BOOK REVIEWS

S.A. Rahman: Punishment of Apostasy in Islam.
Institute of Islamic Culture, Club Road, Lahore, Pakistan, 1972.
Price Rs. 6.50, pages 144.

Mr. Justice S.A. Rahman is one of the outstanding personalities of Pakistan. Towards the end of the regime of Ayub Khan he retired from the post of the Chief Justice of Pakistan. The present work amply testifies to his vast knowledge of Pakistani Muslim Law and provides some food for thought for the legislators of Pakistan who are now busy in framing a new constitution for the country.

Islam has undoubtedly protected the rights of the non-Muslims who like to live peacefully in an Islamic milieu. But the Muslims themselves cannot enjoy a lenient treatment if they declare themselves renegades — a doctrine that has been held unanimously by all sections of the followers of Islam since the very early days till today. Mr. Justice Rahman, however, does not see any rationality in this; and has raised the question that was once decisively dealt with only a few decades ago after the followers of Qadiyân had advanced their arguments against the established punishment of apostasy in Islam. In so far as his arguments are concerned there is hardly anything new in them although the publishers claim that, “Justice Rahman has examined this vital question in the light of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.” In fact, he has concentrated only on one set of verses and has completely ignored the other set of verses which are directly relevant to the question. He has also misconstrued some of the Quranic verses, as his interpretation of those verses would testify.

As for the sources of the book, it is apparent that the contents of the book are mostly derived from Al-Sâmirî’s Al-kâm al-Murtadd, and the criticus apparatus indicate that the interpretations of the author are mostly based on the Urdu versions of the Qur’an, various collections of Ahdîth and the works on Fiqh and jurisprudence. The book consists of an Introduction of eight pages and five chapters as detailed below:

I. Apostasy and the Qur’an, 9-55
II. Apostasy and the Sunnah, 56-86
III. Apostasy and the “Khilâfat al-Râshidah”, 87-103
IV. Apostasy and the Fuqahâ’, 104-129
IV. Summary and Conclusions, 130-138

The learned judge postulates that an apostate is not necessarily an active rebel ignoring the etymology of ‘Apostasy’ (which is “abandonment of religious faith, vows, principles, or party”). Unconventionally he divides “apostasy” into two parts, as he argues (cf. Introduction p. 3): “...... and no distinction apparently exists in the minds of the old jurists between apostasy simpliciter and apostasy combined with treason or severance of allegiance to the state. It is tacitly assumed that every apostate from
Islam deserves the death penalty, not merely as a renegade from the true faith, but also as a muḥārīb — an active rebel." To the author 'apostasy' is not 'rebellion' and an 'apostate' is not 'active rebel' — a meaning which, if accepted, leads to believe that 'apostasy' is not 'abandonment of faith, vows or party', and this etymologically is not sound. Again the learned judge uses the word 'muḥārīb' in the sense of 'active rebel' instead of 'one fighting'. Moreover, he repeatedly (pp. 4, 130) mentions the Qur'ānic expression: 'lā ikhrāhā fi'd-din' (there is no compulsion in religion) and never quotes the verse fully which runs as: (al-Baqarrah. 256) "lā ikhrāhā fi'd-dini, qad tabayyana r-rushdu mina'l-ghayyi, fa man yakfur bi't-tāghūti wa yūmin billahī fa qad istam-saka bi'l'urwati'l-wuthqā, la'nifiṣama lahā, wallīhu sami'ūn 'alim:" 'Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error; whoever rejects Evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things' (Yūsuf 'Ali).

The author's conclusion (vide p. 54) "The position... may be summed up by saying that not only is there no punishment for apostasy provided in the Book but that the word of God clearly envisages the natural death of the apostate. He will be punished only in the Hereafter" is his own surmise, and a conjecture without any basis, as it obviously goes against the Qur'ānic expression "in this world" (fi'l-'ayyāt al-dunya) occurring in the first verse quoted by him on page 32. Again, the expression 'fa yamut wa huwa Kāfirun' is deliberately used by the author only in one sense i.e. natural death whereas it also carries a second meaning that he may be killed (for defection). His argument (see p. 60) that hadith "apparently contradicts the Qur'ānic texts", would have been acceptable had he referred precisely to any verse meaning that 'an apostate be not killed' or 'do not kill an apostate'. In the absence of any such verse the Prophetic order (referred to on page 60) "whosoever changes his faith, slay him" is clear and is the source of the unanimous decision of the Ummah (see p. 104). This leaves no room for making distinction between "apostasy simpliciter and apostasy combined with treason."

Disbelief after belief (al-riddah, apostasy) cannot be tolerated, as the Qur'ān has it (vide 'āl 'Imrān, 85, 86):

"And whoso seeketh as religion other than al-Islam it will not be accepted from him, and he will be loser in the Hereafter.

How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their belief and (after) they bore witness that the messenger is true and after clear proofs had come unto them. And Allah guideth not wrong doing folk."

If the unanimous decision of the Ummah on the punishment of apostasy were followed in Pakistan, the easy conversion of Muslims in the Punjab and Sind to Christianity for small worldly gains, would have been stopped long ago. The new interpretation of 'apostasy simpliciter' would, on the other hand, make matters easier in the field of conversion particularly when the masses are very poor and susceptible to temptations of money and facilities in life.

It will not be out of place to quote the English version of a few verses which have unfortunately escaped the notice of the learned author, from 'ālī 'Imrān in which 'believers' have been asked to stick to their belief and it has been made clear that 'disbelief'
entails 'chastisement' and is therefore an unpardonable crime: (verses 100-106 Arberry: The Koran Interpreted):

"Let there be one nation of you, calling to good, and bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour; those are the prosperous.

Be not as those who scattered and fell into variance after the clear signs came to them; those there awaits a mighty chastisement.

the day when some faces are blackened, and some faces whitened.

As for those whose faces are blackened — 'Did you disbelieve after you had believed? Then trust the chastisement for that you disbelieved!' But as for those whose faces are whitened, they shall be in God's mercy, therein dwelling for ever. These are the signs of God We recite to thee in truth, and God desires not any injustice to living beings'.

The excellent get up, the beautiful diction and the style of Justice S.A. Rahmān have together made the book very interesting. To the Arabists, however, the following orthographic and printing errors, I quote only a few here, may not be surprising:

Page 43: Muharibah instead of 'Muḥārabah'
47: Tafsir Khazan instead of 'Khāzin'
47: Shibah instead of 'Shaibah'
55: The author does not recognise any discrimination between 'apostates and hypocrites'.
60: Mu'jamat (—Mu'jam).
60: ".... contradicts the Quranic texts" (—He forgets 'inna'd-dīna 'indallāhi 'l-Islam' and 'falan yuqābala minhu' etc . . . .)
62: "al-Juz' Yalhaqat al-Takdhib (?)
64: 'uqtalūhu instead of 'uqtulūhu'
65: "Again, on the Prophet's death on the day of Thaqifah,...." (—after the death of the Prophet on the . . . .)
65: "Uqtalu as-Sa'd, .... instead of "Uqtulū's-Sa'd....
67: "In order words, he says, ...." (—In other words . . . .)
68: ".... fīman artadda)". (—fīman irtadda).
69: "al-Mafariq ...." (—al-mufāriq . . . .)
77: Abdullah b. Zaba'ri (— .... Zaba'rā)
77: Hibār .... (— Habbār)
77: Mugais .... (— Maqis)
77: WaW̱ b. Harab .... (— Ḥarb)
83: The author refers to Mi'rāj and some Meccans who abandoned Islam. (He needs not be reminded that Ḥudūd and punishments were prescribed in Islam after Hijrat. His argument is therefore not sound.)
88: Tulaiha b. Khawailid.... (— Khuwailid)
92: His criticism of Kanzu’l-‘Ummāl is not valid, as all its ḥadīths are traceable in canonical works.

93: Muwātṭā of Baihaqi (?) (— Baihaqi’s Sunan is well-known).

94: Abdullah b. Nawāḥa (repeated) ? (— Nawwāhah)

96: “.... element of iḥrāb (also p. 97) (— hirāb)

98: — al-Musawwa is the commentary by Shah Waliyullah, see ed. of Fārūqi Press, 1293 H.

The author used the Salafiyyah ed. 1351. Hence the wrong title).

100: “.... Ḥāḍrat ‘Ali banished Ibn Sabā’ to Madā’in on his saying to the Caliph “Anta Anta” (you are, you are—God). So the Saba’ is to be differentiated from that of simple apostasy, on that ground.” (Is the author not disrupting the social order of Pakistan by opposing the ijmā‘ and insisting on his conclusion?).

100: Safāriyyah (— Saffāriyah).


110: Muntahi al-Arādāt (— Muntaha’l-‘irādāt).

M.S.H. Masumi.
Dr. Yohanan Friedmann —

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindhi

McGill Queen's University Press, Montreal and London,

pages 130, price $ 9/50.

The present book is a doctorate thesis, written on the various aspects of the life and works of Shaykh Ahmad. The concept of Tadjid, the Shaykh's views on Prophecy and Sainthood, Islamic Tradition, Ta'awwuf etc. have been discussed. The learned author has taken pains to judge things independently and has tried to correct the views of several contemporary writers of repute. He has refuted some baseless charges levelled against the Shaykh and has given a picture of his environment, as depicted in his letters. Unfortunately the author could not get a scholarly edition of the Maktūbāt (P. In), nor had an access to the Shaykh's other books, like Tahliliya, Mukaṣṣafat-i-'Ayniya (not Ghaybiya, p. 6), Sharh-i-Rubā‘iyāt, etc, which have already been published from Karachi. He has not eventually ascertained the dates of the Shaykh's works, nor could write an authentic life-sketch. In the Introduction (P. XIII) he writes:—

"Because of his scholarship he was later invited to the Court of Akbar at Agra. He stayed there for an unspecified period of time, during which he assisted the famous wazir and writer Abu-al-Fazl in his literary work."

We have no historical proof that the Shaykh was invited to the Court. He, however, went there on his own accord, as is stated in the Zubdat-al-Maqāmāt (P. 132, Lucknow 1890) and that he did not assist Abu-al-Fazl in his literary work, but assisted his brother Fayzi in his commentary of the Holy Qur’ān, written with undotted letters.

He says (Introduction, P. XIII). In 1619 (1028 A.H.), therefore, the emperor Jahāngīr summoned Sirhindī to his court and decided to imprison him in the fort of Gwalior”. This fact has not been stated with care. The Shaykh writes (in 1027 A.H.) in his letter 92, vol. II, “The infidels demolish mosques.... No prostration to the emperor should be done.... I shall come to Agra when the emperor returns from his tour” (see also the Tuzk-i-Jahangiri, p. 272, Aligarh 1864). The author has also discussed the position of the Shaykh (P. XIV) and does not consider his 70 letters (out of 534), addressed to officialdom, sufficient to guide the Moghul politics (pp. 2, 79). But we should bear in mind that it was an age of a despotic monarch, whose policies could be moulded through his officials only. Even when Jahāngīr could hear the Shaykh (Vol. III, Letter 43), the religious knowledge was inculcated mildly and slowly. There are again a number of letters, written to the royal family and the officials, by the Shaykh's sons and grandsons (published in the collections Maktūbāt-i-Maṣūmīa, Gulshan-i-Waḥdat, Waṣīlat al-Qabûl, Maktūbāt-i-Sayfīa, etc). We should not expect these religious men to have dictated the political policies. They could only write and guide them spiritually, and the result was that the policies of Akbar were gradually changed.

The author has discussed, in details, (pp. 60-66) the views of Ḥallāj and Ibn -al- 'Arabī as taken by the Shaykh and has said that those Sufis were not treated as infidels. The belief that the Shaykh took them to be so, has no authenticity. We may recall to
our mind the efforts of the writer of the Kāsir al-Mukhālifin and also of Barzanji’s family, who either fabricated or distorted certain wordings of the Shaykh, saying that he had called those Sufis infidels. These attempts were made about 60 years after the death of the Shaykh. Mr. Iqbal Mujaddidi has proved in his book on Abdullah Khweshgi (Lahore 1971) that neither of the said writers had seen the Shaykh’s writings in the correct form. The forged farmān of Aurangzeb, regarding the proscription of the Maktūbāt, and the Fatwā of the Arāb ‘Ulama calling the Shaykh a Kāfir, are all misleading and have no authenticity, (See Mr. Iqbal’s said book, pp. 148-150, 161-164, 180-204). Similarly, the manuscript letter by ‘Abdu’l Jalil Siddiqi (as quoted by our author on pages 116-117) has no contextual relation with the letter No. 112, Vol. I, of the Maktūbāt. Dārā Shikoh’s Safinātul Auliya (discourse on the Shaykh) would throw light on ‘Abdu’l Haq’s misunderstandings in this connection. Dr. Friedmann, no doubt, deserves congratulations for writing a good thesis on the Shaykh, but he could really write much better if he could have an access to the works supposed by him as not extant.

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