) was the most prominent early leader of the modernization movement among Indian Muslims, noted especially for his advocacy of social and educational reforms. He came from a noble family and was brought up in his grandfather's house, as his father died young. He did not receive a traditional *madrasa* (seminary) education, but did study the Qur'an in Arabic and Persian classics. As an employee in the British colonial judiciary, he was greatly affected by the failed struggle for independence of 1857. Ahmad Khan became active in analyzing both the causes of the revolt and the reasons for what many perceived as the backwardness of Muslims in scientific and social fields. He concluded that the Muslims' needs could be addressed by a program of education that would incorporate both modern subjects and a respect for Islamic values. Therefore, in 1875, he established the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in North India, offering English-medium higher education. His journal *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* (Refinement of Morals) was a showcase of modernist thought, featuring his articles and those of like-minded supporters. Prevalent themes in his writings include "demythologized" Qur'anic interpretation, presenting the sacred texts as in harmony with science and reason, criticism of *hadith* (narratives of the Prophet), and calls for renewed *ijtihad* (religious interpretation). In the passage that follows, Sir Sayyid—he was knighted in 1888 by the British Empire—presented the case for renewed Islamic theology, capable of assuring an appropriately scientific and rational understanding of religious truth.¹

[(i) No Claim to Authoritative Teaching]

My brothers in religion! You have come here today desiring that I may state before you my ideas about the religion of Islam. For that I am grateful to you. I have no objection to stating my ideas before friends who are eager to listen to them. Yet, first, I want to say this—I am an ignorant person, neither a *maulavi* [religious scholar], nor a *mufti* [religious official], nor a *qadi* [judge], nor a preacher. Also, I do not wish that anybody, even my closest friend, should [blindly] follow my ideas. I consider that no person, except the Messenger of God, has such a rank in matters relating to the things of heart and spirit—

matters between God and His servants—as to make him wish that people should follow him [blindly]. This rank was that of the messengers, and finally, that of the Prophet of God, Muhammad Mustafa (the Chosen of God)—may God keep alive his religion that is from eternity to eternity—and, indeed, He will surely keep it alive; as it is without beginning, so it is without end. With Islam has arrived the end of prophethood.

But before I state my ideas, I should first like to explain my objective in presenting them. I think that there are in this world, since it was peopled and from the time God began regularly to send His prophets and messengers—from that time till today—there have [always] been and still are two kinds of people.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Lecture on Islam," translated from Urdu by Christian W. Troll in *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), pp. 307–332. Lecture delivered in Lahore on February 2, 1884, before the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam (Islamic Protection Association). Introduction by Marcia K. Hermansen.

1. Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-i Javid (Immortal Life)*, translated by David J. Mathews (New Delhi, India: Rupa &

Co., 1994); J. M. S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf, 1958). B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore, Pakistan: Institute of Islamic Culture 1957); Hafeez Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi, India: Vikas, 1978).

One group concerning whom God has said, "God guideth whom He will unto a straight path." [Qur'an, Sura 2, Verse 213] "Lo thou (O Muhammad) guidest not whom thou lovest, but God guideth whom He will." [Sura 28, Verse 56] "It may be that thou tormentest thyself (O Muhammad) because they believe not." [Sura 26, Verse 31] With regard to the second group He has said to His Messenger that you cannot guide those whom you desire to guide. Howsoever much you try—even if you torment your soul to death—they will not believe. These are the two groups of men which we find clearly depicted in the Glorious Qur'an. From there it becomes evident with regard to those who have believed formerly and those who believe now that God has made their natural constitution or their nature such that the disposition for belief or unbelief is in it. Because there can be no change in what is the nature of man. It is beyond the power of the person himself or any other person, and be he even a prophet, to change it.

[(ii) Unquestioned Belief and
Critical Belief]

This occurs daily in all aspects of our life. In this world many things happen, the truth of which we cannot prove. But in the heart, from unknown causes, something arises by which their truth acquires full certainty. This applies exactly to Islam. Thousands, hundred thousands, even ten millions of men have passed or are alive now or lived at the very time of the Messenger of God whose heart accepted the instruction and who believed firmly in the truth of it, although they had no knowledge of the arguments for its truth. The only reason for this [their firm belief] was that God had made their heart in such a way that they would, even with a minimum of instruction, accept the straight path. Their heart accepted this guidance and they believed. (*Cheers.*) Thanks are due to God that at this moment, too, that His mercy is lavished over thousands, hundred thousands, and ten millions of Muslims. These people from their heart believe in Islam without knowing the proofs for its truth according to the principles of logic and philosophy. I am convinced that people who believe in Islam without the arguments and proofs of philosophy have a more solid faith than those who believe in Islam or hold it for certain on the basis of philosophical proofs and arguments. Because into their hearts no shade of

doubt and hesitation has found its way, there is no room for that in their heart. These people are the *ahl-i jannat* [people of paradise], who will go straight to heaven. (*Cheers.*)

I remember a story of my country. In our region there lives a tribe, the Ramghar [a branch of the Rajput, settled in the region of Gurgaon, Punjab], which at some time had become Muslim. Probably up to the time before *Maulavi* [Shah Muhammad] Isma'il [Shahid, religious reformer, 1789–1831], all the customs of the Hindus were practiced among them. They wore *dhotis* [loincloths] and shirts of the *ulte pardi* type [tunics cut to open on the left side, Hindu-style, rather than the right]. The *qadi* [Muslim judge] performed the marriage, and the Brahmin led the bride around the fire. Many other Hindu customs were common among them. One day a Muslim passed through one of their villages. He was thirsty and desired to drink water. He saw an earthen pot kept there, filled with water. Yet he had doubts whether this water belonged to Hindus or Muslims. The person he asked about it answered very harshly: "Are you blind? Don't you see on top of the earthen water jar the *kulhra* (that is an earthen cup for drinking water)?" As if this was a sign for being a Muslim—whereas all people [Muslims and Hindus] drink water from [such] a cup. He had answered harshly because the traveler had doubts about his being a Muslim, in spite of the presence of the [supposedly distinctive] Muslim sign.

My brothers! When these people were so ignorant, how could they know the tenets of Islam and the philosophical arguments for its truth? There was nothing on the basis of which they could call themselves Muslims, except the faith in God and His Messenger. But, I assure you, I consider their faith to be much more solid than my own faith. (Why should I mention somebody else's?)

My brothers! The faith of such people who have no doubt whatsoever, nor any uncertainty in their heart, is usually very solid and intense. They believe with the certainty of their heart in God and the Prophet and recognize as Muslim anyone who calls himself so. They do not need any logical proof or philosophical demonstration for knowing God and for believing in the Prophet. Whatever is stated to them as having been taught by God and the Messenger, be it irrational or unbelievable, be it true or false, they will believe in it. I consider such people the stars of firm belief, models of firm Islam and true Muslims.

But there is also the second group, which wants a proof for the truth of everything. People of that group desire that the tenets of Islam should be explained to them by philosophical argument, that the doubts of their hearts be removed so that their hearts may find satisfaction. They do not want that whilst in their heart they waver, they should confess [outwardly] by tongue, "Yes, yes"—for fear of the people and because of the pressure of society. These alone are the people we address and with whom we argue.

[(iii) A Precedent to the Present Situation]

At the time when the reign of the 'Abbasid caliphs [750–1258] flourished and the star of the Muslims was at its zenith, Greek philosophy and natural science had gained popularity among the Muslims, with the result that doubts arose among the people concerning many questions regarding Islam. Because the very people who acknowledged the tenets of philosophy and natural science to be true found a discrepancy between these and the contemporary teachings of Islam, as they had been elaborated by independent judgment, thus doubts about Islam arose among them. If one can rely on history, it emerges as an established fact that that period was one of hard attacks on Islam, and yet that Islam does not have to fear damage from the hardest attacks by its hardest enemies. All the '*ulama*' [religious scholars] had to define Islam at that time. They made great efforts to protect Islam and to make it triumph. May God accept their efforts! They established three ways of protecting Islam. The first was to prove that tenets of Greek wisdom and philosophy which were against Islamic teachings were wrong. The second was to formulate such objections to the propositions of [Greek] wisdom and philosophy by which these tenets would themselves become doubtful. Third, to harmonize between the tenets of Islam and the tenets of wisdom and philosophy.

By pursuing this debate, a new science originated among Muslims which they call '*ilm al-kalam*' [the science of theological argumentation]. Till this day the books of this science are part and parcel of the learning and teaching of the '*ulama*' of our religion, and they are quite proud of them. It was for this reason that many of the tenets of Greek philosophy and natural science of the third kind [that is, that which could be harmonized] were incorporated by the

Muslims into their religious books and that, step by step, they began to be accepted like religious tenets, whereas in fact they are by no means connected with the religion of Islam. It is no easy task today to separate them from it. Therefore, I think that since Islam is in the same state, attacked in the same way as then, we must make, to the best of our ability, the same efforts our elders made in former times.

My friends! You know well that in our time a new wisdom and philosophy have spread. Their tenets are entirely different from those of the former wisdom and philosophy [of the Greeks]. They are as much in disagreement with the tenets of ordinary present-day Islam as the tenets of Greek wisdom and philosophy were with the tenets of customary Islam during their time. Moreover, an especially difficult problem is posed by the tenets of Greek natural science. The erroneousness of these tenets is by now an established fact. Yet the Muslim scholars of that time accepted them like religious tenets, as I have just explained, and this has made things even more difficult.

[(iv) Former Science and Modern Science]

My friends! Another problem is the big difference between critical research today [and its results] and the tenets of Greek wisdom of old, because the tenets of former wisdom were based on rational and analogical arguments, and not upon experience and observation. It was very easy for our forbears, whilst sitting in the rooms of mosques and monasteries, to disprove teachings arrived at by analogous reasoning and to refute rational teachings by rational demonstrations, and not to accept them. But today a new situation has arisen which is quite different from that [brought about] by the investigations of former philosophy and wisdom. Today doctrines are established by natural experiments [that is, experiments in natural science], and they are demonstrated before our eyes. These are not problems of the kind that could be solved by analogical arguments, or which can be contested by assertions and principles which the '*ulama*' of former times have established. Take for instance the question of the piercing of the roof of heaven and the closing of [the doors of] heaven, which is a very big issue in the natural sciences of our tradition, and which has lived on in our learning and teaching. Closely connected with this question are also the principles of natural science which have

been accepted in the religion of Islam. But of what use is this doctrine [of the piercing and closing of the cupola of heaven] now and what utility is there in studying and teaching it, since it has been established that the way in which former philosophers and 'ulama' decided upon the existence of heaven is wrong. What is needed now is to reflect upon what "heaven" means, and for this it is necessary to work out new principles and tenets instead of simply calling to memory the worn-out and obsolete doctrines. (*Cheers.*)

A very big issue with us was that of matter and form. If one accepted matter following [the understanding of] Greek philosophy, then the existence of a state after death, which is an important tenet of Islam, would be in vain. The long discussions of the philosophers of Islam concerning this issue were somehow fruitless and insufficient. In any case, present-day natural philosophy does not discuss "matter" at all. Rather, it is accepted that all bodies are composed of small elements. What is therefore the use of the debate on matter and form, a discussion which forms a part of our religious and worldly teaching? There are many other problems of this kind which could be stated as an example here.

My friends! Forgive me when I say that one highly necessary subject has been neglected by the 'ulama'. They did much to confront Greek wisdom and philosophy, but nothing or very little to satisfy the heart of the denier or doubter of Islam, by the way they would present to them the religion of Islam. It is neither sufficient for the firm believer, nor does it satisfy the mind of the doubter, to say simply that in Islam this has been taught in this way and has to be accepted. (*Cheers.*)

[(v) Need for a New 'Ilm al-Kalam]

In the same way, there are many other reasons for which in our time Muslims need to adopt new methods in controversy. The person who considers Islam to be true and believes firmly in it, that person's heart will testify that Islam alone is true—whatever changes may occur in logic, philosophy, and natural science, and however much the doctrines of Islam seem to be in contradiction with them. This attitude is sufficient for those who believe with a true and uncomplicated mind in Islam, but not for those who reject or doubt it. Furthermore, it is by no means a

work of proper protection to confess just by the tongue that Islam is true, and to do nothing to strengthen it in its confrontation with the modern propositions of wisdom and philosophy. Today we need, as in former days, a modern 'ilm al-kalam by which we either render futile the tenets of modern sciences or [show them to be] doubtful, or bring them into harmony with the doctrines of Islam.

I am not well acquainted with all the venerable persons present in this assembly; yet I am sure that quite a number of learned people are present in this gathering. I address myself to them with utmost sincerity—those of you who are able to make an all-out effort to harmonize the tenets of contemporary natural science and philosophy with the doctrines of Islam, or to prove the futility of the tenets of contemporary science and philosophy and yet fail to do so, are all sinners—and certainly so. If only two or three among them accomplish this task, then undoubtedly the collective duty will have been fulfilled. (*Cheers.*)

I happen to believe that there is nobody who is well acquainted with modern philosophy and modern natural science as they exist in the English language, and who at the same time believes in all the doctrines which are considered doctrines of Islam in present-day understanding. May the English-educated [literally English-reading] young men and students forgive me, but I have not yet seen anybody well acquainted with English and interested in the English sciences who believes with full certainty in the doctrines of Islam as they are current in our time. I am certain that as these sciences spread—and their spreading is inevitable and I myself after all, too, help and contribute toward spreading them—there will arise in the hearts of people an uneasiness and carelessness and even a positive disaffection toward Islam as it has been shaped in our time. At the same time, I believe firmly that this is not because of a defect in the original religion, but rather because of those errors which have been made, wilfully or not, to stain the face of Islam.

I am never entitled to claim that I could clean the black stains of these errors from the luminous face of Islam, or that I could take upon me the responsibility to undertake the work of protecting Islam. This is the duty and the privilege of other saintly and learned people. But since I have striven to spread among Muslims those sciences which, as I have just stated, are to a certain extent in discrepancy with contemporary Islam, it was my duty that,

as far as it could be done by me, I should do, rightly or wrongly, whatever was in my power to protect Islam and to show forth to people the original luminous face of Islam. My conscience told me that if I failed to do so I should be a sinner before God. (*Cheers.*)

O my friends! I do not say that whatever I investigated is true. But once I had no other choice but to do whatever could be done by me, then I had certainly to do exactly what I did and what I am still doing. God knows my pure intention. If I have done wrong, may he forgive me who wants to and refuse to do so who does not want to. If I have done any good, then I do not want any reward from any human being. Therefore I do not fear people calling me *kafir* [non-Muslim] or *nechari* [naturist, meaning materialist], nor do I frown upon it. I shall not ask those people who slander me because of my efforts, and call me a *kafir*, to intercede for me either. My good or bad actions are with God. If I have made mistakes or shall make mistakes in the future, then I hope to God that He will have mercy on me. (*Cheers.*)

[(vi) Truth and the Plurality of Religions]

My friends! After this lengthy introduction I shall now state my ideas concerning Islam. Whatever I say here I shall certainly state in a free and frank manner. I shall not state my ideas precisely as a Muslim, because in the statement of a doctrine from the point of view of a Muslim, there is no need for this kind of untrammelled argumentation [based purely on reason]. At this moment I shall adopt a way of speaking which a third person would employ in explaining the principles and tenets of Islam to people who have doubts about Islam or its principles. Or I address myself to the English-educated young students whom modern philosophy and the modern natural sciences have thrown into doubt about the truths of the principles of Islam, or who have come to believe that they are wrong. The person that states Islam to be true must also state how he can prove the truth of Islam. When people want to corroborate or affirm the truth of their religion, be it Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism, they must first prove its truth. To argue that this and this person is without any doubt holy, and that we believe in the word of this holy person, is not sufficient for establishing the truth of that religion, because such a statement remains in the realm of mere

belief. Among all people who follow somebody, whether an avatar or a prophet or the God of the Christians, they all consider in the same way the one whom they follow as holy. All members of a religion hold the same firm belief in their religion as members of another religion in theirs. With what justification then can we call one religion true and the other false?

However, if we say that we possess a book sent by God, in which there is not even a suspicion of error, then another person can say, in a similar manner, that I too possess the book of God, and not the slightest doubt attaches to its truth. Given this state of affairs, one must offer the reason for preferring the one to the other, and one must be able to give a reason that satisfies, which is not based on some belief [only], as for instance the book sent to us after all is sent by God, whilst the one sent to the other is not.

If we put forward the miracles of our prophets to prove the truth of our religion, then apart from the difficulties which attach to the possibility and, further, to the proof of their occurrence, the followers of the other religion likewise will state similar miracles of their religious leaders. So what justification have we for acknowledging the miracles we put forward as trustworthy, and for declaring those which the other people put forward as false? All such arguments are based on beliefs [only]. Nobody can confute them, nor can anybody say that this belief is true and this one wrong. If one person holds such a belief, how can one expect the other person to adopt it? Therefore, in order to arrive at the truth, it is necessary that we discover a criterion and establish a touchstone which is related to all religions in the same manner, and by which we can prove our religion or belief to be true. (*Cheers.*)

[(vii) The Criterion for Establishing the True Religion]

Now I shall state this criterion which is related to the religions of the whole world in the same way. By this criterion I shall justify without any wavering what I acknowledge to be the original religion of Islam, which God and the Messenger have disclosed, not that religion which the '*ulama*' and blessed *maulavis* and preachers have fashioned. I shall prove this religion to be true, and this will be the decisive difference between us [and] the followers of other religions.

No people, be they attached to a religion or not, can deny that God has created humans as a composition of various powers in such a way that they are able to do one or the other work. During this life, therefore, one has to adopt a mode of conduct that coordinates one's [exterior] forces and [interior] faculties toward the purpose for which they exist, and are created. Thus the only criterion for the truth of the religions which are present before us is whether the religion [in question] is in correspondence with the natural disposition of humankind, or with nature. If yes, then it is true, and such correspondence is a clear sign that this religion has been sent by that One which has created humankind. But if this religion is against the nature of humans and their natural constitution, and against their forces and faculties, and if it hinders humans from employing these profitably, then there can be no doubt that this religion is not sent by the One that created humankind, because everyone will agree that religion was made for humankind. You can turn this [around] and state to the same effect that humankind was created for religion.

So I have determined the following principle for discerning the truth of the religions, and also for testing the truth of Islam, that is, is the religion in question in correspondence with human nature or not, with the human nature that has been created into humankind or exists in humankind. And I have become certain that Islam is in correspondence with that nature. (*Cheers.*)

No doubt this should have been the work of outstanding thinkers and scholars. I do not possess the ability to achieve it. But for the reason I explained a few moments earlier, I embarked upon it to the best of my capability. I hold for certain that God has created us and sent us His guidance. This guidance corresponds fully to our natural constitution, to our nature, and this constitutes the proof for its truth. Because it would be highly irrational to maintain that God's work and God's word are different and unrelated to one another. All beings, including humans, are God's work, and religion is His word; the two cannot be in conflict. This criterion I have established for those who themselves in their heart want to settle the truth of any religion and desire to satisfy their minds, and also for those who are in doubt about Islam, or oppose it. To my mind there be no further additional criterion.

After determining this criterion, I clarified that Islam is in full accordance with nature. So I formu-

lated that "Islam is nature and nature is Islam." This is a wholly correct proposition. Yet, unfortunately, there were people who deliberately accused me of being a naturist, or *nechari* in a different sense. They will have to answer for it before God. God is the Creator of all things, as He is the Creator of heaven and earth and what is in them, and of all creatures; so is He also the Creator of nature. What a tremendous slander is it, therefore, when opponents state that I call nature Creator or—God forbid—nature God. What I declare to be created, they accuse me of calling Creator. On that day when there will be the interrogation of our deeds, there will stand before God men with long full beards, with prayer marks on their foreheads, wearing their pajamas neatly above their ankles [sign of strict adherence to the details of religious law]. Men who buy lies for truth—they will be questioned. I leave them, who have made this false accusation, to God. No, I do not leave them to God; rather I forgive them on my part! (*Very loud cheers!*) I do not want to take revenge of any brother, of any fellow creature, neither in this world nor on the Day of Resurrection. I am an utter nothing. Yet I am a descendant of that Messenger who is the mercy of the two worlds [heaven and earth]. I shall walk on the path of my ancestor. And all people who have spoken ill of me and accused me falsely or will do so in the future—all of them I shall forgive. (*Cheers.*)

[(viii) This Path Is Not Entirely New in the History of Islam]

Can anybody say that the path I have outlined above is not apt to strengthen Islam? Can we not meet in this way the great philosophers, the natural scientists, and the atheists? Is our method in any way opposed to Islam? Here, too, I do not claim that the method I adopted is absolutely free from error. I am not infallible and do not claim to be so. I am an ignorant man. I have done this work, for which I am not qualified, out of love for Islam. No doubt it is a new path, and yet in it I have followed the ancient '*ulama*'. As they developed an '*ilm al-kalam*' in a new fashion, so I, like them, have developed a new method to prove the same truth. We cannot exclude the possibility of a mistake. Yet future '*ulama*' will render it fully correct and will help Islam. In my view, Islam can be reaffirmed against doubters in this way, and not in any other. (*Cheers.*)

[(ix) Basic Islam: Unity]

Gentlemen, you have asked me to state what Islam is. In answer I say that Islam is [basically] the profession of the *tawhid* (unity) of God. By the firm belief in that unity, a person can be called a Muslim or Musalman [Urdu for Muslim]. The person who in truth acknowledges God, and firmly believes in His unity, is a Muslim. This is the first and foremost pillar of Islam, and all the other pillars are subordinate to it, and as deeply linked with it as in a genuine drug various ingredients are mixed up with the basic paste. Islam means to acknowledge God and to understand Him to be absolutely One and the Creator of everything, but not only to know and understand but rather to be certain of this, and a Muslim is the one who firmly believes in it. God Almighty, when mentioning in the Holy Qur'an the iteration of Christians and Jews, has said, "Nay, but whosoever surrendereth his purpose to God while doing good, his reward is with his Lord." [Sura 2, Verse 112] That is, those who believe in God direct their face towards Him and do good—their reward is with the Lord. God did not want anything from the "people of the book" except that they should acknowledge God and serve Him, when He said, "O people of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you, that we shall worship none but God." [Sura 3, Verse 64] And in one place the Prophet of God said that "My prayer and my worship and my life and my death are for God." [See also Sura 6, Verse 126.] And after this he said, "I am the first of those who surrender (unto Him)." [Sura 6, Verse 163] [The prophets] Isma'il [Ishmael] and Ibrahim [Abraham] said this prayer: "Our Lord, make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation submissive unto Thee." [Sura 2, Verse 129] The disciples of [the prophet] Jesus also, after believing in God, said: "Bear Thou witness that we have surrendered (unto Him)." [Sura 3, Verse 52] God said to Ibrahim, "Surrender!" and Ibrahim said: "I have surrendered to the Lord of the Worlds." [Sura 2, Verse 131] Ibrahim enjoined to his sons: "O my sons! Lo! God has chosen for you the (true) religion; therefore die not, save as men who have surrendered (unto Him)." [Sura 2, Verse 132] And in one place God has said, "Lo! Religion with God is surrender (al-Islam)." [Sura 3, Verse 19] Again, God has said: "Ibrahim was not a Jew; nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to God), and he was not of the idolaters" [Sura 3, Verse 67]—that is, Ibrahim was not a Jew, nor a Christian, but rather a pure Muslim. Hence the truth of Islam, as

God revealed it, is to acknowledge God and firmly believe in Him.

One can have a firm belief in God and God's unity only when one has become absolutely certain about His essence and attributes, which are, in reality, one, and about His right to be worshiped, which is essential to Him. To believe in His essence means to believe that He exists as eternal essence without beginning or end, as One without associate. To believe in His attributes means to be certain that in no one else are attributes like His. The attributes like knowledge, mercy, and life, and so on, are related to God. With the notion of these, other attributes inevitably enter our mind because they are associated in the imagination. Now to acknowledge that the attributes of God are pure and unalloyed [by other attributes associated with them in our mind] means to believe firmly in the attributes of God. To believe in His right to be worshiped means that nothing but God deserves to be worshiped, that is, is worthy of worship. The person who in this way believes firmly in God is a Muslim. Not I, [but] God Himself says so.

[(x) ... And Acknowledgment of the One Who Finally Preached Tawhid, Muhammad]

True, I shall certainly maintain that a person who acknowledges exclusively the One God [without recognizing Muhammad as His Prophet] is not a Muhammadan. The usage of the Qur'an is what I have stated, but in our time Muhammadan and Muslim are used synonymously. Therefore I consider it necessary to go to a certain extent into detail. For being a Muhammadan, it is necessary that we firmly believe also in the person who, in his bounty, has taught us *tawhid*, because of whom we know God and recognize His attributes. Our reason tells us that we cannot refuse to believe him as the guide through whom we received guidance. It was Muhammad the Messenger of God who guided us in Islam, the truth of which I have stated with such firmness. Therefore, to affirm him [Muhammad] as the Prophet sent by God is necessarily the second pillar of Islam, which cannot be separated from the first. It follows from this whole passage that the person who acknowledges God and accepts Him as One and without partner, and believes firmly in Him—yet does not affirm any prophet [before Muhammad] nor the Prophet [Muhammad]—such a person certainly

cannot be considered a Muhammadan or a Muslim, the latter word taken here as a synonym of the first. Yet according to the principles of Islam, it is not correct to call such a person unbeliever in the sense of associationist [polytheist] or to refuse to call him a unitarian.

No doubt, to affirm the prophethood is the second pillar of Islam. From early on, it has been a moot point among the '*ulama*' whether those who acknowledge only the unity of God [that is, without believing in the prophets and Muhammad] will be in eternal hellfire or not. Some maintained they would, whereas others said they would reach salvation after punishment. Leave this discussion to the '*ulama*', and let us stay with the saying of our Friend [the Prophet]: "Despite Abu Dharr [al-Ghifari, a devout companion of the Prophet, died 653], I did so."²

[(xi) The Religious Duties of Islam]

After the belief in the unity of God and the divine mission of the Prophet, there are further elements in Islam which God has established as religious duty, for instance ritual prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, and so on.

We consider those who do not perform these duties as sinners, and we regard the one who denies them like the one who denies the divine mission of the Prophet as not a Muhammadan or Muslim, both terms taken synonymously. With regard to such people's eternal punishment in hellfire, the same discussion arises which we mentioned in the context of those who proclaim only the unity of God [but do not believe in His messengers].

My friends! This is an important and extremely subtle discussion, and to cover it very much time is required. Because of [lack of] time we do good to keep it short. Likewise, the question of associationism [polytheism], which is the outright enemy of Islam and with which Islam cannot go together by any means, is also

2. [Possibly a reference to the *hadith* (tradition of the Prophet) related by Abu Dharr, in which Abu Dharr asked the Prophet several times whether those who commit illegal sexual intercourse and theft would be allowed into paradise if they die believing in God and monotheism. The Prophet answered in the affirmative: "Even if he had committed adultery and theft, despite Abu Dharr." See the *hadith* collections of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (821–875), volume 1, number 172; and Muhammad ibn Isma'il Bukhari (810–870), volume 7, number 717.—Ed.]

a big issue. Yet I shall explain it just a little bit here. God is one in essence and attributes, and nobody shares with Him in this unity. In the same way, therefore, those who consider the precepts of any person—except those of the Messenger—in religious matters as incumbent on themselves, they too, in a way, associate [others with God]. I call this associationism in prophethood. When accusing Jews and Christians of the same thing, God has said: "They have taken as lords beside God their rabbis and their monks." [Sura 9, Verse 31] Such a following [of the precepts of men, except the Prophet] leads finally to taking "lords beside God."

Do not imagine from what I have said that I hold a view opposed to the community of religious scholars. No, I consider them to be the crown of the Crown of the *umma* [Muslim community] and their *ijtihad* [independent judgment] and differences of opinion a source of mercy. Also, do not think that I denounce those who follow them blindly or that I detest *taqlid* [imitation of a religious scholar] as bad. But I certainly do think that some of the actions of those who follow blindly have reached the point where they—by their own mistake, not by virtue of following the community of religious scholars—have made the latter "lords beside God." And those people who are against this tenet of blind following and hold the doctrine of '*adam-i taqlid* [absence of *taqlid*] and who desire to try to implement this—these persons also I respect. I consider the objective of both groups to be one. Both desire to please God and the Messenger. (*Cheers.*) It is a pity that because of these two groups, mutual vexation and enmity have arisen. These are the evil inspirations of Satan, which are designed to split Islam and weaken its power. In truth Islam means to profess "*La ilaha illah Allah*" ["There is no god but God," the first part of the Islamic profession of faith], to believe this firmly and sincerely and to regard all who profess the word as brothers. To split the assembly of Islam by being opposed to one another is against the principles of Islam, and is ingratitude for the blessing God has bestowed upon us, which He has expressed in the words: "And He made friendship between your hearts." [Sura 3, Verse 103] (*Cheers.*)

[(xii) The Belief in the Prophethood of Muhammad, in the Modern Context]

Now I want to deal a little with those subjects that are related to the affirmation of the prophethood [of

Muhammad] and to those tenets of Islam that on first sight seem to be opposed to reason and science. A detailed treatment of these subjects would need a very long time and would probably not be finished in years. This is no matter of surprise. But it may not be out of place to succinctly deal with these subjects for the benefit of some English-educated young men, or for other people who desire to alter their outlook.

To be a Muhammadan, or (what is synonymous with it) to belong to the circle of Islam, demands belief not only in the unity of God but also in the divine mission of the Prophet, that is, in prophethood. Two things put the English-educated or liberal-minded young man into doubt. First, the belief in the prophethood; second, those tenets of Islam which seem to contradict contemporary wisdom and philosophy or reason, or which seem to be far removed from reason. The discussion of the prophethood along the principles of nature is a lengthy one. I am not going to open it up now. Instead I shall state a few points, as one does in a speech, concerning the truth of the prophethood of Muhammad—points which the heart can accept. Many great philosophers of the past and present, who have reached a very high rank in scholarship, and have written many excellent books, accept, nevertheless, the teaching of basic Islam and the principles upon which it is built. But leave them aside and examine yourself how excellent, solid, and unrivaled the principles of basic Islam are, omitting the independent judgments and complex problems of the jurists, which do not correspond to the plain and simple principles of Islam. Even those who all their life have investigated into the essence of philosophy, wisdom, the natural sciences, and human nature—even such people would not be able to establish such principles. I therefore do not think it out of place to argue that a person who was born in a land full of sand and stones, who had become an orphan at a tender age, who had neither received training in a house of sciences nor heard the doctrines of Socrates, Hippocrates, or Plato [Greek philosophers, fifth–fourth century B.C.], nor sat at the feet of a teacher nor enjoyed the company of wise men, philosophers, or men of political and moral science, but who spent forty years of his life among uneducated and rude camel drivers, who for 40 years had seen nobody but a people addicted to idolatry, internecine warfare, and men and women who prided themselves on theft and fornication. Such a man, who all at once rose against all his own people and, al-

beit surrounded on four sides by idolatry, yet professed "*La ilaha illah Allah*"—who not only said it but made all his people say it, people who for centuries had worshiped Lat and Manat and 'Uzza [pre-Islamic Arab goddesses]; who eradicated from his people all this bad behavior and these immoral practices; who made them throw to ground and break their idols and exalted the name and worship of God throughout the entire peninsula, the peninsula which, after Ibrahim and Isma'il, had been sullied by a thousand acts of impurity. Who then restored to it its original purity and the great religion of Ibrahim? Who, I ask, after forty years, put light in man's heart, the light which has illuminated not only the Arab peninsula but the whole world?

After teaching the *shahada* [profession of faith], he gave the people precepts about the morals of religion. Could any philosopher have said more than what this illiterate man said? And not only did he pronounce these precepts, but rather, by the influence of his pure heart and tongue, he implanted them in the hearts of people. This work was such that it could not have been achieved by any philosopher or any powerful political ruler. What was the thing in this orphan child which demonstrated not only to the Arab peninsula but to the whole world the wonder of divinity?

O my friends! The most hardened materialist, irreligious persons, if they do not—God forbid—accept such a person as a prophet, surely they shall have, at least, to acknowledge that if after God there is any person as great, it is he alone. "My spirit a sacrifice to you, O Messenger of God!" [Arabic phrase] Thus whoever arrives at understanding the true nature of prophethood cannot but put faith in the prophethood of the Messenger of God. These few words about our affirmation of prophethood will be fully sufficient to satisfy the mind of a person who possesses a little intelligence and understanding.

[(xiii) Need to Clearly Distinguish Between the Doctrines of "Pure Islam" and Later Doctrinal Elaborations]

Now I have to say something about the doctrines of Islam. As you know very well, they are of two kinds. One, what is revealed explicitly; the other, what is arrived at by *ijtihad*—established by the '*ulama*' in the goodness of their heart and intention. If a doc-

trine of the second kind—that is, from those which are called *ijtihad*—should be contrary to nature or human nature, then this does not bring any reflection upon Islam, because such a doctrine is the independent judgment of a human being or *mujtahid* [one who conducts *ijtihad*], and he is not preserved from negligence and error.

The leaders of the four *madhhabs* [the four main legal schools of Sunni Islam] have themselves accepted the saying: “The *mujtahid* may err and may be correct.” It is therefore pointless in our context to discuss the *ijtihad* and *qiyas* doctrines [arrived at by analogous reasoning] of the ‘*ulama*’. They can be right or wrong. We are partisans of Islam and not of the opinion or independent judgment of every Tom, Dick, and Harry. If there is an error in these, this does not do any harm to Islam; and if they are correct, then there is no reason whatsoever for Islam to be proud of it. It is our task to establish the explicitly revealed doctrines as being in correspondence with human nature. Not by any traditional argument, nor by any proofs of the *mujtahids* based on independent judgment, but by nature. We are prepared to prove these doctrines by the same science, through the study of which doubts have arisen in the hearts of those people. Whatever people may think about our claim—and although some people may consider it impossible to fulfill—we proclaim with a loud voice what is in our heart, and of what we are certain. In our understanding, no doctrine of “pure Islam,” nor anything stated in the Glorious Qur’an, is contrary to any old or new science. Nor can any wisdom or any philosophy demolish it. (*Cheers.*)

[(xiv) The Miracle of the Qur’an]

I firmly believe that there is no religion, except Islam, which when compared with former or contemporary research, with philosophy and natural philosophy, emerges in all respects true and valid. Only that much holds true—that truth never changes. Yes, surely, when the style of philosophy changes, the principles of debate change, and there arises the need for new argument. For this reason the arguments formerly set up by our elders have lost their relevance in our time. We need therefore to adopt a new method of controversy. The Glorious Qur’an, which for 1,300 years has been firmly held to be *mu’jiz* [that is, disabling an opponent of the Prophet in a contest; in the follow-

ing: miraculous], I, too, accept it as such. Yet our elders had put forward only a superficial argument for its being miraculous, that is, the excellence of its pure language and speech. And this only because till today no human, no one, however fluent of speech, however eloquent, has managed to compose one or ten verses in the same fluency and eloquence, even when challenged in a public contest to do so. No doubt I, too, accept the Glorious Qur’an in the very same way as fluent and eloquent of speech. And why should I not, since I firmly believe that it is the word of God and dictated revelation. Its words are the very same that God put in the heart of the Messenger, and which reached from the tongue of the Messenger. I also accept that till today nothing comparable has been spoken by any human being. But I regard this proof to be weak, not solid, and I do not interpret the relevant passages of the Glorious Qur’an in this way. Further, even if this proof is a real proof, it cannot still be put forward in confrontation with nonbelievers. It will not satisfy their mind. I have another proof which I consider more solid than the one mentioned. What proof is this? The direction for man given in the Glorious Qur’an cannot surely be bettered by others. This I consider to be the miracle, rather the basic miracle of the Glorious Qur’an. The Glorious Qur’an “descended” at a period marked by ignorant, uninformed, and uneducated people. The Qur’an was at the same time guidance for the ignorant people of that period and guidance for the most highly educated people, then and in all ages to come. It was necessary that its precepts should be stated in such a way that both a Bedouin camel driver of the desert and an outstandingly wise man like Socrates or Hippocrates would likewise receive from them profit and guidance. The Glorious Qur’an is a word that possesses this quality. From it people of different degrees [of learning], or rather opposed qualities, would receive one and the same guidance. An ignorant Bedouin and a holy *maulavi* would both receive from its literal meanings the same guidance as a philosopher from the intended meanings of the same words, and the latter would not find one word [of it] opposed to nature or philosophy. Compose for me and show me any book in any language—French, Latin, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and so on, or name me a book written formerly in these languages which contains the most exalted thoughts of philosophy and wisdom—and yet in extremely pleasant and fluent words and which is of equal use to both illiterate and learned, ignorant and philosopher,

and which makes an equal impression on the hearts of all; you will find it utterly impossible. The Glorious Qur'an is the only book in which there are all these qualities, and this is the original, true, and real miracle of it. Its doctrines were true when the earth was regarded as immovable. In the same way today, when the sun is regarded as immovable and the earth as revolving round it, it is equally true and satisfies the mind. Jews, Christians, Chinese, and Hindus all have their books, which they regard as sacred. But tell me, which of these possesses the quality I have explained? In the Torah, it is stated that the sun halted for Joshua [Book of Joshua, Chapter 10, Verse 13]. If this was the case, when would the destruction of the whole world ever be accomplished? In contrast, the Glorious Qur'an refrains from preaching such things, and if it gives a counsel it is the following—"There is no altering (the laws of) God's creation." [Sura 30, Verse 30]

I firmly believe, although it is liable to be opposed as being a prediction, that if the wisdom and philosophy considered to be true today turn out tomorrow to be wrong, as has happened to Greek wisdom in our days, and should there be established as true totally new principles, still, I maintain, then also the Glorious Qur'an will prove to be true in the same way as it is true today. After reflection, it will be established that what was erroneous was so [on account of] the deficiency of our knowledge—the Qur'an, in contrast, is as true as ever. Our ancient exegetes have greatly stressed [the need] to harmonize the Qur'an with Greek wisdom and astronomy. But the people who reflect on the Qur'an in the light of God's guidance, understand that whatever might seem wrong in it was their error and not that of the Glorious Qur'an.

[(xv) Explicitly Revealed Precepts and Duties Elaborated by Rational Conclusions]

My brothers! My friends! This is an arduous road, not free from obstacles. But for people who claim to belong to the religion of Islam, it is necessary to reflect about it. What I am doing [here] should have been, in fact, the work of other people, not the work of an ignorant man like me. But when no one undertook it, there was an impulse in my heart and I responded to it. I understand that God put this impulse into my heart. If I did not try to the best of my ability, what answer was I to give to God? It is a pity that people did not understand my intention and objec-

tive, and that they opposed me on behalf of some really minor differences which are not even completely new [in the light of Islamic history], and made various false accusations against me. Yet reflect about the past conditions and study thoroughly the books of former '*ulama*', and you will see what a contradiction there exists between principles that lead to *kuf*r [disbelief] on the one side, and those on the other leading to Islam. One group professes the vision of God and says that it is explicitly revealed. Then there is a group of the very traditional Sunni scholars who profess God to have hands, feet, eyes, and a nose, who firmly believe that He resides on a throne, and who hold this to be explicitly revealed. Another group opposes this and regards it as *kuf*r. If the former '*ulama*', from early on, have differed to such an extent in basic matters, what then is my sin when I differ from doctrines formulated by those '*ulama*' of old? In the end they, too, were human beings and not preserved and protected from error.

The undisputed and unequivocal, explicitly revealed precepts like prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and almsgiving which God Almighty has declared in the Qur'an to be religious duty, I consider to be religious duties in the same way as does an ignorant Muslim. But when an opponent [of Islam] attacks them, it becomes unavoidable to discuss their inner reason and original meaning. When the question is raised what the washing of hands and face, that is ablution, has to do with worship, which after all relates to the heart or what "out of place" rinsing and washing of the mouth has to do with an accidental cause of ritual impurity, or what has prayer, which is a spiritual action, to do with standing, sitting, lowering of the head, and raising of the hips, then we shall, willy nilly, have to discuss the inner reason and original meaning of the "pillars" of prayer, and we will have to explain why ablution has been prescribed as a duty and why the constituent parts of prayer have been determined [by revelation]. To explain these things, proofs by simply adducing revealed texts without rational argument will not do, because the doubter in religion, or the religious, will not accept such. Rather, it will be necessary to explain them in a manner corresponding with reason, nature, or human nature, so that the mind of the other person will be satisfied. (*Cheers.*) Or do you think it will satisfy people who are an alien party to Islam to argue that this and nothing else is the precept, accept it as it stands?

[(xvi) The True Meaning of Islam as the Perfect Religion]

O my brothers! Certainty, which is another name for faith, does not originate from the mere saying of another person. If I, in this very situation here where a splendid hall is illuminated by chandeliers made of crystal, by glass shades and wall lamps, if I should state: in this hall is total darkness—and you, out of regard for me and my words, accept and repeat my words, saying that yes, it is darkness, will there, because of my saying so, be certainty in your hearts? Surely if you are reasonable and truly and sincerely consider me worthy of respect, and my words as deserving certain assent, then you will, no doubt, reflect and think about what is the meaning [here] of darkness. And when you have understood this, will there then be in your heart true certainty? My point is this, and I desire this from my Muslim brethren—don't call the Glorious Qur'an a miracle only by tongue, but acknowledge it as a miracle in your heart. For this reason, I have said that arguments should be put before them through which certainty will originate about the Qur'an being a miracle, or at least about its being true. Since I had exactly such certainty about the Qur'an, it was therefore my desire to demonstrate to the world, without fear and anxious thought, whether this agrees or disagrees with the opinion of the revered men and without fearing the *fatwas* [religious rulings] of *kufri* by the contemporary '*ulama*', that the Glorious Qur'an and Islam are likewise in accordance with the nature of humankind. I hope that my Muslim brethren, insofar as they are able, will correct whatever I have done, and if I have made mistakes will forgive, instead of regarding me the inventor of a sect or the founder of a new *madhhab*. I assure you that I affirm, as far as I can, all the doctrines of Islam which are authentic. Can you call this a new *madhhab*? It is my creed that the religion of Islam is the perfect and final religion. I am absolutely certain of the word of God which says that "this day I have perfected your religion for you and completed my favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam." [Sura 5, Verse 3] Yet if the exegetes—may God have mercy upon them—explain the meaning of this perfection—that God has made perfect religion by declaring this animal *halal* [lawful to eat] and that animal *haram* [unlawful]—then I oppose them, be they a Fakhr al-Din Razi [famous exegete and theologian, 1149–1209] or a Mulla [Abu'l-Hasan] 'Ali Nishapuri [died 1075],

or somebody greater than them. I propose humbly to these revered men, Sirs, if this is the meaning of the perfection of religion, then adieu. I maintain that this exegesis is wrong. The religion of Islam has been perfected by pronouncing the unity of God in a perfect way and by throwing light on every detail and principle of [this unity]. This alone is the perfection of religion, and because of this perfection Islam is the last religion and will stay on unchanged to the Day of Resurrection. Yes, til after Resurrection as well. (*Cheers.*)

[(xvii) Distinction between Fundamental and Nonfundamental Elements in the Religious Commandments]

Now I want to say something about various precepts mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an. Prayer, for instance—I understand that God has made prayer a duty, precisely with respect to the nature God has put into humankind, that is to say, in order that the memory of the One worshiped may stay in the heart, and that people may not forget their aim, and that they may express their heartfelt longing and submission before Him. This is the fundamental element of prayer, which God has made a duty. Yet in order to teach humankind how to perform this duty, he has fixed "pillars" for it that, in reality, are not a fundamental element of it. Rather, they are meant to protect the fundamental element, and as such cannot be separated from it. They have therefore become part of the fundamental element, and have become incumbent in the manner of the fundamental element. We easily arrive at the distinction [between fundamental and nonfundamental element] in the following way, when we consider that people can be excused from performing an element which is meant to protect the fundamental one. Given the case of excuse, the religious obligation of ablution, the obligation to stand, sit, prostrate, yes, even to recite aloud, can be waived. Yet, the attention toward God and the performance of sincere longing and submission, which is the fundamental element of prayer, cannot be waived as long as a person is conscious and breathes. Thus it is crystal-clear that those elements which can be waived in the end are not fundamental. Only that element is fundamental which cannot at any time, as long as a human is human, be waived. (*Cheers.*) Now, who can say that this mode of prayer is against nature or human nature? (*Cheers.*)

True, the question remains with regard to these fixed "pillars" of prayer—why have they been established and how do they accord with human nature? My [first] answer is yes, they do correspond to human nature. Yet here I shall answer in another, a philosophical way. If we were to determine some other "pillars" for the performance of this [fundamental] duty, then the same question that arises with regard to the determining of the now established "pillars" of prayer will arise, with regard to the proposed ones, and so on. And to raise an objection that refutes itself is unreasonable.

Of course, one must raise the point whether more excellent "pillars" of prayer could not have been established. But I am certain that no person could name other "pillars" better than these, in which all exoteric and esoteric, all inner and outer organs, all ways of respect and submission of body and soul find expression, and which impress man in accordance with the exigencies of nature.

[(xviii) Overall Objective: Restatement of Islam]

I have, in a succinct way, told you my thoughts concerning the religion of Islam. I have also explained to you why I have adopted this new way of reaffirming Islam and of [defending it in] debate. I have also

pointed out why I felt it necessary to take a stand different from that of the former '*ulama*'. It would need much time to state on which issues the '*ulama*' differ among themselves, on which issues I have taken a stand different from theirs, on which of these latter issues some ancient '*ulama*' too had chosen the approach which is mine, and how many points there are on which I am on my own and all former '*ulama*' are against me. Yet now, after my statement here, I leave the critical assessment of the question whether what I have said is a reaffirmation of Islam or not—that, gentlemen, I leave to you.

To end, I want to say that the [kind of] reaffirmation of Islam I have adopted to my best knowledge has not come about for the reason that I am a Muslim, was born in a Muslim family, and therefore had willy nilly to reaffirm Islam. I do not think highly of that [kind of motivation]. That a person born in a certain religion should quietly walk in it is one thing, and to set out to reaffirm your religion another. The latter work does not become a man who has not reached full certainty about it. I have reflected a lot, with an open mind about Islam. After considerable reflection and thought I became deeply convinced that if there is any true religion, it is Islam alone, and I reaffirm Islam on the basis of this heartfelt certainty, not because I was born in a Muslim home and because I am Muslim. (*Very loud cheers.*)