

# INSPIRATION

## A DIALOGUE

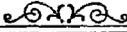
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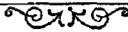




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## P R E F A C E

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There is no subject more important than that of inspiration. There is also no subject upon which men talk more in the East, yet have absolutely vague and unsatisfactory ideas thereon.

The following is an essay in the form of an imaginary dialogue. It attempts to clear up this subject; to show that the Moslem idea of Qur'anic Inspiration, clear cut and definite though it is, will not hold water, will not stand the tests which it itself applies; and that, on the other hand, the Christian idea of inspiration through Christ the Incarnate Word satisfies both spirit, hheart, and intellect alike.

May God use these pages to attract many a Moslem brother to a heart faith in Jesus Christ, and to the book by which we have access to His inspired personality!

## PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE

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The President,  
Sheikh Husain,  
Sheikh 'Abdu'lláh,  
Ahmad,  
Fahmy,  
El-Hindi, an Indian Student,

} Egyptians, }  
} Moslems.

Hanna,  
Bulus,  
Girgis,  
Saleem,

} Christians.

Kohen, ... a Jew.

Scene: Cairo.

## INTRODUCTION

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There were certain friends, mostly students of the great city of Cairo, who were wont to meet together for the purpose of serious discussion, regardless of the fact that they belonged to different religious persuasions. And one day it occurred to them to form themselves into a regular society for the discussion of great religious questions, without bias and without temper.

They therefore met together to arrange the preliminaries, and, after electing a president, an excellent Moslem employed in one of the Government Offices, began to talk about the subject which they should first discuss.

"There is one subject," said el-Hindi, an excellent Indian Moslem from Aligarh, at the time studying Arabic in Cairo, "which I should very much like to hear discussed. It is inspiration. We look around and we see that the Jews have a book which they claim as inspired; the Christians another book; the Moslems a third. Yet nothing could be more dissimilar than these books in character and contents; so much so that it seems hardly possible that they should all have the same sort of inspiration attributed to them. I should like, therefore, to go into this question of inspiration, what is it? how is it manifested?"

"A good idea," said Hanna; "for we Christians continually have it said to us that we have no inspired

book. And when one enquires on what grounds this is alleged, it always appears that our book does not conform to the type of inspiration which exists as a standard in the minds of those objectors. I therefore should also like to thrash out this question. What is this inspiration that we talk so much of? What is the Moslem idea of inspiration, the Christian, the Jewish?"

"Very good indeed," said another speaker, Kohen, the Jew. "That will involve a close study of the contents of those books themselves. From this study we shall be able to infer inductively the type or standard or ideal of inspiration which each one of them yields. And when all is before us we can decide which is the highest, the noblest, the most universal type; and be guided accordingly."

The whole company applauded this, and it was decided that Kohen should lead off the next Friday with an account of the inspiration of the Taurát (Old Testament).

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# INSPIRATION—A DIALOGUE

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## THE FIRST DIALOGUE

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### THE INSPIRATION OF THE TAURÁT (OLD TESTAMENT)

When the friends met on the next Friday after the one on which they had discussed the preliminaries of the subject, the President first called on the Secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting, and after that, said as follows:—

*The President.*—Sirs, we have decided then to examine each of the three books current in Egypt for which inspiration is claimed, with a view to seeing what we may gather from each as to the way in which God reveals Himself to men. I therefore call on Kohen Effendi to open by giving an account of the inspiration of the Taurát.

*Kohen.*—Mr. President and Gentlemen,—When we look through the contents of the Taurát we see at once its manifold character. It consists of many books, confessedly written at different periods, by many different persons—some of them anonymous—and of the most diverse description. Some of its contents are messages in which God is the speaker, speaking to men (as in most of the Súras of the Qur'án): other parts are addresses of men to God (as in the Fátíha or opening Súra of the Qur'án): and

other portions again are simply about God, or His chosen people Israel. It is clear, therefore, that we must examine the book carefully first and sift its contents.

But first, one or two historical matters. When and how were all these books regarded as inspired, so that it might be said they form one sacred book (for I must ask my Moslem friends to let me, for the present, regard the Zabúr [Psalms] and the Taurát [Law] as forming one book)? An exhaustive answer to that question would take too long, but I imagine that all in this room will be satisfied with these facts. (1) The Jews in the first century of the Christian era recognized these same books as sacred and inspired, the Council of Jewish Rabbis at Jamnia at the end of that century putting its seal on them and finally fixing their number. (2) The Jewish writer, Josephus, the celebrated historian of that century, explicitly lays down a list of sacred books which tallies completely with that of the Taurát to-day; and that their contents are the same is evident from the abundant quotations which he makes from them. (3) In like manner, Philo, the celebrated philosopher who wrote before A.D. 40, quotes voluminously from these same books as sacred. (4) Though the Jews had many other religious writings, many of which they venerated very greatly, they venerated these said sacred books in a much higher way, as though quite differently inspired. Philo, for example, never quotes any text as fully inspired except one found in these said Scriptures; and similarly Josephus. (5) The Christians accepted and took over these said Scriptures as the genuine Taurát and read them in the churches till this day, and this in spite of the

fact that we Jews have opposed their religion, a fact which makes impossible any suspicion of collusion. (6) Jesus, whom many accept as Prophet and Christ, set his seal on these same books, for in the comparatively small number of his recorded sayings he is found quoting from nearly every book as the word of God: and similarly, his disciples and other New Testament writers.

This evidence, gentlemen, warrants me in saying that the present Scriptures of the Taurát are what were accepted as such, and as inspired, in the first century of the Christian era. It is possible to go further back, but unnecessary. The Christians already accept the entire collection; the Moslem may well accept it too, for this evidence is all nearly six hundred years before Muḥammad, which proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Taurát appealed to by him as being held by all Jews, even by those who tried to wrest its meaning, was the same as the one accepted by Jews and Christians alike in the first and in the twentieth centuries.

And now, before further classifying these books and thus proceeding to the nature of their inspiration, I will pause in case any of my hearers has any question to put with regard to this historical part of our study. [*He takes his seat.*]

*The President.*—We are obliged to Kohen Effendi for the opportunity. Has any gentleman a question to ask?

*El Hindí.*—What is the history of the canonization of those particular books? I am fairly well up in the history of the canonization of the books of the Gospel, but not in the corresponding history of the Jewish books.

*Kohen.*—The subject is a difficult and complicated one owing to the very great antiquity of the books in question. The history of their collection and canonization has chiefly to be traced by internal evidence, that is from indications found in the books themselves. It was a long process too; for they cover a period of many hundred years.

*Sheikh 'Abdu'lláh.*—But in view of the difficulty and obscurity of the subject, are we warranted in accepting these books as constituting the true Taurát or as inspired, especially as we know that the Jews perverted their Scriptures, a fact we have on the authority of the Qur'án itself?

*The President.*—I must rule your question out of order, Sheikh: for first of all, we have agreed to consider these books as constituting the true Taurát, for the sake of argument. But, on the question of fact, how could our Prophet have testified to a perverted book? This one argument is really sufficient, and the evidence by which Kohen Effendi has traced the book back to the time of 'Ísá in the sixth century before the Hijra is more than sufficient for us. As for the four sole passages in the Qur'án where tahríf is attributed to the Jews, it is absolutely clear that they, in each case, mean perversion of meaning, not of text, as a glance at our greatest commentators would show you.

*Sheikh Husain.*—But what about the tradition that all the books were burned at the captivity six centuries before Christ, and that Ezra two generations later wrote them out from memory. This would destroy our faith in these books.

*Kohen.*—If the first half of this tradition is true, the difficulty is as formidable to you, as a good Moslem,

as it is to me, the Jew; for a Taurát undoubtedly was witnessed to by Muḥammad, and you dare not deny its existence or genuineness. So you would certainly be driven to believe the second half of the tradition, that Ezra did really write them out from memory. And why on earth not, considering, first, that nothing is impossible to God; secondly, that even greater feats of memory are well known to have taken place, nay, are taking place to-day!

*Fahmy.*—Bravo, Sir, your answer is clever! But what is the actual value of that tradition?

*Kohen.*—It is worthless. It occurs in a book written not only after Ezra's time but after the time of Christ! That is, after Ezra by over five hundred years. During those five hundred years we find nothing to support, and everything to discredit, this tradition—which was clearly invented to glorify the name of Ezra, and magnify the undoubted part he took in preserving and collecting the Mosaic law. In other words, it is a superstition.

*The President.*—Well, you seem to be sure of your facts, and I do not suppose any of us have more certain ones to offer. So, if there are no more questions, I would ask you to proceed.

*Kohen.*—We are then agreed that the Taurát of to-day is the Taurát of Muḥammad and of 'Ísá, and is, therefore, whatever we may find in it, to be considered as essentially the word of God. I must bind you, gentlemen, to this conclusion, which prohibits any one of you from objecting to any of the contents as such. I will now proceed to analyse and classify these books, and then we may see what ideas on inspiration they yield.

Now let us classify the contents of this Taurát, which, as we have seen, is really a collection of sacred books.

Our older Rabbis used a three-fold classification. (1) The Law (the five Books of Moses); (2) the Prophets (including the historical books, as having been the work of Prophets); and (3) the Sacred Literature (Kethubim—including the Psalms, or Zabúr, and other books of sacred poetry, or proverbial sayings, etc.)

They predicated inspiration of all of these various books; and, as we have seen in the case of Philo, the inspiration which they predicated was of a very high order. At the same time they were clear that the Taurát (by which they meant the entire content of God's revelation to man), was created. But many of them held that it preceded all other created things, which latter thus existed ideally before they were created really. We are thus reminded of the interesting discussions which Moslems have often held as to the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'án.

As to the inspiration by which this Taurát was conveyed to men, all were agreed that inspiration came from God, and that it was conveyed to inspired persons, and resulted in inspired books. But considerable latitude of belief was permissible as regards the modes by which it came. Philo, for example, distinguishes three modes; (1) where a prophet acts as the interpreter of God, in which case there is complete identification between God and man; (2) where not only does God address the inspired person, but the latter addresses God also; (3) where the inspired one speaks in his own person, though still influenced by the divine Spirit. Philo also conceives of the word

(thought) of God as the mediator of inspiration, just as other Rabbis grouped every medium of inspiration spoken of in the Taurát (angel, spirit, voice, etc.) under the general title of memra, or word of Jehovah.

Thus according to these old Rabbis all the Scriptures were equally inspired, though they recognized a certain difference of mode, and allowed that one mode was more exalted, or more intimate than another. One of the old targums, for example, compared some of God's utterances to the utterances of an awful king who instructs his messenger outside the palace, standing at a distance from him; while others are to be compared to the utterances of the same King sitting within the palace, "as a father would speak to one of his children, placing him upon his lap. and laying a hand upon his head"—a beautiful thought.

All of them, we may conclude by saying, believed in the equal inspiration of every word and letter, as such; and this led to a reverence for the letter of the law, which has very often, I fear, meant a blindness to its spirit. From which we may infer that those old theories of inspiration need not be accepted as themselves inspired. And in fact I am not aware that they are authoritatively binding on any Jew, or whoever else accepts this Taurát.

I would, therefore, beg leave to examine the question anew. I gladly accept the belief of my forefathers that God is the source of the inspiration of all the books, and that all are His word. But I think it wise to recognize frankly distinctions between mode and mode of inspiration. And, for my part, I do not feel prepared to accept any theory which forces

me to believe that every word of these sacred Scriptures is equally inspired: (1) because that is a doctrine of man, not explicitly taught by God; (2) because it leads to the worship of the letter rather than concern for the spirit; (3) because it places divine inspiration at the mercy of the accidents involved in the human processes of copying, processes which depend on infallible memory or an infallible accuracy; and I am convinced that there is not a book in the world, no, not the Qur'an itself, which can prove that it has been from the first transcribed with such infallible accuracy. It is dangerous to make God's truth hang upon so precarious a theory as this. I am convinced, however, that the substance and entire meaning of the book has come down to us providentially from God.

Following out, then, the hint afforded in Philo's threefold division, I see in the Taurát (1) books wherein God is mainly the speaker to man; (2) others where man is the speaker to God; (3) others (such as the historical books) where man merely speaks about God, His people, and His world.

If now we interrogate these books themselves, thus classified, as to how they describe the process of inspiration, we find at once that different ways are described, and that in some cases the mode is not described at all. For example, in the first case (where God Himself speaks to a prophet), the most remarkable instance is the case of Moses, with whom God spoke "face to face as a man speaketh with his friend." This instance is described by the Bible itself as unique, but there are other instances not very dissimilar to it, as for example, when God spoke with Elijah by what is described as a "still small voice."

Other prophets had visions, as Isaiah and Ezekiel, others like Balaam were inspired during a trance, and, on one occasion, Abraham. Others saw and heard Divine things in dreams, during which they received a Divine word. But these very same men were not, it would seem, dependent on such periods; and, in fact, we are in the large majority of cases left in ignorance of the prophet's subjective condition when "the word of the Lord came to him," or when "God spake to him, saying." We must not forget to mention a large class of instances where an angel or the angel of the Lord is said to have appeared to a man and communicated to him God's message; as in the case of Jacob, Gideon, Manoah, Zechariah, etc. In another case it is simply said that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon" so-and-so.

Thus we see that even in this first class there is no absolute rule. All we see is a direct and special communication made from God to man, surpassing the ordinary working of God's Spirit with man, and making him the vehicle of a divine message. The mode we have seen to be manifold; God never obliterates the individuality of the Prophet, which is proved by the fact that the different writings show different characteristics of style; for example, Isaiah's language and style is peculiar to him; it is his, despite the fact that God is speaking through him.

We thus see that it is more direct and accurate to say that God inspired men; these men, under the stress of that divine influence, spoke or wrote prophecies, usually, however, preserving their consciousness, their reasoning power, and their separate individuality; and their words were afterwards gathered

into books; so that, in a secondary sense, we then say that God inspired the books. But the phrase must never be used loosely. It must be laid down clearly at once that if we try exactly to square the mode of Taurát inspiration with that claimed for the Qur'án, we shall get into confusion. And why should we thus try?

Not all that passed between God and these inspired men was gathered into books. It is quite unnecessary to try to prove such a thing, even if we could—which we cannot. Sufficient was gathered. And this doctrine of economy in revelation, if reflected upon, helps greatly to clear up our minds on the subject.

When we come to the second division, that in which man speaks to God, we find that here also very little is said about the mode of inspiration. It is evident to the reader that the saint who is speaking (as David in some of his psalms for example) is under the influence of religious emotion, or in other words, of the Holy Spirit of God, and that it is this divine element which gives his prayers or praises their eternal value. It is quite clear that here we have a mode different from, though just as real as, the other. And the proof is the experience of millions who have found, for example, in David's outpourings of heart to God, a message as divine, a revelation as positive, as in God's messages to David. In other words, we see here once more the Spirit of God working on the human spirit; and the result of the partnership is revealed truth.

Coming to the third class, where the sacred writer wrote compositions of varied character about God (e.g., the Book of Job) or the history of His dealings with men (the historical books), or the relations of godly

men with each other (the Proverbs and similar books), we are again left, by examination of their contents, to infer the mode of inspiration. And here our answer is, that the Spirit, whose modes of working are infinite, guided the writers of these works in a special way, and enabled them to write things for our edification, without which, we should know little about God's dealings with the human race. But the Taurát gives us a connected account of those dealings, and thus guides to a knowledge of who and what God really is, and how in history we may see His workings. We see in it, in fact, the mirror of God's dealings with men; the qualities that make a man acceptable with God and those that forfeit man His favour; we see clearly the beauty of holiness and the ugliness of evil, and the superiority of that to this, whether rewarded in this world or not, whether with or without the hope of immortality.

Are we not right, then, in asserting the inspiration of this book as a whole? From whom else could it have come except from God? You have only to compare it with the religious records of Babylonia and Assyria, yes, and those of Egypt itself, so highly praised recently by Dr. Sayce, to see the immense superiority of the Taurát, its sublimity, its freedom from superstition. Now, my ancestors were not in themselves superior to other nations. Heathen they were in origin, and heathen were their natural selves all along. It was the Spirit of God, who, working successively in their generations, raised up prophets and other holy men, whose writings or the records of whose lives form this book, and reveal God to man. The Jewish race was the chosen means of communication between God and man,

the chosen channel of His self-revelation: the record of that race must, therefore, in virtue of its very subject, if nothing else, be inspired; the Taurát is the record of that race; therefore the Taurát is inspired.

And lastly, we are thus led to perceive one other application of the law of divine economy, and yet another mode of inspiration—that of the selection of the books. Enough were selected by the divine Providence for these purposes of revelation; and He inspired the Jewish leaders in every age to preserve, collect, and arrange such-and-such books, so that we may say that the book in its final form (when it was taken over by the Christians), was in the form that was willed by God. The Spirit of God was not only the author but the editor of the book.

Gentlemen, the method which I have applied to this sacred book is a safe method (it is the only safe method) by which we accept the facts, the data, and form our conclusions from what those data tell us: it is the method of science used with success in all branches of thought to-day, the method which delivers us from the errors due to prejudice, or unreasoning acquiescence in theories which assume what they want to prove. I ask you to criticise my views by this method, and not by your own prepossessions; and I ask you to examine your own books by this theory; it will be better for yourselves and more profitable to us all.

#### DEBATE ON KOHEN'S ADDRESS ON OLD TESTAMENT INSPIRATION.

*The President.*—We thank Kohén Effendi for his learned address, which we appreciate in spite of the strangeness of its ideas. I now throw the meeting

open for discussion of this matter, or for questions on the subject of the address.

*Sheikh Husain.*—Sirs, I am unable to find words to express my astonishment at this address, or my indignation at the utter inadequacy of the descriptions of inspiration which it contained. It is perfectly incredible to me that any religious man should be satisfied with these views, or believe in a book from which they are deduced, or remain in the religion of that book. For it is obvious that they contradict every sound idea of inspiration. Most of the modes of inspiration described differ radically from those enumerated by our commentators after diligent study of the Qur'án, for example, the Sheikhs Jiwán Ahmad, Ibn Khaldún, Abú Hanifa. Now it is certain that these give us the only complete account of inspiration, and, therefore, when we hear statements like those of Kohen Effendi, we know them at once to be false, and the book which he defends to be corrupt.

*The President.*—Excuse me, Sheikh, your remarks are beside the point. With the authenticity or non-authenticity of the Taurát we have nothing to do at this moment. We are simply to hear, and, if possible, understand a view of inspiration based on the Taurát, and afterwards to compare it with views based on the Injil and Qur'án, all in due course. Then you will have liberty to prefer one to the other, just as you like, or even to reject one or other of the books if your are so led.

*Bulus.*—The Sheikh seems to me to have fallen into the old, old error of assuming what he wants to prove (viz., that the theory of inspiration drawn from the Qur'án by Ibn Khaldún and the rest is the only

possible or conceivable true theory), and then summarily rejecting all that conflicts with that. This, of course, is absurd. It is the mere negation of the search for truth; and if the world held to that method we should be believing that the sun goes round the earth to this day. To me the ideas of Kohen Effendi were nearly as new and strange as they are to the honourable Sheikh, for my ideas of Inspiration have (I think) very closely resembled his, but I am not going, therefore, to reject an idea because it is new or strange. I for one shall certainly reflect on what I have heard.

*Sheikh 'Abdu'lláh.*—I sympathize with Sheikh Husain, but at the same time I see we have no right to assume that only one way of inspiration is possible to God. But the speaker said that he could not accept the equal inspiration of each word and letter of Scripture, owing to the impossibility of proving that each such word and letter has been transmitted with exact precision: and he threw doubts upon the exactitude with which the Qur'án has been transmitted. There, of course, he is clearly wrong, as I will now prove.

*The President.*—I think you had better postpone that last point to next time, Sir, when we discuss the inspiration of the Qur'án.

*Kohen.*—I simply said that there was danger that mistakes would be made in transmission, and that a theory of inspiration which depends for its life on the assumption that no such mistakes ever did or could occur was itself a dangerous theory.

*Sheikh Husain.*—Then look at the contradictions in the book! I have here a list of hundreds of these, and will now proceed to give some of them to

this assembly, challenging Kohen Effendi to explain them.

*Hanna.*—I rise to order, Mr. President. It is not our business here to explain, or fail to explain, these difficulties. For we are not talking of the fact of inspiration now, but the manner of alleged inspiration.

*El-Hindi.*—I was interested in Kohen Effendi's saying that he did not feel himself bound to adopt all his forefathers' ideas on this subject. I think he is right in this. We hardly claim inspiration for all the inferences of the men of old, I imagine. But I should like him to explain more clearly what he meant when he said that he did not feel bound to accept any theory which regarded each word of Scripture as equally inspired.

*Hanna.*—Let me answer for my friend Kohen, for I think I can illustrate his meaning with an example. I liken the Bible to an organism like the body. Now, every part and particle of a body is indeed animated by the life of the whole, yet its parts are not all of equally vital importance. They are in fact of all grades of importance—from the heart which you could not so much as prick with a pin for fear of destroying the whole, to the hair and nails which you could clip or pare without making the slightest difference to life, or injuring the body in the smallest degree. And between these extremes are organs of every grade of importance and essentiality. Just so is it with the words of Scripture. There are teachings you could not touch without destroying the whole: there are again parts which, if missing, would constitute a loss more or less serious, even though vital parts remained; and finally, there are words or short phrases

which make no essential difference at all to the life, i.e., the meaning of the whole. And of these are the words and phrases which have become uncertain or have been dropped in the process of copying. This is, to say the least, as reasonable a view as that which asserts that all the words and letters of a sacred book are on dead level of importance and intensity of inspiration and essential divinity.

*Kohen.*—Thank you, Sir. Your metaphor is good. I say, moreover, that when God intends to convey a moral and spiritual meaning it is possible for that to be conveyed in very many ways. I believe He allowed considerable freedom to the men whom He inspired by His Spirit to reproduce the divine meaning. He gave, say, the same thought to both Isaiah and Jeremiah, but you will find that they reproduce it in quite different ways, and totally different words and style. He did not make these men tools or machines. We cannot say that God has a literary style peculiar to Himself. I feel inclined to say, "Far be it from Him that He should have a literary style!" Yet it seems to me that this is just what those say who make no allowance for the human medium of inspiration.

*Sheikh Husain.*—There is another point. Can a translation be said to reproduce accurately the original? How can God's Word be translated?

*Kohen.*—My doctrine that inspiration resides in the meaning and spirit solves this difficulty also. A good translation does give, and give accurately, the meaning and spirit of every passage, and it can always be improved from time to time. Whereas, by your denial of this, you first of all assert that your own book is

useless to all those who do not know Arabic, and secondly, that if a sacred language once becomes dead, any book written in it becomes utterly useless and unintelligible; for a knowledge of a dead language can only be acquired by what is in fact a process of translation.

*An Azhari Sheikh.*—It is true that many Turks and Indians, for example, cannot understand the Qur'án, not knowing Arabic. But they can understand its substance when explained to them.

*Kohen.*—Precisely, Sir. In other words, the substance is the important thing. How much more then may we say that those who read an accurate translation of the very text of the Taurát grasp its entire substance and, therefore, profit from its essential inspiration.

*Fahmy.*—Well said, Sir. That is a notable argument. And, as a matter of fact, Qur'anic Arabic is to some extent a dead language even to us; that is, many words and expressions in it have totally fallen out of use, and have to be translated into modern equivalents to be understood. What else is the science of Tafsí? So if we deny the validity of translations, we deny the possibility or the utility of inspiration itself.

*Ahmad.*—If I may venture to sum up the speaker's three methods of inspiration, I find that the first of the three is more or less identical with that claimed for the Qur'án, while for the second and third we have no Moslem equivalent—unless we say that the Fátíha corresponds to the prayers of the Taurát. So that we must choose between rejecting two-thirds of the Taurát, or admitting that God has more ways of revealing himself by inspiration than we are aware

of. I was also interested in the speaker's idea of divine economy, applied to the possibility that God only suffered a sufficiency of His revelation to be gathered into the volume, not necessarily all of it. Certainly this reminds us of His methods of working in nature. It set me thinking, too, is there not an application of this doctrine to the Qur'án itself? Can we prove that all the word of God preserved on the table was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, or that if it was it was all collected into the Qur'án?

*Sheikh Husain (springing up).*—Really, Mr. President  
.....!

*The President.*—Ahmad Effendi was scarcely in order: and, moreover, as the time has gone we shall not discuss further. But in order to relieve the overburdened feelings of our revered Sheikh, I will, in the name of the committee, ask him to introduce the subject of the inspiration of the Qur'án next time, when he will have ample opportunity of replying to all that he has objected to to-day, and bringing forward his positive beliefs on the subject.

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## THE SECOND DIALOGUE

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### THE MOSLEM VIEW OF INSPIRATION

*The President.*—Gentlemen, having heard at length from Kohen Effendi the nature of the inspiration of the Taurát as gathered from a study of the book itself, the committee has decided to take the inspiration of the Qur'an next, since we continually found that Kohen Effendi's ideas were running counter to all the ideas we had ever held or heard of on the subject; we therefore felt it desirable to hear a statement of a view as different as possible from that advanced by Kohen Effendi that we might have the contrast brought vividly before us. We can afterwards hear what our Christian members have to say. I call upon the Sheikh Husain 'Abd el-Majid el-Tantáwi to open the discussion.

*Sheikh Husain.*—My tongue, Excellent Sirs, is incapable of expressing my satisfaction in this opportunity of at last placing before the members of this Society an adequate view of inspiration, one which satisfies the soul and mind of the wisest and the most ignorant, one which being, moreover, drawn from the study of the unquestioned book of God is itself beyond criticism or question. I hope to show, too, how this view is superior to, and indeed destructive of, the extraordinary ideas propounded to us by our Israelitish friend.

### I The eternal aspect of the Qur'án

Know then, O Members of this honourable society, that the Qur'án is not a book that came into existence in the time of the Prophet through whom it was made known; such a description merely accounts for the letters, the vowels and the writing with which it is written, for these are the works of man: so said the famous Abú Hanífa. But as for the word of the Qur'án, it existed before such transcription, before the Prophet himself, before history, before the world, before creation itself—in fact, it is uncreate. Such is clearly the opinion of the great Imáms, who drew the opinion from a study of the book itself—the very principle upon which we have agreed to proceed in this society (so we see we need never think to improve on the great men of old; we can never do more than follow). For example, Abú Hanífa says: “The Qur'án is the word of God, and it is His inspired word and revelation. It is not God but it is inseparable from God. God's word is uncreated. Its words, its writings, its letters, and its verses are for the necessities of man, for its meaning is arrived at by their use: but the word of God is fixed in the essence of God, and he who says it is created is an infidel.”

The entire Qur'án, therefore, in its present form, existed as an attribute of God from all eternity; it was written, together with the actions of men, on the Preserved Tablet; it was transcribed from thence by the hands of heavenly beings; it was thus sent down to the lowest heaven complete, and from thence it was sent down by means of Gabriel to Muḥammad the Prophet, piece by piece. Gabriel is once named

in Suratu'l Bakara; he is also variously called "The Faithful Spirit," or simply "The Angel."

## II Its Earthly History

Following now its earthly history, we know that the times or fits of the Prophet's inspiration were clearly distinguished by extraordinary symptoms, whereby we may be sure that no uninspired material crept into the Qur'án. Every Moslem knows the famous passage in Bukhárí, where 'Áyesha describes the first revelations that came to Muḥammad and the first piece of the Qur'án that was actually brought down to him (I mean the first five verses of Suratu'd-Alaq [xvi]). She also related that Hárith ibn Hishám asked him "How did the revelation come to you?" and he said, "Sometimes like the noise of a bell, and sometimes the angel would come down and converse with me in the shape of a man." We know also that at least once he was caught up to heaven in the night journey, and there received the word without mediation from God Himself, though whether with face veiled or unveiled our commentators are not agreed. But in every case his human body underwent strange phenomena of unconsciousness or ecstasy, during which time he received the word of God. Then, when he recovered, he repeated it to a bystander, who preserved it either by writing it on white stones, or date-leaves, or by committing it to memory.

Finally, after the death of Muḥammad, when it was found that many readers had been slain at the battle of Yamáma, and that the word was in danger of perishing, the Khalifa commanded Zaid ibn Khábit to collect all these fragments from stones, date-leaves, and

the breasts of men, into one volume. This was done by a process of scrutiny so accurate that addition, subtraction, or change of the original was utterly out of the question. The second recension, some years later, under 'Uthmán the Khalifa was merely to assimilate the text of the Qur'án to the dialect of the Quraish, in which it had been sent down, since people of other tribes were reciting it in other dialects contrary to the original text.

And copies having been made of this recension they were sent to the chief quarters of the Moslem world, and from these have sprung, in absolute and flawless uniformity, all copies, written or printed, to this day.

Thus we see we have a complete chain of connected events from the descent of the Qur'án from highest heaven to the present day, whereby one may be certain that this copy which I hold in my hand is word for word, syllable for syllable, letter by letter, the eternal word of God, unchanged and unmodified and unchangeable.

This is the true view of the inspiration of the Qur'án. That it is the highest form of inspiration is self-evident—what higher or more perfect form can be conceived. I do not deny there are kinds—our 'Ulamá have admitted that there are and have classified them. But this is the unique kind, the insurpassable. Therefore, the book that possesses it is the unique and insurpassable and final book, and the religion of that book is the finally true religion. For only that religion and that book and that inspiration ensure our possession of the direct word of God, absolute truth, unalloyed fact concerning this world and the next. This I assert. And, moreover, I find my assertion virtually

supported by the very defenders of other so-called sacred books. I say nothing as to whether the present Taurát is the true Taurát, or the present Injil the true Injil: but even assuming that they are so, it is plain from their contents, as even Kohen Effendi admitted, that they make no claim to be wholly informed by this absolute inspiration. They are not invariably, on the face of them, the address of God to a Prophet: they contain histories, songs, prayers, letters, traditions, and what-not, admittedly by human authors and often with no claim that God is behind those authors. What shall we say to these things? The answer is plain: even assuming some inspiration for them, it is inspiration of an inferior kind and degree. Therefore, the Qur'án, last in time, is first in value, for in it inspiration has reached its climax. Therefore Islam is the final and one true religion, for while the religions of Moses and Jesus (on them be peace) were preparatory, they must yield and bow to the religion of the Prophet. And may peace be to you, first and last.

*The President.*—You have heard, Gentlemen, the speech of Sheikh Husáin, and the orthodox Sunni doctrine of inspiration. It is so simple and complete that I do not imagine there can be many questions to ask concerning it or many difficulties to urge against it. Still, if anyone has a question or a difficulty I have no doubt the learned speaker will be glad to hear them.

*Hanna.*—By your leave, Mr. President, a large number of difficulties occurred to me as I listened to the Sheikh's exposition. I do not think that the theory is so simple and complete as is generally believed;

much less it is worthy to be taken as a norm with which our sacred books must be measured and then rejected. Let me mention the points as I noted them down.

#### Criticism of the Eternal Aspect of the Qur'ân

First, that "the Qur'ân is uncreate." I find it impossible even to understand the meaning of this claim for the Qur'ân or any other book. If it is said that it pre-existed in the thought of God, why, so did everything else—and wherein then can it claim a special character? And this is made very clear by what the Qur'ân says about the "Preserved Tablet," in which (as is expressly said) all the deeds of men were written down—not merely the Qur'ân.<sup>1</sup>

*Sheikh Husain.*—No, but we say that the substance (مدلول) of the Qur'ân had actual existence in the divine essence in quite a different sense from that in which the actions of men are foreknown in the divine thought. These latter did not exist while they were merely foreknown: but the Qur'ân existed, just as each of the divine attributes existed in the divine essence, for we believe the substance of the Qur'ân to be a necessary divine attribute. And just as there was never a time when the mercy of God (for example) did not exist, so there was never a time when the substance of the Qur'ân did not exist.

*Hanna.*—If the Qur'ân merely consisted of general statements which enunciated the attributes of God in a series of propositions, one might attach some sort of meaning to your notion, for we might in that case say

<sup>1</sup> Sûratu Yâ Sîn, xxxvi. 12.

that these statements were the self-revelation of God, and revealed the sum of His attributes. And in this sense it might be possible by a stretch of language to say that such a book was uncreate, meaning by this that its contents were exclusively concerned with uncreated things, viz., the eternal attributes of God. But, as a matter of fact, the enormously greater part of the Qur'án is about earthly events, stories of prophets and unbelievers, etc. : and how on earth can these be said to have a part in the divine essence, as distinct from the divine foreknowledge ?

*Sheikh Abdallah.*—The Qur'án enunciates the eternal moral law. As such it is as much a divine attribute as the divine holiness.

*Girgis.*—Not so, Sir : very many of the commands of the Qur'án are purely temporary and occasional, some of them about trivial matters, such as matters concerning Muḥammad's private domestic concerns. Other commands are so purely occasional that they only lasted a few years and then were cancelled. They had, on the face of it, nothing to do with the eternal moral order, but were simply directions to suit a temporary emergency and a definite historic situation. How can you then possibly say that such local matters or directions concerning them were part of a necessary attribute of God !

*Hanna.*—It comes to this : either the Qur'án pre-existed, in the sense in which all other events pre-existed, in the knowledge of God, in which case it is itself an *accidens* and can claim no superiority over other *accidentia* ; or, you make particular finite, historical matters part of the eternal living attributes of God, in which case you associate something finite

with the essence of the infinite One, which is Ishrák and infidelity!

*El-Híndi.*—It is perfectly true that so much difficulty was felt in old times in this matter that some 'Ulamá held that the subject-matter of the Qur'án was partly eternal and partly temporal.

*Hanna.*—Very good; but what then comes of the homogeneous character of the inspired book, or its uncreateness as a whole, or its pre-existence *qua* book? It is this notion which I think so mechanical, limitative of God, and therefore unworthy of Him: and we have seen the logical absurdities with which it is connected.

*Fahmy.*—But if the Book did not pre-exist as a book, what becomes of the doctrine of the tanzíl ('bringing down') and the whole doctrine of inspiration? If there was nothing to "bring down," then there was no "bringing down," i.e., no inspiration.

*Hanna.*—Pardon me, inspiration may be a fact, and the doctrine of tanzíl an erroneous hypothesis to account for that fact. I believe in inspiration, but I think the doctrine of tanzíl is an error and one that degrades rather than elevates the idea of inspiration: (1) because the doctrine of tanzíl tends to fix the attention of men on the words rather than on the sense, on the means rather than the end; and (2) because it takes away all distinction from the inspired man, since his intellect and other faculties play no part in the process of inspiration. He becomes a mechanical instrument—like a phonograph, for example. On this showing God might just as well have chosen any other, even non-human, means to be the medium of revelation; yes, and if he had created

a phonograph with which to effect this purpose it would have been a much more accurate way, and much better safeguarded from human carelessness and inaccuracy in the transmission of words. If then anyone feels that the doctrines of inspiration (wahí) and tanzil are inseparably connected, it would be far safer to dispense altogether with the term wahí and to use instead ilhám to prevent all misunderstanding and obscurity.

*‘Uthmán.*—No, no, the term wahí is not exclusively predicated of the Qur’án. We believe the Prophet was always under the influence of a sort of wahí, so that his daily acts and words (preserved in the traditions) are inspired and binding on us to follow them, and we reckon this as ilhám and as practically an inferior form of wahí.

*Hanna.*—Well and good; I will not argue the justice of that last claim (you know we disagree on the point); but I only beg leave to think that that it implies what is really a higher, not a lower, idea of inspiration, and makes otiose and superfluous the Qur’anic view, with all its paraphernalia of a tablet and a tanzil, which Moslems fancy to be so superior.

*Sheikh Husain.*—The authorized commentators say that the inspiration of the Qur’án (wahí matlú) is the supreme form; and that is enough. To inquire too closely into the how of things is infidelity.

*Hanna.*—It is just your inquiries into the how of things that I protest against as barren and misleading! Let me now, having criticized the transcendental doctrine of the Qur’án, come to the matter of its transcription and transmission after its appearance on earth.

### Criticism of the Earthly History of the Qur'án

*Hanna.*—Having now criticized the theories of the eternity of the Qur'án and its descent and its literal inspiration, I beg to proceed to the matter of its transmission. And here I maintain (1) that it is simply impossible to be certain that we have the whole of that which was "brought down," or (2) that what we have is exactly what left Muḥammad's lips.

*Kohen.*—That is, as I remarked, not a serious matter for those of us who believe that God exercised an economy in what He caused to be collected into a book, and that inspiration is rather of the spirit than of the letter: but it is a most serious, nay, a vital matter for those who believe that the inspired material was absolutely limited in quantity and throughout rigidly defined in letter as well as spirit.

*Sheikh Husain.*—Precisely, and for this very reason we have an account of the transmission of the Qur'án in which there is no shadow of a flaw.

*Hanna.*—That is what I deny. I admit it is wonderfully good, and quite good enough to make us feel confidence that the Qur'án account gives the substance of Muḥammad's teaching, but it is utterly insufficient for a book for which claims are made like the claims made for the Qur'án. For such a book, you must be able to prove negatively as well as positively that the whole material of the revelation was collected, and that it was collected with absolute accuracy and handed on without the smallest change.

*Sheikh Husain.*—I have done so.

*Hanna.*—You are far from having done so. First of all, on the authority of the undisputed tradition

concerning Zaid's recension, we know that not all the suras, or verses, were taken down in writing from Muhammad's lips—many of them were merely enshrined "in the breasts of men." Many years passed before they were first transcribed from the memories of these men by Zaid. How then can we be possibly sure that their memories had not played them false? Such verses in fact, from a critical point of view, rank with traditions, and how many times have I heard Moslems in attacking the Injil say that you cannot be verbally sure of any traditions that were not committed to writing on the spot? This attack now turns back on the Qur'án, for since we do not know which parts of it were transcribed by Zaid from the "palm leaves and white stones," on which they had been written originally, and which parts were gathered "from the breasts of men," we cannot be sure of the literal accuracy of a single verse!

*Kohen.*—Moreover, in the account concerning Zaid's recension, we read that verses were only admitted as genuine on the testimony of two witnesses. But it might quite well happen that one witness might have a genuine verse which was rejected, and two witnesses might bring a spurious or at least a verbally inaccurate verse which was admitted. You cannot possibly disprove this! On the contrary, it is more than probable that such did occur.

Here is an instance when a verse was inserted in a slack unofficial way. When Kharija ibn-Zaid ibn-Thabit found a verse that had not been included in the authorized copy of 'Uthmán, and so presumably in that of Abú-Bakr also, he coolly inserted it without asking any one's leave. Bukhári relates: "Khárizah,

son of Zaid-ibn-Thábit, informed me saying, 'I could not find one verse when I was writing the Qur'án, which I had heard from the Prophet; then I looked for it, and found it with Khuzaina, and I entered it into Súratu'l-Ahzáb.'" (xxxiii.)

*Girjis.*—And in fact, what shall we say if we can prove that additions were made to the Qur'án, apart from this incident?

*Husain.*—You can never prove that. You Christians and Jews have the monopoly of that, thank God.

*Girjis.*—Not so. Tell me now, was Ibn Mas'úd a trustworthy authority on the Qur'án?

*Husain.*—The very best! In al-Mishkát Muham-mad is recorded to have said "Learn the Qur'án from these four, 'Abd'ulláh ibn Mas'úd, etc.'.....And in Muslim, Ibn-Mas'úd is recorded to have said of himself: "The Companions of the Prophet well know that I know the Qur'án better than they all." And yet again the Prophet said of him: "Let him who wishes to read the Qur'án as it was sent down, read according to the reading of the son of the mother of 'Abd (i.e., 'Abd'ulláh ibn Mas'úd)."

*Girjis.*—Well, Sir, are you aware that Ibn Mas'úd would have nothing to do with 'Uthmán's collection: that he refused to hand over his copy to be burned: that he advised his people, those of 'Iráq, to hide their copies, saying: "O people of 'Iráq, hide your Qur'áns, and shut them up under lock and key;" that his own copy was forcibly seized and burned by 'Uthmán, who beat Ibn Mas'úd to death; and finally that Ibn Mas'úd did not include the first and the last two Súras in his Qur'án, condemning them as not part of the true Book? How can you say then that

there has never been any addition? Here is clearest proof of it. [A pause, during which the Moslem members appear very disconcerted.] Now, Bulus, what have you to say about omissions?

*Bulus.*—Before I say anything, I wish just to remind you that millions of Moslems in Persia attribute both addition and omission to ‘Uthmán. They say that he took out many references laudatory of ‘Ali, and they have a whole Súra which they say was left out bodily. Certain it is that ‘Ali, like Ibn Mas‘úd, refused to allow his copy to be “corrected” by ‘Uthmán, saying it was perfect as it stood.

Now (taking a paper out of his pocket) what Kohen Effendi said is certainly true, on the showing of trustworthy traditions. For example, in Muslim we find the following: “We used to read a Súra equal in length and threatenings to Súratu’l Bará‘at (ix). I have forgotten it wholly except one verse . . . . . and we also used to read another Súra that was equal to one of the Musabbihát; I forgot that too, saving one verse which I recollect.” ‘Áyesha said (quoted by Jalálu’d-Din, on the authority of Ibn Abú-Miriam, Abú Laheifa, and ‘Arwa Ibn al-Zubeir) that “the Súra of al-Ahzáb was also recited in the time of the Prophet with two hundred verses, but when ‘Uthmán wrote out the Qur‘án only what now is read was officially proved (i.e., seventy three verses); and that in it was the verse of stoning.” A tradition in the Itqán says: “Ibn Jásh said; Ibn K‘áb said, ‘How many verses are there in Súratu’l-Ahzáb?’ I said, ‘seventy-two or seventy-three.’ He said, ‘Súratu’l-Ahzáb was (once) equal to Súratu’l-Baqarah.’” And Bukhári has written in his history a tradition from Hazifa, that the latter said, “I was

reading *Súratu'l-Aḥzáb* before the Prophet, but I forgot seventy verses from it, and I did not obtain them again." Jalálu'd-Din also quoted another tradition from 'Ayesha (on the authority of 'Ubeid, Ibráhím, Aiyóub, Náfi.) "One of you saith, 'I have learned the whole Qur'án.' He knoweth not what is the whole, for there hath gone from it much Qur'án. Let him rather say, 'I have learned what has appeared.'" "Ibn 'Umar said, 'Let no one of you say, I have the whole Qur'án.' That which is known is not the whole, for a great part has been taken from it: but say, I have that which has been saved (made manifest) from it." "Ibn-'Abbás said, 'I asked 'Ali ibn Abi Tálíb, Why was not the Bismilla written in *Súratu'l-Bará'at* (ix)? He said, 'Because the Bismilla is for faith, but *Súratu'l-Bará'at* was sent down for the sword (war). And there is a tradition from Málik that when the first portion of *Súratu'l-Bará'at* (ix) was destroyed, then the Bismilla was lost with it; but if it had been proved, then verily it would have been equal in length to *Súratu'l-Baqara*.'" By this we see that it is certain that many serious omissions were made. Therefore your eternal word of God has suffered Naqṣ (diminution).

*Hanna*.—But worst of all is the omission of *Ayatu'r-Rajm*, the very verse you remember which the Jews refused to delete from the Old Testament. But the Moslems were more complaisant!! Here is the story as it stands in one of the most authentic Moslem books, the *Itqán* of as-Syúti:—

"..... In *Súratu'l-Aḥzáb* was *Ayatur-Rajm*. Ibn K'ab said, 'and what is ar-Rajm?' Ibn Jish said, 'If any man or woman commit adultery, stone them.'"

“‘Ayesha said that the *Súratu'l-Aḥzáb* which she was reading was incomplete. In the time of the Prophet it contained two hundred verses. And when ‘Uṭhmán wrote the *Qur’án*, he accepted nothing except what he found authenticated, and in it was *Ayatu'r-Rajm*.”

*El-Hindi*.—I confess that the story accounting for the disappearance of that Ayat is an absurd one, though it seems authentic enough. Here it is: “‘Áyesha related, ‘The *Ayatu'r-Rajm* and the *Ayatu'r-Ridá'ati* were sent down and committed to writing. But the paper was underneath my bedstead. And when the Prophet died, and we were taken up with his death, a goat entered the room and ate it up’”. Certain it is that that Ayat is not to be found in the *Qur’án* to-day.

*Hanna*.—What a crushing commentary on your assertion that God necessarily preserves His word from the slightest diminution! Why did He not stop that goat? [Blank silence among the Moslem members.]

*Sheikh Husain*.—Mr. President, this is utterly abominable. To make such attacks on the *Qur’án* is an offence worthy of the direst punishment, and is threatened with as much by the Prophet.

*Hanna*.—The Sheikh does not see that we are not attacking the *Qur’án* at this moment, but simply a theory of inspiration. I admit that on a different theory of inspiration such diminutions and alterations might be considered as irrelevant; but on the current Moslem theory (to which we are objecting) they are not trivial matters, but vital. They either must make you change your theory or deny your book. For the theories of previous existence, *tanzil*, literal inspiration, and literally accurate transmission are all bound up

together. It is this last link that connects you, the reader, with God, the Author. If it snaps, the whole chain is gone; for what is the use of the tanzil and the literal inspiration if the inspired words were not equally, literally, and exactly preserved—as we know they have not been. My conclusion is, that just because the condition of literally exact transmission has not been and can never be fulfilled, the theory of literal inspiration, with its corollaries of tanzil and pre-existence must be given up too, as we saw on other grounds they should be given up. And we are thus left free to adopt a more spiritual view of inspiration.

*Bulus.*—And further, the whole ground of attack on the Injil and Taurát on the score of inaccuracy of transmission and selection of material falls to the ground.

*Sheikh 'Abdu'lláh.*—You are robbing us of the word of God, and of our God Himself! For unless I can believe in a book in which man had no part and God every part, I have no reason for believing in God.

*Hanna.*—Nay, my brother. Not even the Moslems have succeeded in eliminating the human element from inspiration—man had his hand (as we have seen) in the transmission of the Qur'án, as he has in the transmission of every book, and especially such books as the Qur'án. In one word, if you pin your faith to a book as book you are lost! first, because we see that the most elaborate pains cannot guarantee the exact transmission of the original, and secondly, because the very slavishness of the care for the letter demanded by this theory has always tended to the worship of the letter and the neglect of the spirit.

This is the lesson that God teaches me in the fact of His having permitted a margin of textual uncertainty in all His sacred books, without exception.

*El-Hindi.*—But at least the text of the Qur'án is much more uniform than that of the Taurát or Injíl.

*Hanna.*—True, but that does not affect the principle. Moreover, all copies of the Qur'án have descended from one parent copy which is now destroyed, and which was itself removed by two stages from the lips of Muḥammad. Personally I do not believe in the existence of one of 'Uṯmán's original copies anywhere; and I doubt whether there exists any manuscript belonging even to the first century of the Hijra. But even if one of 'Uṯmán's copies were extant, it is only the copy of a copy of an imperfect record of Muḥammad's words. In fine, you are (I gladly admit) guaranteed substantial accuracy: but literal accuracy or substantial completeness—no!

*Bulus.*—Moreover the value of the uniformity of the existing copies of the Qur'án is indeed largely discounted just because their parent copy was destroyed, for we have no means of proving that that copy was itself a good one. Such a process as that of 'Uṯmán's, who, when he had made his copy, burned all previous existing ones, may really only perpetuate and register mistakes. Now our manuscripts come from all parts of the ancient Christian world, and nothing is concealed. By comparing them together you may arrive at the essence of the original—and the very differences become a witness to that unchangeable original essence. Imagine two masters dictating two pieces, extempore, to two different classes of boys. The first master destroys all the boys' versions except one, and does

not correct that one. The second master keeps all the versions, mistakes and all. Now in which case would you have most confidence of being able to reproduce the original? Certainly the second case, for by comparing all the copies you can eliminate the mistakes and arrive at the original. In the first case you have indeed uniformity—for only one copy is left; but as it may itself have been full of errors you have no sense of security, since the means by which it might have been compared and verified have for ever been destroyed.

*Sheikh Husain.*—I fail to find words to express my disgust at these peddling objections. Man needs a direct revelation of the word of God, and that revelation must be by a book, and that book must have been brought down intact and transmitted intact. And only the Qur'án fulfils all these conditions.

*Hanna.*—Assertion is no argument, Sheikh. It is your theory of inspiration that we have attacked, as not meeting the very need you have mentioned, viz., of a direct revelation of the word of God. I absolutely share that feeling of need, and further I greatly admire the Moslem demand that the revelation, or the word, should have eternally existed in the essence of God. It is a true demand, founded on a true need of the soul. Only I find that the demand is not satisfied, if that word or revelation is absolutely identified with a book. Thank God, however, this noble imagination of Islamic theology has been realized, and this craving of Islam can therefore be satisfied—but not by any book as such, however inspired. And with joy I ask the leave of the President to lay before this Society some principles of inspiration gathered from

the study of the Injil which show how self-revelation is of the nature of God, and how the word of God was eternally in the essence of God and was revealed in all fulness to men, and how revelation is related to the inspiration of the book which perpetuates it. Have I your leave, Mr. President?

*The President.*—Yes; and we may defer the remainder of the controversy till we hear what you have to say on the positive side. The session is concluded.

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## THE THIRD DIALOGUE

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### THE INSPIRATION OF THE GOSPEL

*The President.*—Sirs, once more welcome to this debating-hall and another meeting of this Society, which I open in the Name of God. You are aware of the interesting point at which we have arrived in our discussions. Kohen Effendi first described to us the mode of inspiration which he discovered in the Taurát and laid before us some ideas which were decidedly new to us. Then the Sheikh Husain explained the theory of inspiration which is inferred both from the study of the Qur'án itself and the traditions that touch upon the subject. We then saw that this theory was utterly different from that put forward by Kohen Effendi. And although we do not deny, a priori, that God is not confined to one method, yet all the Moslem members of the Society were quite clear that, when these two methods were placed before them, that of the Qur'án was shown to be incomparably the highest—nay, that it is the highest conceivable one—and that that of the Taurát (to say the most for it) was an exceedingly low type of inspiration. But here some of the Christian members struck in, and maintained that there were weak points in the seeming strength of the Moslem theory, and that an examination of the Injil would not only show that, but would also confirm Kohen Effendi's ideas and show that in the Injil inspiration reaches its *ne plus ultra*. This is an immense claim—

one which we cannot readily allow; but we shall at least give a fair hearing now to Hanna Effendi and see what he can say in support of this claim.

*Hanna.*—I gratefully acknowledge the courtesy with which the President and the Society have called on me to give my ideas, and I rise feeling deeply my responsibility to explain clearly what seems to me to be the truth. In accordance, therefore, with the scientific method which is the one we have been attempting to follow, we must inquire first what are the facts before us, and secondly, what is the view that best accounts for these facts: in other words, we must survey the phenomena which these writings present and base our view of their inspiration on these phenomena. Not until then shall I be justified in claiming that in the Gospel inspiration reaches its *ne plus ultra*.

When we glance superficially over the Injil we at once see (as Kohen Effendi pointed out in regard to the Taurát), that it consists of many parts or books; that these books are ascribed to different authors; and that the character of the writings varies very much indeed. As in the case of the Taurát we have here books of a historical nature, four of them concerned with the earthly life of the Saviour (the Memoirs of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), and one concerned with the early history of the Society (or Church) which He formed after His ascension. The remainder of the books, however, with one exception, are of a character quite different to anything found in the Taurát, for they are letters from individual Apostles to various branches of the Christian Church, about deep matters of Christian theology and Christian morality. The last book alone resembles in character some of the prophecies of the Taurát, especially the book

of Daniel. All these books together make up the Christian book, to which Christians usually give the name of the New Testament, and which Moslems generally call the Injil, though we must never forget that that word, a Greek one, originally referred rather to the message of Christ itself than the book in which the message was enshrined.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen that the Qur'án is, in form, entirely (with insignificant exceptions), an address from the Deity to the Prophet; and we have seen that in the case of the Taurát large portions are not formally so at all; but that some parts are addresses of men to God, and other parts are chronicles of events of sacred history. This was startling to our Moslem friends, and Kohen Effendi had some trouble in showing them that such parts could be in any sense inspired. What then will they think of what I am about to say now, which is that the Injil even less than the Taurát is in the form of an address of the Deity to any prophet or prophets! With the possible exception of the "Revelation of John," there is not a single book of the Injil which claims that it was "sent down" on its author, or that its author was specially commissioned by God to write it. In some of the books the author does indeed definitely claim to be under divine guidance in what he wrote (e.g., some of St. Paul's Epistles), but in others, and those some of the most important of all, the writers do not formally make that claim: superficially, they seem to be writing on their own initiative, as circumstances demanded.

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<sup>1</sup>The name has also been given more particularly to the four Memoirs, or even to each Memoir taken separately. But the various use of the same term should be avoided.

*Many Moslem Members* (unable to restrain themselves further)—Enough! . . . . You have yourself thrown up your case . . . on your own showing, your book is of man, not of God . . . it is not an inspired book at all . . . .

*Hanna.*—The interruption, Mr. President, is intelligible and excusable, for indeed I wished, by stating matters as paradoxically as I could, to startle members into interest and thought. I admit the thing is amazing to a Moslem. And though, of course, I do not admit that what I have said conflicts with a true idea of inspiration, yet I entirely admit that it shows that the view of inspiration claimed for such a book as the Injil must differ *toto caelo* from the view of that claimed for the Qur'an.

*A Sheikh.*—At most, it is the absolutely lowest conceivable form of inspiration!

*Hanna.*—We shall see whether that is so or not. The dates of these books are various years in the first century of the Christian era, the last probably being the writings of St. John not long before A.D. 100, or nearly seventy years after the death of the Christ. The evidence for the dates of these books and their authorship is determined partly by internal and partly external evidence, and the history of their collection into one volume and canonization is known. I cannot go into that matter now, interesting though it is, and indeed it is unnecessary that I should, because a conversation between four of our members on this point has been published in an essay named "What happened before the Hijra?"<sup>1</sup> I must be content simply to make three observations. (1) The argument of that essay has never been answered,

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<sup>1</sup> "What happened before the Hijra—a Dialogue;" published by the Church Missionary Society, Cairo.

viz., that in the six centuries between Christ and Muhammad, there never existed any recognized inspired Christian book or Injil other than the present one known as the New Testament. (2) The challenge to anyone to produce a morsel of evidence to show that some other book was ever officially recognized as the inspired Injil, or to account for its supposed disappearance subsequent to A.D. 623, has never been taken up. (3) Therefore, the existing Book holds the field as the true Injil. I wish here to add that the principle which guided the Church in selecting certain books and rejecting others was, 'were these books written by an Apostle or under Apostolic supervision?' and that the action of God in the matter of the canonization of the books is as important an element in a true view of inspiration as His action in the matter of their composition. See what Kohen Effendi said in this connexion in his remarks on the Taurát.

In drawing deductions from those data I will not repeat, I will only remind you of certain points which have been sufficiently developed in past discussions, and which become clearer than ever in the light of the phenomena of the Injil:—

(1) It is not necessary, but superfluous and dangerous, to suppose the pre-existence of a book called the Injil which was "sent down" upon Jesus or His Apostles. It is sufficient to conceive of the inspiration of the men themselves, in very various ways and modes, and the inspiration of the substance of what they wrote follows from that.

(2) Thus it is not necessary, but derogatory to the dignity of God, to suppose that His revelation to men is so limited in quantity that it could have been got

between the two boards of a book. We have seen that there is such a thing as divine economy, and that where the quantity was practically infinite it was sufficient to record what was typical and essential, and that God took care that this essential minimum should be in fact recorded.

(3) Therefore it is not necessary, but superfluous and dangerous, to lay too much stress on the letter of the Injil apart from its meaning—as, for example, that if a clause were to fall out of the revelation of God it would be irreparably maimed. We showed that no book, not even the Qu'rán, was, or could possibly be immune from such incidental omissions, additions and alterations; and further, we showed that in the case of the Injil we possess so many copies that a comparison of them shows what words or clauses have crept in and should be rejected, and what accidental omissions have been made; so that the very relative unimportance of the sum of these various readings, and the truthfulness with which they are displayed, increase our confidence in the verity of what is identical in all copies. These three points I simply mention so as to refresh our memory upon them, for I want now to proceed to the crowning question of all—the supreme mark of Christian inspiration.

#### **The Word Made Flesh!**

We have seen the longing of the Moslem to find in the very essence of God an eternal principle of revelation—a self-expression—a word. We have seen how this touching aspiration of the Moslem heart remains utterly unsatisfied by supposing a book (or the substance of a book) to exist as a necessary attribute in the divine essence, owing to the fact that every book as such must contain and does contain many elements of a purely

occasional nature. But thank God, the Moslem aspiration is fulfilled in the Christian faith; for it is revealed to us that in the very essence of God there is a principle of revelation—self-expression—a Word, who was from eternity with God, and therefore, was from eternity God. Of the inner relation between God and His Word and Spirit it is of course totally impossible to form any adequate conception. Human analogies fail, human words are apt to give as many false ideas as true ones, and for this reason the Injil itself leaves the matter undefined, and only by reverently considering all that is said do we gather that God the Father, His Word, and His Spirit are One yet distinguishable, distinguishable yet One, One essence manifested in three persons eternally. God is not utterly apart from His universe: if He were, He would be utterly unknowable and inconceivable, He would be a mere name of three letters, and every message from Him to us would be impossible—for a message constitutes a relation, a connexion. No, He is in some way related to His universe, and has revealed Himself to men in different ways by the light of His Word—of whom it is written that “the world was created through Him,” and that “in Him was light,” and that “He was the true light that lighteth every man,” and that He was ever “in the world and the world knew him not,” and finally that “He came unto His own,” and that He “was made flesh and dwelt among us (so wrote His apostle John) and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>1</sup> He therefore is, as must needs be, the absolute revelation of God to man, the last

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<sup>1</sup> John i. 4, 10, 11, 14.

word, the *ne plus ultra*, to whom all previous revelations pointed, compared with whom they were all partial and incomplete, and in whom revelation, being complete, closes; so that is written, "Many were the occasions and many the modes in which God of old spoke to the fathers in the Prophets; but now finally he has spoken to us in a SON, Him whom He constituted heir of all things, yea even Him by whom He made the universe . . . the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His essence!"

Here, then, is the Revelation of God—the Word—the "Descended One," but no longer a book or any such thing, but a living breathing person, a holy life! That is to say, the will of God for men, and the self-revelation of God to men, have been visibly embodied in that life which for a short time tabernacled among us. Here was no need for elaborate laws, commands, prohibitions, cancellings—all these are summed up thus "Be like Jesus, the Incarnate Word."

And now we see the place the book takes; it is an indispensable place, but now definitely secondary and subordinate. Its part is to put into permanent form a word-portrait of that inspired life: to say nothing new, but to set down such of the acts and words of that inspired one as will bring His personality and the essence of His teaching and saving work before all succeeding generations, so that all may be on an equal footing with the eye-witnesses of that heavenly life, and scan it as they did without any accretions of false and misleading superstitions and legends, and through it know God and be saved.

And herein we see the necessity of the doctrine of divine economy in the written word to which I

have alluded before and the impossibility of the whole quantity of revelation being contained in any book; for Christ being the Word of God, all His acts as well as all His words were inspired: and His unspoken words and thoughts were inspired too. Herein is one of the great contrasts between Him and what is claimed for Muhammed. For the latter are claimed periods of inspiration, but the former had no periods of inspiration, for His entire life was one long period of inspiration, and a book that contained the whole record would have to chronicle every thought and word and deed of His—an impossible task. And this shows in a final way the subordinate task assigned to the inspired book compared with the inspired person. The written word is a sufficiency and no more; it is not an end but a means; it leads to the incarnate Word in whom alone is knowledge of God and salvation. We cannot too deeply ponder the words which seem to me to place this matter in so clear a light—they are the words which close the sacred memoir:—"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, and which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain all the books that should be written." Were not these "other things" part of the revelation? Were they not inspired? Yes; but God has given us a sufficiency. In the world of grace as of nature there is that which seems, from one point of view, divine prodigality, from another, divine economy.

We also see how it is that the Injil has taken the form of tradition, that is a record of what the incarnate Word did as well as what He said. For men speak by their actions. The saving work of Christ in

particular is even more in what He was and what He did than what he said. Our salvation was wrought out in a work of suffering wherein words played a very small part indeed. The core of the good news is not that Christ said God loved us, but that God's incarnate One died for us and thus showed us what that love was.

We see also how incorrect it is to say that the Injil or any book was "sent down" on Jesus. He was the Word, not, He had the word. He was the revelation of God, not received it or saw it.

The function of the written word, then, was to interpret those divine acts of the incarnate Word. What, then, when we consider the second part of the Injil—the Epistles and other writings? These are entirely concerned with the doings and teachings of the disciples of Christ after His ascension. Yet they claim no credit to themselves: they do what they do and say what they say through the fact that they are possessed by the Holy Spirit, who was sent in fulness to possess them after the ascension of Christ; and hence is called not only the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of Christ; that is, the Spirit which animated the life of the incarnate Word in the days of His flesh. And so this second half of the Injil is, in another way, the record of the words and acts of the incarnate Word; only whereas the first half concerned what He did and said directly in His days on earth, the second concerns what He did and said by His Spirit working in the lives of His own after His ascension to heaven. And the reason why the record was not closed with the ascension was simply this: that then was the time for divine acts rather than teachings by word: the interpretation of those acts,

of which the ascension was the last, must, therefore, come after the ascension, through the instruction and inspiration of the Spirit, according as Christ Himself said on the eve of His atoning death: "The Holy Ghost whom the Father shall send in My Name shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." "I have yet many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all the truth . . . and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you." So then we see that the doings and sayings of Paul, and Peter, and James and John and the others, are part of the revelation of God in Christ and give us the interpretation, the significance, of those great silent divine acts, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and ascension, the work which wrought out the salvation of the human race. And the book, the Injil, the New Testament, is a summary of those acts, and a summary of the interpretation of their significance. In no other Book will you find either the one or the other, and therefore the book is itself the Word of God in a true sense. But it is not itself in a primary sense the revelation of God it is the index to that revelation which is Christ. While Christ was in the world and while His eye-witnesses were alive, the book, as a book, did not exist; it was only when that generation was about to pass away that God moved the sacred writers to embody their recollections or teachings in writing for the sake of those who came after. Could anything be more clear? It is as

though God were saying, "No longer shall any book as book be considered my last word to men; for a divine human Life is my last Word to men, now and for ever."

And this is why the actual text of the written Injil is open to the freest enquiry. Scholars conduct reverent, accurate, truth-loving researches into the human aspects of the book, the dates of the various writings, their authorship, their precise text, etc., and we welcome all they can tell us. And these researches only reveal more and more clearly the glory of that divine human life in whom we believe, who reveals God to us, in whom we have found salvation.

I must now conclude. Our Moslem friends will now understand why it is that, these things being so, it is impossible for us to accept any revelation or book or prophet subsequent to Christ. The Word was made flesh—what need of further words? God, after that He spake to the Fathers in Prophets hath at the last spoken to us in a SON,—how can we then go back to any prophet? No—it is impossible. When you have won the peak of a mountain all further "progress" will not be progression, it will be retrogression—descent. And in closing my survey I therefore have the joy of inviting my Moslem friends to join us again on the mountain-peak of God's revelation, the very Word of God, eternal as God Himself, incarnate in these last times for us; and leaving all other, find in Him their light and life and salvation, as He said Himself:—"I am the way, the truth, the life: no man cometh to the FATHER but by ME."

*(Hanna sits down amid silence.)*