

# The Untenable Charge of Fatalism Against Muslims

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*This lecture was entitled "The Charge of Fatalism" and was delivered in Madras, India by Marmaduke Pickthall in 1927.*

I have shown you something of Islamic culture in its splendour and decline. It is the fashion to ascribe its decline to a certain defect said to be inherent in Islam: its fatalism. To what then must one ascribe the rise of Islamic culture, the leading position which the Muslims attained and long maintained in the world? Logically, this too must be ascribed to fatalism if fatalism is inherent in Islam; which is impossible! And how are we to account for the indubitable fact that Muslims showed most energy, and so won most success, while they obeyed the precepts of their religion strictly and with full intelligence, and became languid and declined in proportion as they disobeyed its precepts and obscured their meaning if fatalism is indeed a defect and inherent in Islam? If all hinges on the old question of predestination and free-will which has agitated the Christian world, as it has agitated the Muslim world, at certain periods of history. In the Qur'an, the province of free-will is clearly indicated. It is but a province in the midst of Allah's Sovereignty and even in that province man cannot escape from Allah's law of consequences.

*Wheresoever ye may be, death will overtake you, even though ye were in lofty towers. Yet if a happy thing befalleth them they say: This is from Allah; and if an evil thing befalleth them they say: This is of thy doing (O Muhammad). Say (unto them): All is from Allah. What is amiss with these people that they come not nigh to understand a happening?* [Qur'an 4:78]

Those are the two verses of the Qur'an round which this controversy of predestination and free-will has chiefly raged, and at a glance they seem to contradict each other. But they refer to a particular reverse which befell the Muslim arms, in which some men were killed; and when that is known, and the nature of the murmuring among the Muslims, most of the difficulty disappears. Death is a matter over which no man has control, and which is certain to overtake all of us sooner or later. And man is subject to

the vicissitudes of fortune which also are upon him from Allah. The Prophet was only a man, therefore it was folly for the people to blame him for such vicissitudes: "*What aileth these people that they cannot even come near to understand a plain fact?*" [last sentence of quote above 4:78] The plain fact, often reiterated in the Qur'an, is that Muhammad p.b.u.h. was a man, and not a supernatural being. The present misfortune was due to secret disaffection or dissension in the Muslim ranks, a thing forbidden by Allah. Victory had been theirs when they were obedient to a law. Therefore it is said:

*"Whatever of good befalleth thee a (O man) it is from Allah, and whatever of ill befalleth thee it is from thyself (through disobedience)." [Qur'an 4:79]*

The Prophet p.b.u.h. cannot change God's Law of consequences.

That there is much fatalism in the teaching of Islam and in the example of the early Muslims is a fact. But it is not the kind which the Western world ascribes to Muslims and is the reverse of laziness. The misapprehension comes largely from observation, and imperfect observation of the Turks, a race of soldiers, who regarded war as Muslim's business, and peace-time as furlough. It is strange that controversy should have singled out this passage which does not seem to me to touch the larger question of predestination and free-will so much as do a hundred other passages. It is a question, like the definition of eternity, which is quite beyond our understanding - one of those matters which we are warned in the Qur'an itself to let alone, not seeking to expound them.

The position of mankind in the world is that of Allah's viceroy.

*"When the Lord said unto the Angels: I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt Thou*

*place therein one who will do evil therein and shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee. He said: I know that which ye know not."*  
[Qur'an 2:30]

While man recognizes his dependence and regards the powers that have been confided to him as a sacred trust, of which he will some day have to render an account, it is well with him. When he forgets or denies his dependence, he is in error and will come to grief. In the *surah* which is reported to have been the first revealed, we read:

*Nay, but verily man is rebellious. That he thinketh himself independent! Lo! unto thy Lord is the return.*  
[Qur'an 96:6-8]

Man is given charge of this world, with all its animals and trees and plants; and his duty is to cultivate and improve it for the good of all mankind, not to devastate and to spoil it for his own pleasure. He has been given charge, within plain limits, of his fellow man, and his duty is to cultivate and improve himself and others and pave the way for the advance of future generations. His absolute dependence on the natural laws which govern all existence: his inability to breathe or raise an arm without obeying laws he never made; the spectacle of day and night; the laws of growth and decay and new growth, of birth and death; the law of consequences which attends on all his acts - all these should be a perpetual reminder to man that his province of free-will is strictly bounded, and always at the mercy of an infinitely greater power. But they often fail to remind him of this plain fact, and then "*man is rebellious and deemeth himself independent*" and evil and corruption grow apace.

The position of the Muslims in the world is that of men and women pledged to make known this truth, and strive unceasingly for the establishment of Allah's Kingdom, which means universal brotherhood. The Qur'an does not limit Allah's Kingdom to a race or sect. The test of loyalty is not the recitation of a certain creed, or the performance of a certain set of ceremonies. The test is one for all mankind, and it is **Conduct**. The Muslim has to strive for good, wherever found, against evil, wherever found. His surrender to the purpose of Allah, in realisation of His Kingship, does not lead to a state of motionless contemplation or of lethargy. It is the beginning of a life of conscious effort, which, however, brings no pain to him, but rather great relief and gladness; just as a swimmer who has struggled long against the tide feels when the tide has turned and now supports him. This strife for good against evil of the Muslim, beginning in himself, extending to his fellow-man and

ending, perhaps in death upon the a battlefield, is called *jihad*.

In *jihad*, the Muslim leaves all things to God's mercy and doesn't care about death, or when and where it may befall him. This is the real fatalism of the Muslim but it is not a fatalism which could ever cause stagnation and decay. It was when the Muslims lost the spirit of *jihad* in works of peace, and lost sight of the larger meaning of the term in the restricted meaning which the scholiasts [commentators] attached to it, that Muslim civilisation began to stagnate.

Never was the narrowing of the meaning of the word down from the world-wide to the technical, which has been the process of scholasticism in Islam, more evident or more disastrous in its consequences, than in this case of *jihad*. Among non-Muslims it was commonly supposed to mean war for the conquest of anybody and everybody who profess any religion other than Islam. A fanatical outbreak analogous to that denoted by the word 'Crusade.' Even among Muslims it has come to be accepted as meaning 'war' for the defence of Islam; so much so that the War Department of the Sultan-Khalifa and his Viceroy, the Khedive of Egypt, was called not 'the Ministry of War,' but to the 'Ministry of Jihad', it being a pious fiction that war is waged by the authority of the Supreme Head of the Islamic brotherhood must always be in the nature of *jihad*.

This pious fiction was necessary for the army authorities, because, according to the Sacred Law, [Shar'iah] the Muslims can because upon to fight only in a war which has the nature of *jihad*. Thus a standing order for conscription could only be justified by the fiction that all the wars in which the army would take part would have that nature - *must* have that nature since they were waged with the authority of the Khalifa of the Muslims which presupposed the *fatwa* of the *Shaikh-ul-Islam* who represented all the learned in religious law. In the old days, when Muslim Universities were at the height of their power and influence, the learned in the Sacred Law judged independently, distinguished clearly between *jihad* warfare and wars of mere ambition or self-interest, and unanimously and invariably condemned the latter as totally unsanctioned by the *Shari'ah*. They could not stop the warfare of ambitious rulers altogether, but the imposed restrictions which made it harmless to the peoples as a whole. Thus no ruler might force a free Muslim to assist him in such warfare, or levy any public tax for such purposes. A ruler wishing to make war upon another ruler must do so at his personal expense, with the help of slaves bought with his own money and such others this might join him of their or an free-will. He and his army

must not touch the life or occupation of peaceful Muslims. Any wrong done to the peaceful Muslims - 'the quiet people, as they called them - was punished by the *Ulama*, who could rouse the whole Muslim world against the delinquent. So such wars did practically no injury whatsoever to the civilisation or solidarity of the Muslims. The quiet people saw the fighting slaves go by to battle and went on with their daily work. It mattered not to them who won, for change of rulers meant no revolution.

The Sacred Law was one for all Muslims, and whoever ruled was bound to obey it; since the *Ulama* were there to shame him in the eyes of the whole world if he did not. In the same way, the *Ulama* of or condemned warfare against non-Muslims in which the ground of action for the Muslims were not that of manifest right against manifest wrong. If all the wars waged by all Muslims throughout history had been on the plane of *jihad*, as were the wars waged by the early Muslims, Islam would have been the religion of the world today, and the world would have been in a healthier condition spiritually and morally than it is now. Wars which fall under the heading of *jihad* can be fought only in self-defence, for the protection of the weak who are oppressed and the redress of wrongs. Non-combatants must not be harmed, priests and religious institutions must be respected, crops must not be laid waste, fruit bearing trees must not be cut down.

**"Destroy not their means of subsistence."**

That was the Prophet's law against his enemies. Compare it with the law of modern Europe as exhibited in the late war [WWI], when it was considered quite legitimate to seek in every way to starve the enemy. And choose which you prefer. The Prophet's aim was to reduce the horrors of war, to render it comparatively mild, and its results so beneficial to the conquered that the hearts of men should be drawn towards Islam, and so peace should dawn for the world. There was, in his time, not a trace of that idea, which did prevail at times among the Muslims afterwards, that it was a sacred duty to wage war on unbelievers.

Everyone who sought peace with early Muslims could obtain it and, so long as he kept faith with them, had equal rights. Their respect for treaties was proverbial. The Qur'an makes every Contact sacred; and Muslims have preserved their fair renown in this respect. *Jihad* warfare was a part of Islamic culture which modern nations would do well to study and imitate. The Prophet forgave his enemies several times in his warfare, and with wonderful results.

There is, of course, one thing which the out-and-out pacifist will always object to in Islamic teaching, and that is the command to fight in self defence, for the protection of the weak and helpless, and for the redress of wrong (i.e. the plain command to kill in certain circumstances.) This command has been made the subject of atrocious calumnies [slanderous attacks] against Islam. Mr. Lloyd George at the Genoa Peace Conference and a learned judge in India about the same time, quoted these words from the Qur'an: "*Kill them wherever you find them*" [Qur'an 2:191] apart from their context, as if they were an order to the Muslims to murder and to massacre non-Muslims. In their context, no one could ascribe that meaning to them. I quote the whole passage from the Holy Qur'an:

*"Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. And kill them wherever you find them and drive them from the places whence they drove you out; for persecution is worse than killing. And fight not with them at the sanctuary (of Mecca) till they attack you there, and if they attack you, kill them. That is the reward of graceless people. But if they desist, then verily Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Fight against them till there is no more persecution an religion is all for Allah; but if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers."* [Qur'an 2:190-193]

This is not a command to murder and massacre. It is simply the ordinary rule of War put in plain terms to men who until then had thought it wrong to take a life under any circumstances. For the Muslims until then had been strict pacifists. And they were to fight against others, not to force on others their beliefs, but for freedom of belief against men who wished to uproot Islam, and were persecuting Muslims with that object.

They were to fight until there should be no more persecution, till the Quranic principle of "*No compulsion in religion*" [Qur'an 2:256] should be established, and religion should be all for Allah (that is, should be free for all alike, since Allah is one for all, and has no favourites; till the only test should be the natural and fair test of conduct). I ought not to have to say this to any audience in the world, but the ignorance which prevails is so abysmal that I must proclaim it:

There is not one word in the Holy Qur'an to justify murder or massacre under any circumstances whatsoever.

All there is is a command for open, honourable warfare, under certain plain conditions, and with limitations which made Islamic warfare, by its mercy as compared with other warfare, a great factor in the success of Islam as a religion; for it surprised the peoples used to utter ruthlessness in war.

Warfare is only one, and at that an extreme form of *jihad*. *Jihad* means effort or endeavour. In the religious sense, it probably applies to the whole effort of a Muslim to assert and establish the sovereignty of God in men's minds, by performing his religious duty as laid down in the Qur'an - an effort which should last through all his life, should govern every action of his life or he is not a true Muslim. This duty may be summarised as the fight for good against evil in every connection and in every field, beginning with man's own heart and mind.

Our Holy Prophet p.b.u.h. said:

**"The greatest *jihad* is that against a man's own lust."**

Which means that the best way of recommending the belief in Allah's universal sovereignty and extending the new realm of peace and brotherhood, is by the example of righteous conduct. The term *Al-Jihad-ul-Akbar*, "the greatest *jihad*," is also applied by the holy Prophet to the effort of the student to become learned and the effort of the learned to spread knowledge.

**"The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr."**

The term '*jihad*' is also applicable to the effort of the faulty towards perfection, to the effort of those who do not fly from pestilence but stay to tend the sick and bury the dead, to active charity, to patience under persecution - indeed to every form of human effort which aims at improvement, the defence of right and the redress of wrong. Trade was *jihad*, for the merchants went forth in the spirit of *jihad* as missionaries proud of their honourable dealing, their fidelity to contracts, carrying the truths of the Qur'an to every place they visited even as the Arab merchants do today. It is therefore incorrect to limit the meaning of the term to warfare, much more to warfare of the fanatical religious kind; though every Muslim - indeed every man - worthy of the name, must be prepared to die, if need be, for the cause which he considers right. So little has *jihad* in common with the war-names of that school of patriotism which hold that a man should be prepared to fight and die, if need be, for his country, right or *wrong* that our Prophet

plainly said:

**"He is not of us who sides with his tribe in injustice, and he is not of us who summons others aid him in aggression, and he is not of us who dies while assisting his tribe in tyranny."**

He once astonished his companions by saying:

**"Help your Muslim brother when he is doing right and when he is doing wrong."** They said: "What! Must we help him when he is doing wrong?" The Holy Prophet answered: **"Yes especially when he is doing wrong. Drag back his hand!"**

The Muslims are those who always fight "in the way of Allah" (as it is called in the Qur'an), that is, in self-defence or for the protection of the weak and oppressed or for the redress of wrongs. To wage aggressive war on people, simply on account of their religious opinions, is not allowed nor can the term '*jihad*' by any means be stretched to cloak such warfare. *Jihad* is "striving in the way of Allah," and the way of Allah, if we must seek a modern phrase to express it, is devotion to the cause of human progress. It is only when a nation or community does grievous wrong to Muslims, attempting towards terminate or enslave them, and extinguish truth by force of arms, that war against them is a duty for all Muslims. Through *jihad*, this general effort after good, is charged on Muslims as a sacred duty, they have not to think of their effort as in any way needed by Allah, or as a help to Him.

*"Whosoever striveth, striveth for his own good, for Allah has no need of His creatures."* [Qur'an 29:6]

There are English proverbs pointing to the same truth: "Virtue is its own reward." "God helps those who help themselves"; but the higher spiritual meaning of such pellets of old wisdom for the collective humanity has never been so brightly illustrated as in the history of the early Muslims. For the result of this unselfish effort after goodness of a host of men, led and inspired by the example of a man, who the happiest civilisation that the world has known, and it remained the happiest until the effort was relaxed.

*"For verily with hardship cometh ease  
Verily with hardship cometh ease.  
So when thou art relieved, still strive,*

*And seek to please thy Lord."* [Qur'an 94:5-8]

The Muslims of a later day forgot these truths, and when they were relieved from warfare and the evident need for effort relaxed their effort and so lost their ease. And so Muslim civilisation lost its vigour and gradually sank into its long decline.

The vigorous but simple discipline of Islam, always self-discipline (so unintelligible to outsiders who cannot conceive why any man or woman should do anything that does not give pleasure and is not profitable in any worldly sense, which he is not obligated to do) becomes intelligible when considered in connection with *jihad*, this unselfish effort for which men and women required training. The daily prayers, the yearly fast and the pilgrimage become but empty forms without the spirit of *jihad*. A Muslim cannot hope to be justified by faith alone nor by observance of the Sacred Law alone. The followers of other religions have been told to **believe only**. The Muslims are commanded to **believe and do** - believe in God without right conduct being a fault and not a virtue, like a duty unperformed. **The test is conduct.**

It has been said by the divines of a sister religion that a man has no duty towards himself. He has a duty towards God and a duty towards his neighbour. His duty towards himself is lost in those two duties. Islam has put it to us in another way. It recognizes man's duty towards himself, and that duty is *jihad*, this striving for good against evil, beginning with the conquest of man's own lusts. The duty of a man towards himself includes the duty to make war in certain circumstances, but it is nonetheless *jihad* though he be never called on to make war in all his life. His training for *jihad* is not only military training, it is the whole structure of Islamic discipline. On the other hand, universal military training is the natural corollary of the command to fight, and it must always be the law as in an Islamic State. Every Muslim ought to be a trainee *Mujtahid* qualified to bear his part in the *jihad*, which is forever going on against the powers of evil, whether in his own conscience, or in the workshop, or in the marketplace, or in the council chamber, or in the battlefield. He ought never to become so absorbed in his temporal possessions or occupations that it would break his heart to be deprived of them or torn from them suddenly.

*"For we are Allah's and unto Him we are returning."*  
[Qur'an 2:156]

It is but a little while, in any case, before we shall be obliged

to leave behind us all that we have loved and valued in this world. What do we take with us? Nothing. But we shall find something waiting for us, and by that we shall be judged for good or ill. It is,

*"That which your own hands have sent before you"*  
[Qur'an 22:20; 4:62; 2:182; 2:95; 8:51; 28:47; 62:7]

In the words of the Qur'an - the record of the effort we have made in the cause of righteousness, for the defence of Allah's Kingdom upon earth, on behalf of the weak, the ignorant, the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, and for the redress of wrongs. It is the account of our *jihad*. The wealth of this world is the gift of Allah. He bestows it upon whom He will and He removes it from whom He will. It is given always as a trust, often as a test of principle, sometimes as a trial, and sometimes as a punishment. It is a dangerous and troublesome possession, spiritually speaking, and it is insecure. What can we count on as secure? Only the promise of Allah that those who believe and those who strive for righteousness and those who leave their homes and their most loved possessions for the sake of Allah.

*"...their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve."*  
[Qur'an 2:62]

This is the fatalism of Islam. But is not the sort of fatalism of which it is generally accused. It is a condition of vigorous unceasing effort and intense vitality. Indeed the condition of *jihad* is glorious ennobled life, and it is easily within the reach of everyone.

Now the impact of a different civilisation has confounded the ideas of the majority of Muslims, many of whom are inclined to withdraw from it, as being based on greed and usury instead of sacrifice, and seek their own salvation as a folk apart. They perceive no religious sanction for most of the pursuits of men today. Commerce has become a cut-throat lying business, law mere chicanery, and science is being used for selfish and destructive purposes. In short, in the words of the Qur'an,

*"... but verily man is rebellious. That he thinketh himself independent!"* [Qur'an 96:6, 7]

But that is not a reason for the Muslims to withdraw from life, but the reverse, since to bring men back to knowledge of the sovereignty of Allah is the very reason why Islam was brought into existence. It is a simple question of adjusting the idea and practice of *jihad* to modern conditions, and that can be done only by the revival of Islamic institutions in a

modern guise. If the existing modern society is based on usury, let Muslims show an example of a modern society which is not based on usury. If a law is mere chicanery, let Muslims re-establish and obey the Sacred Law in all things which concerned their own community. If the present banking system seems usurious to them, let them start a Muslim banking system founded upon brotherhood, let them re-establish *Zakat* and *Bait-ul-Mal* [state treasury]. If the existing commercial methods strike them as villainous, then let them set up their own commerce and co-operative lines. If the industrial system seems to them a selfish tyranny, let them start their own industrial system in accordance with the *Shari'ah*.

It would be suicidal for Muslims to become merged in the new civilisation, for that would mean that they have accepted what they consider to be evil in it, and so could never in this world again become a power for good. But it would be equally suicidal for them to hold aloof from it, when it contains the knowledge and efficient standard of the present day. Muslims cannot go on living in the past or they will lose Islam as surely as they would if they accepted a non-Muslim civilisation unreservedly. The *Jihad-ul-Akbar* for the earnest Muslim's study is to obtain modern education so that they can discriminate between what is good and what is noxious in the new era. They must accept and assimilate what is good. And as for what is evil, they must propose something better which may replace it in the course of time. If the world is going to the devil, they alone can save it, for they alone possess the standard by which civilisation should be judged, and they alone are able to produce a complete alternative system of civilisation, claiming the divine sanction (a system which has worked with wonderful success in times past and, being adaptable to the needs of any age), may reasonably be expected to work with wonderful success in times to come. Which cannot be said of all the schemes of Western revolutionaries that have so far, when put into practice, always failed to add a little to the sum of human happiness. And we must remember always that to strive for the success in triumph of our own community, right or wrong, against other communities is not *jihad*. *Jihad* is to strive for right against wrong, good against evil wherever found. If you think that the ideal of such *jihad* has ever been about from the Muslim world then you are wrong. Read of the dealings of the Umayyad Khalifas with the Christian Kingdoms of the West and you will see that their ideal was precisely this, the fight for right against wrong wherever found. Read the letter of Sultan Suleyman the magnificent, to King Francis of France, when he was a prisoner and wrongfully despoiled of all his wealth, and you will see this principles set forth

and strongly vindicated. Our aim is not to establish the empire of our own community, it is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth; and the Sacred Law of Islam - containing natural laws which are for everybody - has the same wide human aim. To use it for a law or aim is to misinterpret, and so court failure. Without the wider human aim there can be no *jihad*.

The 'fatalism of Muslims,' which is so much talked about, is but a recognition of the unavoidable. In the present day, it must be shown in cheerful acceptance of the existing conditions as the will of God; while their *jihad*, their religious effort, must be, as before, to strive for good against evil first in purifying and rebuilding the Islamic brotherhood on modern lines and then in seeking by their conduct an example to call the world to consciousness of God's universal sovereignty.