

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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*Hyacinthe Loyson*

*The Open Court for August, 1897.*

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## THE RELIGION OF ISLAM.<sup>1</sup>

BY PÈRE HYACINTHE LOYSON.

A VERY LARGE NUMBER of Frenchmen—perhaps I should say the majority of Frenchmen—have more or less completely broken with the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the bulk of them have not yet parted with the prejudices and antipathies which were its mediæval accompaniments. These prejudices and antipathies are quite unamenable to reason, on the contrary they dominate it when they do not absolutely hinder its action. They are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh by a force of atavism, and, if I may be permitted the metaphor, they oscillate fatally in the electric piles of the most liberal brains.

During all the Middle Ages, and even since, Mohammed has been regarded as the Anti-Christ, or at least as his precursor. The empire of the Caliphs, and later the Ottoman empire, were always in the eyes of our theologians the empire of Anti-Christ, the social incarnation of the power of evil, and the kingdom of Satan on earth. "Repent," said the disciples of Saint Francis of Assisi who were massacred in the thirteenth century in Morocco, to the inhabitants of that country, "repent or ye will be cast into hell, as was Mohammed your false prophet before you." And to-day even, a goodly number of Catholic and Protestant missionaries do not speak or at least do not think differently.

In one of the most enlightened and freest countries of Europe, a writer of some note published in 1829 two large volumes to prove "that Mohammed was the little horn of the ram that figures in the eighth chapter of Daniel, and that the Pope was the big horn."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From *Christianisme et Islamisme*. (Paris: E. Dentu.) Translated, with the author's permission, by T. J. McCormack.

<sup>2</sup> *Mohammedanism Unveiled*. By Charles Foster.



From this premise the English author deduced a complete philosophy of history, according to which the corruption of Christianity was due in the East to Mohammed and in the West to the Pope.

Nor is the case different with the Mussulmans as regards us. It is true, they revere Jesus as much as the Christians detest Mohammed, but they regard us as unfaithful disciples, and, to speak plainly, as idolators. "They are infidels who say 'Verily God is 'the Messiah, the Son of Mary,' for the Messiah himself hath 'said: 'O children of Israel, worship God my Lord and your 'Lord.' Verily to him who associates other gods with God, God 'hath forbidden paradise and his resort will be the fire. The un-'just will have none to help them.'" (Koran, V., 76.)

And Mohammed also preached a holy war in behalf of God, not only against idolators, but also against "those among the men having the Scriptures who do not profess the religion of the truth" (Koran, IX., 29), that is to say against the Jews and the Christians. "God sent from heaven iron. In iron is great violence, but also much advantage for man. He has given it to you "that he may know who among you is willing to help him and his "apostle with sincerity. Verily God is strong and mighty." (Koran, LVII., 25.)

Oceans of blood flowed from these utterances. The crusades of the Christians were the answer to the holy wars of the Mussulmans, and it would be a dangerous error to believe that the spirit which engendered them is yet extinct.

I maintain, nevertheless, that if we closely examine these two hostile religions—that of Mohammed and that of Jesus—we shall find no valid grounds for their antagonism. We shall discover, in fact, a marked family resemblance between them which almost justifies us in regarding them as sister faiths.

I shall now establish my contention by successively considering the origin, character, and fruits of Islamism.

\* \* \*

What was the origin of Islam? Without doubt it was the personal creation of Mohammed. Mohammed was an extremely original and very powerful genius, and from his brain and heart issued the religion which his adversaries have often designated by his name—Mohammedanism. But, be a man ever so great, he is yet the expression of his country, the creation of his epoch, and it is in no sense a disparagement of the prophet of Arabia of the seventh century if we apply to him this law of universal history. The applica-

tion is the more in place, too, from the fact that his work, and to his great glory be it said, was not a revolution, but an evolution.

Arabia had long been stirred by the need of a religious transformation, which the best of its representatives conceived as a return to the past. Among the gross superstitions of an idolatrous creed bordering almost on fetishism, it had yet preserved something of that faith in a single God by which its ancestry could be traced to its great progenitor, Abraham. Not the desert is monotheistic, but the posterity of Abraham. The influence of the Jews and the Christians, more faithful disciples of the patriarch, had penetrated deeper and deeper into the peninsula, and was accelerating there this silent, mysterious movement which only needed for its start an inspired mouthpiece. At the period in which Mohammed appeared, the sectaries of the ancient monotheism were known by the name of Hanifs. M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire has recounted their history in his excellent work on Mohammed and the Koran. They were not numerous, but they were the élite of the thoughtful minds of Arabia, and the attention of their compatriots, respectful even when hostile, was inevitably drawn to them. From their ranks came forth the touching figure of Zaid, son of Amr, whom the world has justly styled the John the Baptist of Islamism.

Zaid was in the habit of visiting the sanctuary which it is said Abraham himself had built, and which to-day annually attracts hosts of pilgrims from all parts of the world. With his back resting against the Caaba, he reproaches the Arabs for the idolatry with which they had sullied the sanctuary, and then cries out, "O Allah! if I but knew what form of worship was most pleasing to thee, I should adopt it. But I know it not."

A shining example this, bequeathed by a barbarian to us civilised men! How many are there among us in France and in Europe who can no longer enter their temples because they know there are idols in them! For all idols are not made of wood, stone, or metal, and the worst of all are those which clothe the forms of mind. May all such persons escape the fatal mesh of blasphemy, or what is perhaps more sinful still, and certainly more disastrous, the fate of indifference! May they, too, lean with sorrowful and tender reverence against the walls of the edifice which sheltered their childhood, and in their hard bereavement of the church of the present, invoke, like Zaid, that of the future!

Pressed by Omar to pray for the soul of Zaid after his death<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Mussulmans like ourselves rightly pray for the dead.

Mohammed replied: "I shall pray for him, but in the day of the resurrection, Zaid will form by himself a church entire."

The voice which did not reply to Zaid was heard by Mohammed. It was heard during his retirement at Mt. Hira near Mecca, after long prayers and long austerities which in these burning wastes are so conducive to ecstasy. He had fallen asleep and during his slumber he saw and heard for the first time the angel Gabriel. "Dreams," he has said himself, "are the revelations of the prophet." On waking he felt, and it is he who still speaks, as if a book had been written upon his heart.

Frightened, and believing himself possessed of evil spirits, he confided his adventure to the woman whom alone he loved in her life-time, and who was at once mother and wife to him, although fifteen years his senior. Her name was Khadija, and the Mussulmans have named her "the great."<sup>1</sup> In a sense Islamism was the creation of her soul. She was the first to assure the prophet, as well as to believe in his word. She believed in it before the prophet did himself and her act is the most beautiful apology that could be found of this man, whom she knew better than any one both in his faults and excellences. "God is my support," she said to him; "He will not suffer *thee* to be a seer in whom none will have confidence, not thee to be possessed of the Djins. Thou always speakest the truth. Thou art never wanting in thy word. Our kinsmen know this as well as I. He who holds the life of Khadija between his hands is my witness that thou shalt be the prophet of this nation. Assure thyself and banish trouble from thy mind."

But Khadija had not yet wholly banished disquietude from her own mind. She in her turn sought counsel, to reassure herself against her own doubts. For faith begins with doubt, deep, genuine adamantine faith which is not merely a habit of childhood but a personal conviction. She addresses herself to her cousin Varaka, a venerable old man and a convert to Christianity. Zaid has been compared to John the Baptist; Varaka reminds us of Peter. "If what thou hast told me be true," answered Varaka, "thy husband has been visited by the great law which descended of yore upon Moses. He will be the prophet of his people. Announce it to him and let him be pacified."

Several days after, the old man met the husband of Kadija near the Caaba. He addressed to him affectionate and consoling

<sup>1</sup> Khadija-ul-Kiupra. Mohammed himself ranked Khadija among the four perfect women. The three others were the Virgin Mary, the converted woman of Pharaoh who persecuted the Israelites, and Fatima the only daughter of Mohammed and the wife of Ali.



words and kissed him upon the forehead. It was the kiss of ancient oriental Christianity still a stranger to the subtleties and superstitions of Byzantium, which recognised in growing Islam its legitimate son, or, if you please, its younger brother.

“They will treat you as an impostor,” cried Varaka, “they will persecute you, they will hunt you, violently oppose you. O, that I might live until that hour to assist you in your struggle !”

Twenty years after, in 630, the persecuted man reentered the Holy City as conqueror. The sword had been justified by the sword ; the apostle had become soldier. Mounted upon his camel he solemnly made the rounds of the sanctuary of the God of Abraham and of Ishmael, which had become the temple of all the idols of the desert tribes. There were three hundred and sixty of them crowning the eaves of the great edifice. Before each of them the prophet raised his curved staff pronouncing the words: “The Truth has come. Whoso belies it shall disappear.” And the overthrown idol was dashed into fragments at his feet.

To find anything as beautiful in religious history we have to go back to the legislator of Israel and of the human race. Moses descends from the tempestuous tops of Mt. Sinai bringing to his people the decalogue written primarily for them but destined to be the law of all upright hearts and the code of all civilised peoples. What are those sounds that rise to his ears? They are the chants of an idolatrous and wanton gathering who are conducting their shameful dances about the golden calf—stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts who rebel in advance against the law which they had not yet received ! The indignant prophet dashes to the earth the sacred tables of which Israel is not worthy. Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai is monotheism growing in a terrible struggle against the unwilling revolts of man ; Mohammed before the Caaba is the same monotheism grown great, still combated but now conqueror.

The last word has not yet been said. It will be said when at some future time, which we cannot fix, the three great religions of the unity of God, Judaism, Christianity, and Islamism shall form but one grand faith—the religion of Abraham, the father of all believers, the religion of Adam, the father of all men.

That illustrious Emir, who, from having once been the embittered enemy of France is now its faithful friend, Abd-el-Kader, has written these words : “ If the Mussulmans and the Christians would “lend me their ears I could put an end to their differences and “they would become as brothers, both outwardly and inwardly ; but

“they will not listen to me because it is pre-established in the science of God that they will not unite in the same thought—the Messiah alone will put an end to their antagonism when he shall descend again.”<sup>1</sup>

With Abd-el-Kader and all Musselmans, I believe in the coming again of Jesus Christ. It is written in the Apostle’s creed of the Christians: *Et iterum venturus est cum gloriâ*. But we know neither when nor how Jesus Christ will return. It is not necessary that he should return in person. It is sufficient if his spirit be poured out upon men with an abundance and power which it has not yet shown. It is the spirit of faith, but it is also the spirit of science. It is the spirit of the highest religious spirituality and of the most perfect intellectual liberty. “Where the spirit of the word is, there is freedom; the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.” It is the spirit of the fraternity of all men under the pater-  
 nity of the same God.

The Apostle St. Peter repeated after the Prophet Joel, on the day of the first Pentecost (Joel ii., 28). “And it shall come to pass,” saith the Eternal, “that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. I shall pour it out even upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days.”

\* \* \*

Of what nature is the religion of Islam? This is the second question which I have set myself. My answer is brief. Islam is one of the three great forms of monotheism and at the same time one of the oriental branches of Christianity.

Mohammed, as we have already seen, issued historically from Judaism and Christianity. He had not read our sacred works,—it has often been asserted that he did not know how to read, much less to write, which is far more difficult for an Arab, owing to the complicated character of his alphabet,—but he was familiar with the substance of our Biblical teachings. Through his numerous voyages he had held intercourse with the disciples of Moses and of Jesus and had been subjected to the influence of the Christian school at Edessa. “The books which have gone before the Koran,” he declares, “are the sources of the Koran.”

Another source, more living than the first, was his own soul. I find no difficulty in admitting that God spoke to Mohammed; he spoke to him in a language which he could understand, yet which even in that lowly form he was not always able to understand. The unconscious errors which men almost inevitably mingle with divine

<sup>1</sup>*Rappel à l'intelligent, Avis à l'indifférent*, par l'émir Abd-el-Kader, Paris, 1858.

inspirations in no wise impair their fundamental truth. Mohammed was the prophet of the Arabs, as Moses and David were the prophets of the Hebrews.

“God,” as St. Paul said, “is not far from every one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts, xvii, 28). To every son of man, who is likewise by nature a son of God,—“for,” as the same Apostle has said, “we are His offspring”—God hath revealed Himself in the depths of the intellect and the conscience, two organs at once natural and supernatural, the one the instrument of truth, the other of goodness. Yet when He is impelled to send forth a prophet, he speaks to him not more directly but in a more palpable and in a more stirring way. He shakes his imagination by powerful symbolical images. He stirs and rouses his heart by enthusiastic sentiments. After having been the food of long and solitary meditations, these visions of the mind and inspirations of the soul become the object of public promulgation. *Unde pascor, inde pasco*, said a Father of the Church.

Jesus himself, the greatest of prophets and their master, never spoke but in parables, and often He was not understood. It took Christian theologians and thinkers a long time to extract from the sacred rinds the hidden fruit of his doctrine. Jesus followed this practice to the last days of his life, when He said to His followers: “The hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but shall tell you plainly of the Father” (John, xvi, 25), and He strove to make them understand a religion that was above all symbols, and which He announced to the Samaritan in the words, “God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John, iv, 24).

Inferior though it be to Christianity, the religion of Mohammed has yet realised pure intellectual worship in one of its simplest and most living forms.

A religious savant of the eighteenth century, the Italian Maracci, who both translated and refuted the Koran, made a just remark which is all the more striking as coming from an adversary, when he said that Mohammed had conserved what was most plausible and probable in Christianity as well as everything which seemed conformable to the law and light of nature. Islamism is in fact a simple and lofty form of primitive monotheism.

It has been asserted that it is lacking in originality and that it is at bottom nothing but natural religion. This is exactly what constitutes its merit in my eyes, for, discarding all complications, subtleties, and superfluities, it has put within the reach of all, in

the poetical and palpable language of revelation, the necessary and sufficient virtues of religious life. "Without faith," says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh of God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb., xi, 6.) The living God, the immortal soul, and for the joining of these in this world and the next, true faith, good works, repentance,—such is natural religion in the high sense of the word, the religion to which the two natures which it ought to unite, that of man and that of God, both appeal.

Yet let us be on our guard against confounding natural religion and the religion of Islam with deism. Nothing could be more dead than deism, nothing more living than Islam. When M. Guizot wrote, "Christians alone possess the living God," he did not think of the Mussulmans.

Deism is dead because it suppresses providence in the Creator and prayer in the created,—acts which bring the two together and join them in unity. The Creator is rather the servant of the laws of the world than their author. In any event they envelop his face in a thick veil and do not suffer him to see minutely the particular beings over whom he rules. We may apply to this mental idol who is not the true God the forceful words of the psalm: "He has eyes and sees not." He hears no more than he sees, and what rises to his ears is neither the cry nor the groans of souls but simply the vague and whirring harmony of things. Deaf and dumb as this singular God is, the soul never speaks to him in prayer; and even when prayer survives it is naught but soliloquy; the soul never hears the inarticulate but expressive murmurs of the supreme inward voice, the organ of the purest and sweetest of revelations.<sup>1</sup>

Such a God cannot love such a soul, nor such a soul such a God, but in this system which Bossuet rightly termed disguised atheism,<sup>2</sup> all communication between heaven and earth is impossible. An impassable abyss separates creator from created.

Deism is not a religion. It is only a philosophy, and a detestable philosophy at that; one which makes an orphan of man, and of God a sort of honorless, compassionless father who has no care for his children subsequently to the caprice which gave them birth.

<sup>1</sup> "Blessed are the ears that gladly receive the pulses of the Divine whisper. . . . Blessed are those ears which listen not after the voice which is sounding without but for the truth teaching within." *Imitation of Christ*, Book III., Ch. I.

<sup>2</sup> Schelling has called it "dastard atheism."



And even if it had other claims to being a religion, deism could never become such, because it rejects from principle the remotest possibility of revelation. Every religion is essentially revealed, and natural religion in the lofty sense in which we conceive it can have no power over men except it come through the medium of an inspired prophet, of an apostle sent by God. It must receive a palpable form and must pass through some outer and visible gate. "Every nation has its prophet," says the Koran (X, 48). "Every people has its guide." "For every age there is a holy book." (*Ibid.*, XIII, 8 and 38.)

In Islam everything hangs upon revelation, the revelation which was proclaimed by Mohammed, who was called "the seal of the prophets," as well as upon that which previously to him was proclaimed by Jesus, by Moses, by Abraham and even by Adam himself, so that we can say of this religion, which like ours is universal in its aspirations, that it is "the beginning of all things."

We may say this in a certain sense more correctly of Islam than of Christianity, because it is less developed, more rudimentary, nearer its origins, and this was why its founder was wont to say that if people become Jews or Christians they are born Mussulmans. "Mussulman" means "he who is subject to God."

I have just mentioned the Jews and the Christians. From the point of view of a universal and living monotheism, the Mussulmans are in my opinion superior to the former but inferior to the latter. They are superior to the Jews in the clear and powerful affirmation which the Koran makes of a future life which is quite foreign to the old sacred books of Israel or is at least conceived there under the oppressive simile of a prolonged slumber terminating in a more or less distant resurrection. For the Mussulman death is without horrors, I was almost going to say without sadness, and although their religion is a religion of the world, like that of the Jews,—and for this I should be very far from censuring either,—yet that of the Mussulmans is pre-eminently a religion of the world to come. It is more complete.

The superiority of Islam appears to me additionally established by its universal character, so different from the rigidly national character which Israel has always striven to preserve in spite of Jesus and Paul. Israel is a people, a race: the race of Abraham and Jacob, mixed no doubt with numerous proselytes, yet having amalgamated them in its racial mill; the people of Palestine, so intimately wedded to Jerusalem that everywhere else it is in exile, and that its very cult has become impossible without that unique



and ruined temple. The Mussulmans, on the other hand, are like the Christians, humanity in all its potencies. Mecca, without doubt, is still their religious centre, but their circumference is in all places, and within this enormous circle move fraternally Turks and Arabs, Chinese and Hindus, negroes and whites, all repeating, to whatever blood they belong and whatever country they inhabit, from the bottom of their hearts: "God is God, and Mohammed is his prophet."

I add, that though superior to Judaism in the sense that I have explained, Islam is inferior to Christianity, though of course not to corrupted Christianity, such as we only too frequently find it among both Protestants and Catholics: *optimi cujusque pessima corruptio*. But above all the churches that have disfigured it and are disfiguring it, the spirit of the gospel possesses a sublimity, purity, and tenderness to which nothing in the Koran approaches. Jesus Christ did not found a church, nor did he formulate dogmas. The Gospel is an evident and abundant proof of this to him who knows how to read it. The Church is the work of St. Paul and of his disciples. The dogmas are the work of the great councils. These two creations are legitimate and necessary, but they did not come from Jesus Christ. What Jesus Christ gave to the world, in the absence of a single line written by his hand or at his dictation, is the spirit which quickeneth those whom the letter killeth, the new spirit which comes from him at the same time that it does from God and which has produced in the world of souls and in the world of societies that marvellous development which has not its peer and which is far from having uttered its last word. "He that believeth in me," Jesus himself has said, "the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than this shall he do." (John xiv, 12.)

Inferior to genuine Christianity in its dogmas, its ethics, and especially its spirit, Islam is yet not opposed to it as Judaism is which crucified Jesus Christ and cast off St. Paul. Far from being foreign or opposed to Christianity, Islam, I make bold to say, is in reality a branch of it, as much so as are some of the doctrines within Christianity itself, which without being orthodox have produced undeniable fruits, and in a certain measure excellent fruits, such as those of Arius and of Nestorius, and in our days of Channing.<sup>1</sup>

"Do you believe in Jesus?" asked of one of our Algerian

<sup>1</sup> To speak only of the Goths, who were zealous Arians, they surpassed the orthodox French in light and in morality. It may even be regretted, with Herder, that the reorganisation of our West was not the work of the great Theodoric instead of Charlemagne.

Arabs an English missionary, one of that class who are making such touching but vain struggles to convert the Algerians to their Christianity. "I believe in him more than you do," retorted the Arab.

They certainly believe in him much more strongly and more sincerely than many indifferent or sceptical Christians with whom the missionaries should first occupy themselves.

Repelled by the Byzantian subtleties, and we must also say by the paganism of the supposedly Christian masses, the prophet of Islam rejected the title Son of God which Jesus had bestowed upon himself and which according to Jesus is a real attribute of us all<sup>1</sup> though less so than in his case, but which our theologians and preachers have so strangely perverted.

Mohammed calls Jesus "the soul of God." He says that Jesus was miraculously brought forth by the Virgin Mary: "One day the angels said to Mary God gives thee tidings of his Word; his name shall be the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, illustrious in this world and in the next, and of those whose place is nigh to God." (Koran, III., 40.) According to the Koran Jesus performed the most astonishing miracles besides revealing the purest doctrine. "There shall be no one of those who have faith in the holy book but shall believe in him before his death." (Koran, IV., 157.) In not separating the mother from the son the Arab prophet conformed to the traditions of the Oriental Christians as laid down in the Gospels of Infancy, so popular at that period. Perhaps he was also making a touching application of the verse written by him in the Koran: "Paradise is at the feet of mothers."

Be that as it may, Aissa, as they called Jesus, is to descend to earth again at the end of time, and will exterminate all the enemies of God and will cause goodness and virtue to reign upon earth.

Am I right in saying that the Arabs are Christians after their fashion and that the Koran is related to the Gospel?

\* \* \*

We should now study Islamism in its results. But the space at my command compels me to be brief. It is in accordance with the spirit of our age, however, to value a religious or social system by the facts in which it has realised itself rather than by the ideas which are its programme, and in doing so, our age simply returns to the method proclaimed by Jesus Christ: "A good tree

<sup>1</sup> "Go to my brethren," says Jesus to Magdalene, "and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

cannot produce bad fruits, nor a bad tree good fruits. Ye shall judge them by their fruits."

The fruits of Islamism are of two kinds, those which it has produced for itself and those which it has produced for others.

And first for itself. Closed as it is against all foreign propagandism, the Mussulman world is nourished wholly from its own substance, and whatever superficial or interested observers may say of it, it is still far from perishing. I would even say it has more vitality, not than Christianity proper, but more than the existing forms of Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic.

A descendant of the crusaders, Prince Polignac, recently wrote me on the subject of Islam: "This powerful discipline of souls does not count a single rebel among its adherents,—not a single atheist. . . . No such result could be realised without intrinsic greatness." And he added *viva voce* the bold words to which I subscribe: "The Arabs are better Christians than we and it is through the God of Islam that we shall return to the gospels. We have at present need of this intermediary between Jesus and ourselves."

The Hegira is now in its fourteenth century, and as I am now speaking, more than 200,000,000 men date their chronology from it. We have, it is true, also our 200,000,000 Catholics and make much ado about the fact, but among these Catholics how many are there who are not Christians, how many who are not even theists!<sup>1</sup>

Islam does not only conserve its faith, but it also propagates it, and its propaganda is now of a peaceful character. "Two things constitute the religion of the world," wrote Abd-el-Kader, "the sword and the pen; but the sword is below the pen." And the word is above the pen if it were only that it can address those who cannot read. And this is the plight of the innumerable black hordes of Africa among whom the missionaries of Islam are making so many proselytes. These hordes are plunged in the black night of the grossest fetishism. Islam lifts them directly to the most absolute monotheism, giving the lie to the chimerical law of Auguste

<sup>1</sup> To speak only of my own country, nothing is more incorrect than to assert, as is asserted every day, that Catholicism is the religion of the majority of the French people. "Thirty-six million Catholics is an easy thing to write on the official rolls, but the preacher who knows his congregation knows what value is to be placed upon such statistics, falsified like all the rest. Of these 36,000,000 it would be rashness not to cut out 25,000,000. . . . There are in our country 25,000,000 baptised Christians who care nothing for the clergy considered as the representatives of God, as the dispensers of the truth, of grace, and the sacraments, brought into this world by Jesus Christ." (*L'Esprit nouveau dans l'action morale et religieuse*, by the Abbé J. Crestey, p. 96, Paris, Guillaumin, 1895.)

Comte which makes polytheism the indispensable link between these two forms of religion.

It is truly a grand and precious result, the bringing of these negroes from the adoration of physical objects to that of the invisible and supreme spirit; but with the same stroke the apostle of the Koran suppresses for them a great vice, the abuse of strong liquors, and a great crime, cannibalism.

Finally, may I be permitted to say that Islam is called to give a necessary lesson to the many degenerate Christians who scoff at it. For they, of all, have the most need to profit by its example. These Christians, and they are numerous, have lost the living God of which they say that they alone possess him. Some have made of him an idol; others have reduced him to a nullity.

Twenty-six years ago, during that dreadful war of which we have as yet neither repaired the losses nor fully comprehended the lessons, Madame de Bismarck wrote to the Iron Chancellor: "I shall send you shortly the Book of Psalms that you may read the prophecy against the French. I tell you a people without God must disappear from the face of the earth."

Several years later a distinguished thinker, the heir of Auguste Comte and to-day professor in the Collège de France, pronounced the following words which, if they are true, give a show of justice to the Prussian puritanism: "Is there a city in the world that can compare with Paris, that ever living heart of the Revolution whence have gone forth the thousand voices of philosophy in the grand struggle against God—Paris, which after Rome became the leader of the West and will become the leader of the world?"<sup>1</sup>

France slanders herself more than she is slandered by those who look down upon her and seek her destruction. France is no more atheistic than it is idolatrous, but her official science and religion would often lead one to believe that it is both at once.

Two years ago or more I was on the frontiers of the empire of Morocco at Tlemcen. It was Friday, that day which is to the Mussulmans what Sunday is to us, or at least was to our fathers. By an exceptional favor, my wife and I were permitted to attend public prayers in the grand mosque. We should judge of the Arab genius, not by its present decadence, but by its ancient splendor. This temple which we entered is one of the most beautiful that the art and faith of men have erected to God. There were none of those superfluous ornaments, too often superstitious when not idolatrous, that wound in our Christian temples the sentiment of the

<sup>1</sup>M. Pierre Laffitte. *Les Grands Types de l'Humanité*.

beautiful and true as well as the more august and more rigid sentiment of religion itself. The mosque was more full of faith than the cathedral. The commandment of Sinai was not broken here: "I am thy God the eternal. Thou shalt have no other gods but me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them."

Devoid of images, the temple was full of worshippers. In our churches we ordinarily see only women, as if the worship they render there were not a virile religion but were framed only for them and for their sons prior to the adult age. There were no women here—these pray in the neighboring oratories—but there were men, two thousand men, I had almost said two thousand warriors. They had the bearing of warriors and they prayed as they would have fought. They were all mingled together without distinction of rank or place. The red burnous of the chiefs touch the white burnous of common individuals and the tattered garments of the poor. For in this theocratic society, which is at the same time a democracy, the most absolute equality unites and binds believers together.

The voice of the Iman was lifted from the other extremity of the mosque. He was no priest, for in this religion, so vigorous, so enthusiastic and with such a mastery over souls, which is now in the thirteen hundred and fifteenth<sup>1</sup> year of its existence, there is no clergy: its believers are its priests. The Iman is a believer specially charged with the direction of the worship.

His assembled brothers responded to his appeal. Now prostrated upon the earth, now with their backs turned towards the heavens but always with a sort of ecstasy, these children of the desert and of the Koran, these Arabs, half monks and half soldiers, cry with one voice and with one heart: "Allah is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Their cry shook the mosque as it had anciently shaken the world. Who knows but it will shake it again?

At any rate a divine thrill coursed through my whole being. I joined, despite myself, in the prayer which was not mine and which was still mine, and I repeated from the bottom of my heart: "Yes, God is God!" Woe to the men who think themselves civilised and free and who know no better than to blaspheme His mighty name or to suppress it! And woe to the men who think themselves Christians and who profane the incommunicable name of

<sup>1</sup> According to the Mohammedan chronology, which reckons time by purely lunar years.



Him who abides eternally in what is born and dies in time, by making what is infinite in him finite, and by associating with this God, justly jealous of his glory, with this sole and supreme Creator, any creature howsoever perfect.

Aye, God is God and Mohammed is his prophet! I do not know how he was so, by dint of what virtues and what ecstasies, despite what errors and what weaknesses. But I know that he was so. Without being a prophet and a great prophet too, one cannot incarnate God so profoundly in the soul, with such great power, such great passion, such holy passion, and cause him to be adored by so many races of men in all languages, in all continents, and through fourteen centuries.

Yes, God is God, and Mohammed is his prophet! And I added without fear of contradiction from those who were praying in the mosque: "Jesus is the Messiah." He is "The soul of God" who will come among us because we have neither loved nor known him; because we have all of us crucified him, some of us in the flesh, and what is more sinful still, the rest of us in the spirit. He will come to judge, to punish, but also to pardon. "Forgive them, O my Father, for they know not what they do!"

That day is approaching, for we can no longer live in the religious and moral anarchy into which we have fallen nor in the cruel antagonism which is its consequence and which is dragging the world to the depths of barbarism.

On that day the final religion will be founded. True Christianity, that of Jesus, that of God, which has never yet been aught but a prophecy will be a reality. The human race reconciled, brought back to unity without losing its diversity, joined to heaven without being severed from earth, the human race will then form but one family of brothers under the paternity of God. Jesus has said: "There shall be but one fold and one shepherd."

And I make bold to say that for those who can forestall the future that state has already come.