

Islam The Only Way

by Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

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It is the first occasion on which I have the privilege of addressing the mighty German nation to convey to them the message of Islam in this great city of Berlin. I am fully conscious of the heavy responsibility that rests on my shoulders and the delicacy of the task that faces me.

For centuries the German nation has enjoyed the reputation of being remarkable for [its] courage, spirit of adventure sobriety of thought, pragmatism, and capacity to work untiringly. It was because of these inherent qualities that this nation has produced a number of outstanding personalities, eminent in stature, both moral and intellectual, whose achievements left deep imprints on Western society, its philosophy and way of life.

To illustrate the above, I will mention only three out of the galaxy of these eminent men, who in their spheres, have very profoundly influenced the head and heart of Europe, and each of whom is, in his own right, the founder of a distinctive school of thought. Out of these I will mention Martin Luther first. He directed his attention towards and applied his energies to the Holy Book with a view to bringing about a reformation in the Church, as it existed then. He passionately preached for the containment of the unbounded rights of, and the curtailment of the unfettered powers enjoyed by the Pope and the priests. He left an indelible mark on Christianity and is rightly known as the founder of a religion: Protestantism. The next personality I wish to advert to is Kant, a profound thinker, whose 'Critique of Pure Reason' revealed the limitations of human reason and reduced the whole work of rationalists to a heap of ruins. And justly has he been described as God's greatest gift to his country. The third in my list is Nietzsche, an absolutely unorthodox and

original thinker, who raised the banner of revolt against the prevalent ethical concepts and values, social system and Christianity. He waged a lifelong war against beliefs, fundamentals and philosophies current in his time. Every one of these schools of thought or movements, whatever you prefer to call them, was remarkable for its courageous, revolutionizing and original way of thinking.

Dissatisfaction, restlessness and a desire for change are the basic ingredients in the make-up of the German nation. The personality of Karl Marx embodied in itself revolutionary outlook and psychological restlessness at their highest level. Hence he was able to infuse restlessness in a very large part of the world, a restlessness, which is considered the greatest rebellion against the existing but archaic systems of the present age.

All the above-mentioned movements were revolutionary in the real sense of the word. It may be that at times their spheres were limited, but often their fields of influence were extensive and far-flung; so was the case with their repercussions quite definite and deep at times, if light at others. Germans have always been distinguished for their bravery and boldness, their courage and progressive outlook, their intense urge to attain a leading place among the nations of the world, and for their self-confidence. Even the last two World Wars were, in their essence, two revolutionary adventures in the sphere of world politics and domination. These adventures became necessary because of the sudden effervescence of enthusiasm and ambition which occurred in this Great Nation, bringing to the surface its capabilities and latent powers and thus created in it stout-heartedness and self-confidence. Even today this nation is fired with optimistic attitude towards life and its happiness and is fully conscious of her immense capacity for creative work, development and extraction of joy from life. But for these natural gifts, Germany could not have survived the catastrophes, which have befallen her during the last fifty years and of which there are few parallels in history. It could not have withstood the two disasters each of which was enough to paralyse and overwhelm any other nation, and to sink it in the trough of despondency. Nor could it have arisen, Phoenix-like, from the ashes and debris created by World War II, to resume the struggle with renewed effort and vigour, to reconstruct its social, industrial and aesthetic life.

However, neither the adventures and experiences of this mighty nation, nor the revolutionary movements initiated by it could bring notable changes except within limited circles. This nation has undeniably played an important part in the

orientation of European way of thinking and the evolution of Western society and has thus earned a deserved greatness and fame. It could not, however, totally transform the basic religious trends in Europe, nor could it repair the common man's way of thinking or renovate his mode of life. It failed to set up a new and healthy society or to create a new and better world. The two World Wars were fought for mundane objectives and not for the sake of purification of Christianity, nor for evolution of high moral values, nor for the establishment of principles of humanism, neither their objective was the wresting of leadership from the tyrant and unrighteous and to vest it in the just and merciful. They were not waged to stamp out sin, vice, lewdness and inhumanity. I may be excused, if I say that they were in fact fought for the sole purpose of wresting power and supremacy. Both the contestants seemed to agree that in justice, tyranny, aggression, and spoliation may continue undisturbed but exclusively under its own supervision and guidance. With their high position and greatness in the comity of nations, the Germans could bring about a world revolution, more extensive and more far-reaching in its effect than that which has been achieved by all the past turmoil; a revolution which would have benefited not only Germany or Europe but the entire mankind, giving to the world genuine peace and contentment; a revolution more valuable because of its character, originality of concept, capacity to bring about a healthy change and creativeness. Such a revolution would have been far more valuable than any other brought about in the distant or near past by the distinguished and stout-hearted leaders of Germany.

Germany in spite of its setbacks is fully abreast with the rest of Europe, and it often appears to be ahead of it, in industries, craftsmanship and productivity. With its resources, inventions, productions and amenities of life, it is constantly forging ahead of most nations. But in the present order of things her role is limited to these fields only—a role in which it has exhibited to a remarkable degree its intelligence and genius, its technical skill and perfection, its sense of discipline and perseverance. In these fields it has out-distanced many of her neighbours and occupies a leading place in the centers of international trade and commerce.

It was expected of this country which has always imbued with a spirit of restlessness and which has ever been a cradle and home of revolutionaries, that it would rebel against a civilization which has converted man into a mighty wayward and destructive being, a civilization which has transformed man into a machine, deaf and blind, possessing neither soul nor heart, neither belief nor conscience. In

this civilization the entire world has become a gambling den and an abattoir for souls. It recognizes nothing as its objective except trade and commerce and has thus rendered life void of its real joy, variety, depth and warmth. German nation was expected to rebel against the civilization in which life is nothing but an endless journey bristling with insoluble problems, an unending racers a fruitless effort and aimless activity. Man today is no better than a blindfolded bullock, tethered to an indigenous oil press moving endlessly round the axis of the machine. He has been deprived of his most precious asset, his noblest attributes – faith, conviction and sincerity and purity of thought and warmth of feeling.

It was no idle expectation that some European nation or other would rise in revolt against these base ideologies and artificial values, which, in spite of being man-made, are deeply cherished and which have imposed upon mankind certain standards of life and modes of living without any rhyme or reason, but are so taxing in their demands as to overwhelm a peace-loving man depriving him of his real freedom. German nation, the true worth of which had never been rightly appreciated by Europe, was particularly expected to bring about a change in the course of affairs; not only in its own land but throughout the whole world, and thus to open a new chapter in world history.

On the other hand this consistently steadfast member of the family of European nations, though always envied, distrusted and unequally treated by them, continued to tread the same ideologies, and to co-operate with them for the achievement of the same goal – materialism – with all its kaleidoscopic genius and phenomenal efficiency. It made no attempt to overstep the limits it had set for itself, nor did it take the great leap forward which could at once change its destiny as well as that of the rest of the world; and in addition could secure for it world leadership, an immortal and elevated place in the ranks of nations of the world and an added respect for itself among her neighbors. No other nation but Germans could take this bold step; a step which no other nation of Europe was capable of taking and one which would have broken the artificial and narrow boundaries within which Europe had been living for centuries, and after obliterating the old as well as the new, the oriental as well as occidental ways of life or thinking, would have rescued the world from the tragic results of materialism and tyranny science has brought so close to humanity. As compared to this, the achievements of all the revolutionaries and leaders in the field of Economics, Sociology, and Politics in the different parts of the world would have paled into insignificance.

It is a strange and incomprehensible paradox that Europe which is vigorously pulsating with life and replete with its good things, which leads the bulk of the civilized world, which has unmasked the Universe, harnessed matter and energy to its service and is literally a stranger to a static and inactive life is guided by a religious system, which though it preaches humanism, believes in the existence of an intermediary between man and his Creator, and according to which, in the Crucifixion of Christ lay the salvation of the entire human race, and thus subscribes to the principle of Vicarious Atonement, a dogma which by belittling the values of action and effort and their necessity ultimately leads man to depend upon others and whittles down his will and activity, initiative and capability. To cap it all, the representatives of this religion acted for a long time as barriers between the inquisitive ambitious, dynamic people of Europe and the realms of knowledge and reason. Deviations from the theories advanced by the commentators of the Bible and from the teachings of the clergy, were considered heretical. Persons who in the light of their own commonsense, observations and experience gave vent to their opinion in any way different from those of the said commentators or the clergy were persecuted so cruelly as to remain unparalleled in the history of any other religion.

In course of time Europe rose against bigotry, narrow-mindedness and folly of, and the uncalled-for persecutions by the Church and broke all chains and shackles, which had made it a captive and thus advanced materialistically to an extent unknown in history. Great strides were made in the field of civilization, literature and social sciences. The efforts, unnecessary in quite a few cases, exhausted Europe mentally and physically. She lost that balance which is the mainspring of the genuine well-being of man, and imposed upon her that extremism in attitude and materialism in outlook, which with the passage of time has become her ethos and second nature. The Church has even today a sway over many a Western country and by and large a European's attitude towards religion is divorced from all reason and commonsense, yet in matters relating to civilization and culture he acts quite independently of it. This contradiction between belief and action is the essential feature of every step, which he takes towards progress, and of every facet of his way of living.

Apart from this contradiction, the fact that Europe remained a stranger to Islam, a religion with unadulterated monotheism as its basis and having clear-cut beliefs, distinguished for its limpidity, practicability, dynamism, self-confidence and

respect for human endeavor, has been an event of tragic significance, the poignancy of which history can never forget. In the scale of values of this religious system, individual's effort and action occupy a very high place, so much so, that according to its cardinal articles of Faith, they are the basis of reward or retribution, both in this life and the Hereafter. According to it life is but a bridge to cross over to the next world; thus inducing a man to develop the qualities of manliness, high-thinking and noble-mindedness. Europe remained oblivious to the Apostle of this divine message about whom the Qur'an in its inimitable and majestic style, has said that he is "the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in 'Torah and the Gospel' (which are) with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all the good things and prohibit for them only the foul, and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear."

Crusades and in their wake the clergy and the missionaries and those European authors who neither had a bent for research nor possessed religious values, were mainly responsible for keeping Europe estranged from and antagonistic to Islam and its Prophet. They have presented both the Prophet and his Message in shockingly hideous colors as a result of which astonishingly false and baseless talks have gained currency about them. The dark hallow created round them by such stories, proverbs and sayings, assiduously propagated for generations, prevented Europe from paying her tribute of love for them and acknowledging their greatness. Instances of such malignancy can be easily picked out from any book written on them or cognate subjects during the Middle Ages or even long afterwards. Even today many a zealous Western author refers to and repeats these accusations though with novel techniques and from new angles.

There has been yet another important reason for this antagonism Europe saw Islam mainly through the Turks. Whenever there was occasion for Europe to ponder over Islam, the Ottomans were before her as its accredited and sole representatives on the continent. She did not look at Islam from a detached, independent and objective point of view. To her it was the religion professed by the Ottoman Turks who often attacked the Continent and occupied large slices of her land. They undoubtedly committed some mistakes and on occasions behaved unjustly and violently. All these blurred the vision and acted as hindrances in the way of the making of a balanced and sane appraisal of Islam. Such an

appraisal, needless to say, could only be made by direct and unbiased study of the subject.

Europe's estrangement from Islam has had a very deep and far-reaching effect on the pace of history and civilization and on the development of human society. Had Europe or any of her important nations accepted Islam and sponsored its message, not only the Continent but the entire world would have been quite different from what it is today; life would not have been so utterly meaningless, nor would have religion and morality been so helpless and ineffective as they are today. Civilization would not have been speeding headlong towards destruction, and the East would not have been, as it is today, a free field for extermination, exploitation, extortion and oppression.

The world suffers from a void which has remained unfilled for centuries, a void caused by the absence of a nation strong in every respect – faith, morals and dealings, believing in and propagating the true and final divine message and thus facing the problems of the world boldly, leading humanity to its rightful destiny. Such a nation is required to be outstanding in current culture, genius, creative capacity, to be replete with energy and happiness, and to be a personification of action and effort. A nation with these qualities alone can divert the world from evil to virtue, from destructiveness to construction and from chaos to order.

The Turks led by the House of Ottomans could fill up this void in world leadership. Indeed, they performed this function in the East in the fifteenth century. They led the then Islamic world infusing into it a new life, impulse and energy. They could not, however, play this role in Europe mainly because of their backwardness in the spheres of modern sciences, organization, invention and genuine progress, as well as their continuous preoccupation with the task of repelling invasions of European nations, involving them in an endless series of wars. They could not lead Europe during Renaissance, which gave birth to a new order. As a result of the above mentioned factors, the Turks were outstripped by other nations of Europe and the vacuum is still waiting to be filled up by a nation, oriental or occidental, which may combine in itself faith and knowledge, insight into the potentialities of soul force and matter and integrate the eternal heavenly message, its all-pervading truth, with reason, knowledge and progressive outlook, the plethora of modern resources with holy objectives and thus attain the results vouched by the heavenly religions of which Islam is the last and the most perfect representative. Only such a nation can be the real leader and guide of the world, and fill up the

vacuum; it alone can change the course of history, command the world to move in a new channel and forge a new path by bestowing upon the despondent humanity, bent upon committing *hari-kari* a new lease of life, and thus pull it away from the very brink of the abyss of death towards which it is inexorably heading fast with rocket-like speed.

This would call for a daring revolution, a revolution before which all others brought about by the great revolutionaries and leaders of freedom and progress in the world turn insignificant. It calls for revolutionary change in the attitude of the entire nation, a perilous leap involving tremendous sacrifice, from one way of life to another, from one order of things to a new order and from one faith to another. This vital step can bring to you, people of Germany, a leadership and a greatness, a respect and an influence, an importance and might, a sense of satisfaction and peace, spiritual solace and joy not even dreamt of by your intrepid, bold and war-loving leaders who plunged you into the fires of two horrible wars.

This leap alone can, by giving the right direction to your material power and political supremacy, make you the real leader of and the example for humanity as promised by Allah in the following verses of the Holy Qur'an: –

"And we wished to be Gracious to those who were being depressed in the land, to make them leaders (in Faith) and make them heirs."

"And we appointed from among them leaders, giving Guidance under Our Command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in our signs."

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