

Myth of Islam's Contribution to Human Civilization – Muhammad Hussain

Saturday, 25 July 2009

From: www.islam-watch.org

Since the tragic incident of September 11, 2001 when 19 suicidal

Muslim terrorists rammed airplanes into the World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon Headquarters killing more than 3000

innocent people, Islam, as a religion, has come under serious scrutiny. A number of books, critically examining Islamic doctrine have been published, whilst volumes of articles and essays, critical of Islam are being published in print media and in the Internet on a daily basis. This is a new experience to Muslims. Indeed, despite being an evidently obscurantist religion, Islam has escaped its due share of criticisms for a long time. For example: hundreds of books and essays critical of Christianity or Hinduism have been freely available in the library and media for a long time whilst such materials on Islam have been virtually absent, since a few titles that were published were banned. Indeed, any attempt to criticize Islam has been silenced through Islamic "rogue justice" called Fatwa as has happened to Salman Rushdie, author of "Satanic Verses". The tragic event of 9/11 (2001) has acted as a catalyst in the hands of the critiques of Islam to invigorate their criticism of Islam. These critiques include moderate Muslims, ex-Muslims and non-Muslims.

As Islam is increasingly being portrayed as an obscurantist and a violent religion which promotes cruelty, armed militancy, human rights violation and a hindrance to progress and modernization, the Muslim apologists - who go by the label "moderate Muslims" - are desperately trying to defend Islam as a religion of peace, progress and modernity. In their desperation, Muslim apologists are often making extraordinary claims such as Islam's contribution to human civilization as a measure of Islam progressiveness. For example, a Muslim apologist of Bangladeshi origin, who is a professor at a college in New York, made the following claim in an Internet forum: "Equating a political ideology, that of the Jamaat-e-Islami (an Islamic political party in Bangladesh), with Islam is a gross insult to a great religion that has contributed to the lion's share of human civilization."
Her claim that Islam contributed a lion's share to human civilization did not come with any supporting evidence or example. When an explanation was sought from the professor to support her claim, she remained silent. This essay will critically examine the contribution of Islam to world civilization. Because of the interrelatedness of the issue, contributions by other religions, namely Christianity and Judaism, would also be covered in a substantial way to give a comparative picture.

Examining Contribution of Religions to Civilization

Let us start with the greatest 20th century philosopher Bertrand Russell's assessment on the contribution of religions to human civilization. Lord Russell, in his famous essay "Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?" has outlined a concise account of contributions made by religions (all religions) to human civilization [Ref: Why I am not a Christian, p.24]. Bertrand Russell could not find any significant contribution that religions, including Islam, might have made to human civilization. He wrote:

"My own view on religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race. I cannot, however, deny that it has made some contributions to civilization. It helped early days to fix the calendar and it caused Egyptian priests to chronicle eclipses with such care that in time they became able to predict them. These two services I am prepared to acknowledge, but I do not know of any others."

If my understanding is correct, the above quote from Bertrand Russell relates to the religious priest of Egypt preceding the birth of Jesus. Or, to be precise those two contributions were made by the ancient Egyptian religious priests before the arrival of Moses/Jesus. Even the Chinese Royal astrologers were able to predict Eclipse in 2134 BC, long before the birth of Moses, allegedly after 1200 BC. In other words, none of the three major Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism, Islam and Christianity, has made any contribution to human civilization. Instead, all these religions have only hindered progress and development of human civilization. A classic example of this is the plunging into the proverbial Dark Age of the Greek rationalism-inspired vibrant and fast-prospering Europe as soon as the anti-progressive and often cruel Christian ideology became part of the ruling machinery of Roman Empire in the early 4th century when Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, became a Christian. The Western world, where religion is becoming increasingly extinct, those societies are making significant contributions to science, technology, human values and social development in recent times. On the other hand if we look at the Muslim world today - where people's religious fervor and adherence to religious rituals are very strong - we clearly see that these societies are making very little contribution to progress and development of their society and people and to the world at large.

Hence, we can safely take Russell's assertion "I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race" as true. As for Islam, this religion started with violence initiated by Prophet Muhammad himself. Prophet Muhammad is said to have fought 78 or more wars and only two of those were initiated by his opponents. He started his campaign to establish Islam as a true religion with the aim of capturing Ka'ba, the alleged House of God from the hands of the Meccan Pagans. However, by the time of his death Muhammad had conquered most

parts of the Arabian Peninsula as a result of those 78 or more wars he had fought. Following his death, his successors stepped in the Prophet's footsteps and this bloody Islamic conquest continued as long as the brutal Arab and Persian Muslim rulers could, for the sake of spreading Islam that resulted in creation of the giant Islamic kingdom.

It should, however, be considered that the Islamic conquests were very different from those of other conquerors, like that of pagan "Alexander the Great". In the case of Alexander, once he conquered a land, the miseries of the conquered people were over since he quickly moved on to establish just governance whereby he rarely discriminated the conquered people. It should be noted that once Alexander established his huge Empire and instituted its capital in Persia, people in his Empire were better off than before, since he established good governance and a better justice system. He realized that, although conquered, those defeated people were intelligent, capable and worthy of respect. Subsequently, he continually pushed for equality amongst all the people in his kingdom irrespective of religion, race or culture. He also realized that racial differences are major a reason for conflicts amongst different people. Hence, he used to encourage inter-racial marriages amongst his people as a means to promote racial harmony. He hosted a feast, famously known as the "Marriage of the East and the West", at which several thousand Macedonian troops formally married Asian women. He also promoted cross-cultural exchanges and during his rule many cultural concepts from India and Arab world entered Europe whilst Greek cultural influence moved eastward to Asia and India.

On the other hand, the Muslim conquerors had invariably indulged in destroying the cultures of the subdued people. Furthermore, the conquered people in the Muslim kingdom had to continue to suffer as the Muslim rulers would impose various discriminatory measures literally to force them to accept Islam. The conqueror Muslims would even brutally persecute those conquered people if they refused to accept the religion of Islam. In Islamic kingdoms, non-Muslim had to pay Jiziya, a special high tax, tactically designed to force the non-Muslims into accepting Islam. It can be cited here that during the centuries of Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent it is estimated that the tyrant Muslim rulers had killed some 50 million Hindus and indigenous people, whilst hundreds of Hindu temples were destroyed. Even Sultan Haider, the father of Tipu Sultan of Haiderabad, had ordered the destruction of many Hindu temples.

It must also be remembered that as per Islamic traditions set by Prophet Muhammad himself, once a country or domain was conquered Muslim army had every right to take the subdued male as slaves and their women as sex-slaves. Muslim conquest of India was no exception in this regard. It becomes evident that after conquering India, tens of thousands of people might have had been taken as slaves by the Muslims army. As an example: while being transported to Persia, some 100,000 Hindu slaves died in a mountain area in Afghanistan because of sudden ensuing of severe winter. This mountain is now known as the "Hindu Kush", meaning "Hindu death". This tragedy, which has never happened in any history of conquest, was of such great enormity that this mountain was so named to recognize the victims. It is always the rule of war: the conqueror takes the credit and not the vanquished.

We should also consider the fact that Bertrand Russell's book "Why I am Not a Christian" was published in 1956. Hence, if Islam had really made the lion's share of contribution to the progress of human civilization it must have happened only after this book was published in 1956. But to our knowledge, Islamic world has only degraded or obstructed the progress of all the fundamental aspects of excellence of our civilization in recent decades. For example, violation of human rights and the practice of unfair justice are rampant in the Islamic world. It is very clear, Islamic world has made no contribution whatsoever to the advancement of science and technology and neither has it made any worthwhile inputs in any other endeavors of human development during the last few decades.

Contribution to Civilization: The Religious Understanding

During discussions with the Islamic as well as other religious apologists, who often make extraordinary claims about great contributions of religions to civilization, I realized that the fundamental understanding of these people about the basic elements of human civilization are grossly flawed, despite their having a very high grade of modern education. I quote here one such highly educated religious person (probably a Christian) who described her idea of religions' enormous contribution to Civilization as follows:

"I would say the contribution is enormous; it actually gives the best thing that there is to people. It gives hope, it gives some kind of meaning to life, and it tells people that they are not alone but someone is watching over them all the time so that they are safe. You see you can have a band of army guarding you 24/7 and you still might feel unsafe, but if you believe in religion then you will probably feel even in the darkest lonely night you have no reason to fear. This is what religion contributes to human life, what more do you think human being needs?"

This definition of 'enormous contribution' by religion to human civilization possibly gives an indication as to why religions or the deeply religious people have never been part of the progress of civilization; instead, had acted as a serious impediment. If this idea on contributions of religions to civilization is to be taken as true, then it can be safely said that the middle-age world and her barbarian people were more civilized than those of today. It is because most of the people were more religious during that time when compared with those of present time. For example, today about 50% of the people in the Western Europe do not subscribe to the known Gods or religions, whilst people not believing in a God and Religion in the middle-age must have been a rarity. Following the logic of the religionists the middle-age world must have been a better civilization. Unfortunately, most philosophers, scientists and humanists, majority of whom have been heretics or skeptics of traditional religions and Gods, might have spoiled the good old civilization by pushing our

world towards today's perceived degraded state.

Today, individual freedom and respect for human rights and dignity etc. define the absolute core elements of modern civilization. These defining elements of today's civilization are far different from what is claimed to be the defining essentials of civilization in religious terms as explained above. And definitely, religions have no critical value in the defining modern civilization. In fact, most of these elements which are the cornerstones of modern civilization have been and still are the enemies of all religions. This is because efforts to institute these defining elements of today's civilization have always collided with religions and they often have been achieved at the costly sacrifices of humanists and freethinkers. Indeed, these pivotal elements of today's civilization are becoming instrumental in kicking religions out of peoples' lives and hence today a good number of people around the world are atheists, skeptics and agnostics. Their number is continually on the rise. Thus, if we are to accept the above-mentioned definition of civilization proposed by the religious friends, we surely live in a much less civilized human society today compared to the one in which, say Prophet Muhammad, Jesus or Moses had lived and the civilization is rapidly turning uncivilized! So, to fulfill our innate aspiration to reach to a higher level of civilization, it is probably time "we set the clock of our world backward and go back to the greater civilization of the time of Prophet Muhammad, Jesus or Moses or may be Adam" - if we are to follow the reason of the religionists. Leaving aside the sarcasm, we may surely conclude that the religiously-indoctrinated peoples' mind, brain and psyche are truly stunted or prejudiced about the whole idea of the progress and excellence of our world and civilization. This also probably explains the reason why religions as social institutions and the religious people have never been part of the progress of civilization but instead have acted as serious impediments.

More intelligent religious apologists, however, would mention the names of renowned scientists, philosophers and thinkers of their respective religions to claim the credit of contribution of their religions to civilization. For example, Christian would mention about Newton and Galileo et al., Jews will mention about

Einstein or an array of modern-day Nobel laureates of Jewish origin whilst the Muslims would cite the name of great intellectuals of the past like Ibn-Sina, Al-Biruni and Omar Khaiyam et al. as well as more recent Nobel laureate such as late Professor Abdus Salam. These names indeed make a formidable case in favor of the religionists but such arguments cannot be given an automatic pass without raising a huge question mark about the role of religion in these individuals' contributions to science. We must consider the following points in this regard:

How knowledgeable and dedicated they were in religion? How much did their religious knowledge help them in making their ground-breaking contributions?

Were they closer to Gods like the Maolanas/Mullahs (Islam), Rabbis (Jewish), Priests/Pastors (Christianity) and Prophets?

What are the contributions the alleged 140,000

Prophets (according to Islam) made to what defines today's civilization?

Many individuals, such as, Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Euclid, Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius and Aristarchus et al., born long before the Prophets such as Muhammad and Jesus, were all known to be pagan as per Abrahamic religions. But they had direct and profound influence in laying the foundation of today's world of excellence in science, education, human rights and justice. As civilization progresses, we keep distancing ourselves from whatever the alleged God-sent Prophets, namely Muhammad, Jesus and Moses et al. had advocated. It is a stark reality that the sole contributions of these Prophets, the Torah/Old Testament, Bible and Koran, have only stalled the progress of civilization to a higher level. The Jews and the Christians of today can mention scores of modern Nobel laureates of Jewish and Christians backgrounds to claim their respective religion's contribution to civilization. However, the following questions are needed to be answered before accepting such examples:

* Are those Nobel laureates going to agree to stoning-to-death of their spouses or anybody else if the latter committed adultery? ["If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her.".....
"Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbor's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you."
(Deuteronomy 22:22,24)]

* Are they going to agree to rip up pregnant women and chop the unborn embryo into pieces for whatsoever reasons? ["Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up." (Hosea 13:16)].

These God-given verses have been taken directly from the Bible. The Christians, however, deny these atrocious and barbaric edicts as alien to their religion since they are actually taken from the Jewish Old Testament. It should, however, be considered that Jesus did not himself write the New Testament; instead, Saint Paul is known to have authored major part of the New Testament. Jesus is said to have had whole-heartedly accepted and preached the Old Testament or Torah. In this regard Michael Hart says in his book "The 100":

"..Mathew and Luke give completely different versions of Jesus' last words; both of these versions, incidentally, are direct quotations from the Old Testament. It was no accident that Jesus was able to quote from the Old Testament; though the progenitor of Christianity, he was himself a devout Jew."

Old Testament, of course, is a part of the Bible and nowhere in the New Testament has Jesus ever rejected or denounced the Old Testament. It must also be understood that Christians believe the God of the Jews as the same God as their own. Hence, an all-correct, all powerful and all-knowing God's eternal and absolutely original teachings as prescribed in the Old Testament cannot be negated or overruled by the lesser than original ones outlined in the New Testament.

Yet, the great majority of the scientists, thinkers and philosophers of today do not subscribe to the fables of creationism or virgin birth of Jesus. For example, most scientists today would believe that in scientific term, Jesus was an illegitimate child, that is, the so-called Holy Ghost who is claimed (by Christians) to have impregnated Mary was none other than a mortal human being. However, the punishment for these giant scientists for such blasphemy is death as has been prescribed by Jesus himself in the Bible:

And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the [world] to come. [Mat 12:32]

It is true that majority of the great scientists of modern times have Christian and Jewish root or background. But this does not automatically make these Christians and Jews or their great discoveries and contributions to be religious. For example, take the case of the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the melting-pot of all the greatest scientists worldwide. Interestingly, only 7% of the scientists of NAS believe in the known Gods or religions. Thus, the greatest minds of today, despite having Judeo-Christian backgrounds, are actually heretics to their religions. The punishment for these great minds, as per the Judeo-Christian religions, is death as outlined in the following Biblical verses:

"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;" (Deuteronomy 13: 6)

"Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people." (Deuteronomy 13:8-9)

Islamic Golden Age and Contribution to Civilization

Similarly, Muslims, whenever they talk about Islam's contributions to civilization, also quickly point to the great Muslim poets, philosophers and scientists, namely Omar Khayam, Ibn Sina, Ibn

Rushd et al. of the so-called Islamic Golden Age, spanning from 8th to the 14th century. There is no denying the fact that these great Muslim people have made significant contributions to human society. But we must address the essential question: "How good Muslims were they?" The truth is, they were hardly good Muslims and in correct religious term, many of them would qualify to be apostates of Islam and indeed, the-then Islamic clerics had called them heretics.

During the so-called Islamic Golden Age (8th-14th century), the Islamic world was most advanced in Science, Technology, Industries, trading and in many other fields compared to other parts of the world. Indeed, during that period, Islamic world produced many scientific, literary and philosophical genius, such as Omar Khayam (1048-1122), Al-Zahrawi (936-1013), Al-Khowarizmi (780-850); Al-Biruni (973-1050), Al-Kindi (801-873), Al-Battani (850-929 CE), Ibn-Sina (973-1037), Abdallah al-Ma'arri (973-1057), Omar Khayam (1048-1122), Ibn-Rushd (1128-1198) and Jalaluddin Rumi (Birth 1207) amongst others.

There is no doubt about the greatness of these genius intellectuals who were indeed without any parallel in their fields of scholarship amongst the compatriots from other religions on the world stage. However, there is something very interesting about that period of Islamic Golden Age - from the time preceding and following that period. It should first be considered that that was the time, when the Christian world of Europe went into the grip of the Christian Churches which plunged the fast progressing and prospering Europe, inspired by Greek philosophy of Hellenistic Age into the proverbial Dark Age. However, exactly the opposite was happening in the Islamic world during this time. Greek rationalism and philosophy disappeared from Europe but emerged in the nascent Islamic world which gave rise to a new Islamic doctrine called Mutazili, originated during the period of 'Abbasid Caliphate' (749-847 AD).

Mutazili theology originated in the 8th century in al-Basrah (also called Besra), the great Iraqi City, when Wasil Ibn 'Atta' left the teaching lessons of al-Hasan al-Basri after a theological dispute. Thus, Ibn 'Atta' and his followers were labeled "Mutazili" which means "deserter of Islam". The Mutazili theology expanded on the logic and rationalism of Greek philosophy, seeking to combine them with Islamic doctrines, and show that they were inherently compatible.

During this period, several questions were being debated by Muslim theologians, including whether the Qur'an was created or eternal, whether evil was created by God, the issue of predestination vs. free will, whether God's attributes in the Qur'an were to be interpreted allegorically or literally, and whether sinning believers would have eternal punishment in hell. Mu'tazila thought attempted to address all these issues.

The Mu'tazila ideology believed that Koran was created by Mohammad; it was not the words of Allah. They believed that Prophet Muhammad could not have direct conversation with the allegedly visually perceptible Allah, who is claimed to be invisible and imperceptible in the Koran. And this doctrine, which amounts to absolute heresy, as per Islam, was promoted by the-then Abbasid Caliphates Haroon al-Rasheed (763-809) and was made the official court belief by his son, the great Caliph al-Mamun. Caliph al-Mamun even instituted inquisition-style persecution, called Mihna in Arabic meaning Ordeal (833-848), for those who would not accept the Mutazili ideology, instead of Koranic Islam. The most famous victims of the Mihna were Ahmad Ibn Hanbal who was imprisoned and tortured, and the judge Ahmad Ibn Nasr al-Khuza'i who was crucified.

The defining philosophy of Mutazili was freewill, rationalism and scientific thought which was rooted in the Hellenic-age Greek philosophy. In the following poem, the great poet, philosopher, astronomer and mathematician, Omar Khayam ostensibly vilifies Islam whilst expresses great appreciation for Greek philosophy:

"If Madrasahs of those drunks

Became the educational institutes

Of teaching philosophy of

Epicures, Plato and Aristotle;

If Abode and Mazars of Peer and Dervish

Is turned into research institutes,

If men instead of following blind faith of religion

Should have cultivated ethics,

If the abode of worships were turned into

Centers of learning of all academic activities,

If instead of studying religion, men

Would have devoted to develop mathematics - algebra,

If logic of science would have occupied the place of

Sufism, faith and superstition,

Religion that divides human beings

Would have replaced by humanism,....

Then world would have turned into haven,

The world on other side then would have extinguished

The world would then become full of

Love-affection-freedom-joy,

And there is no doubt about it."

Ibn-Sina (Avicenna) had also thoroughly rejected religions, including Islam, as lies. He said, "These billy goats (Prophets) pretend to come with a message from God, all the while exhausting themselves in spouting their lies, and imposing on the masses blind obedience to the "words of the master."

Abdallah al-Ma'arri (973-1057), famously known as Lucretius of the East, also trashed religions in his poems:

"Hanifs (Muslims) are stumbling, Christians all astray

Jews wildered, Magians far on error's way.

We mortals are composed of two great schools:

Enlightened knaves or else religious fools....."

Mu'tazila belief system was actively promoted by the Islamic Caliphates and was popular amongst the educated and intellectual elites whilst failing to create appeal amongst the uneducated common mass. On the other side, the dogmatic pro-Koran Muslims, made vigorous effort to counter the Mutazili belief and this period was also graced by the other famous Ahadith-collectors, such as Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (9200 Ahadiths, death 875),

al-Bukhari (810-870, 7275 Ahadiths), Abu Da'ud (death 888) and Al-Tirmidi (death 892) et al. The dogmatic Koranic or Sunni Islam slowly started to dominate the Muslim thoughts and later Imam al-Ghazalli (death 1111), the other famous Ahadith-collector, created a mass hysteria by challenging the rational thinking of Mu'tazila belief since it could not prove the reality of Allah. Famous intellectuals, such as Ibn-Sina, Ibn-Rusd, al-Ma'arri and Omar Khayam were called heretics or apostates by the Islamic zealots, such as Imam Ghazali. Subsequently, Mutazili started losing ground to the assaults of the zealot Muslims and finally lost patronage of the rulers and high officials. By the 13th Century, Mutazili was dead and with that ended the so-called Golden Age of Islam.

Thus, the Islamic Golden Age is a time, which was characterized by the development of a rather anti-Islamic Mutazili theology, inspired by the rational reasoning and freethinking of the pre-Christianity Greek Rationalism. And those Muslims scholars, who enriched science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy and rational thinking - the defining elements of the Islamic Golden Age, belonged to the un-Islamic Mutazili school, unlike contemporary Sunni Islamic scholars, such as al-Bukhari, Abu Daud and Imam Ghazali et al., of the true Islamic school. Given these facts, it is totally untenable and silly to claim that the golden era of progress and prosperity of Islamic world was ever positively influenced by Islam but instead, it was made possible because true Islamic ideology took the back seat during that era.

If we want to count the true contribution of Islam to human civilization, we should look to the pre-Golden Era period, characterized by the rule of Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakar, Hazrat Omar, Usman, Imam Ali and Abu Hanifa et al. - the greatest figures of the Islamic faith. We can also count the contribution of the post-Golden Era period (post-13th century) when the true Islamic (Sunni) doctrine was revived. Unfortunately, during these periods of domination of true Islamic faith, contributions of the Islamic world to science, technology, medicine and human development etc., have been nonexistent. Even the so-called Islamic Golden Age was graced by the famous vanguards of Islamic doctrines, namely Muslim b. al-Hajjaj, al-Bukhari, Abu Da'ud, Al-Tirmidi and Imam Ghazali etc. - the famous hadith collectors. Yet, they had made absolutely no contribution to science, medicine, technology and human development, which define the Golden Age. Instead, works of these true Islamic scholars, assisted by the Koran, helped codify the Islamic Sha'ria, which has caused only violation of human rights and dignity, degradation of individual freedom and justice and genesis of Islamic terrorism, as seen in the Islamic world today.

We must also consider that the ratio of Nobel laureates between Muslims and Jews are ~1:100. This huge disparity can be easily accounted for by the fact that Islamic world is deeply religious as compared to the Jews or Christians. Since majority of Jews and Christians have been able to overcome the bigotry and dogmatic beliefs of their religions, they are more able to be creative and contribute to our world.

Christianity and Modern Civilization

It is true that modern civilization boomed in post-Dark Age Christian Europe and it requires investigation before crediting this boom to the Christian faith. It is obvious that many scientists, philosophers and writers from Christian background contributed heavily to the evolution of our civilization through the days of Renaissance and Industrial Revolution in Europe. The great Copernicus, Galileo and Newton et al. were all born as Christians. But should their mammoth contribution to scientific revolution owe anything to the Christian faith? If examined what these great scientists did - we will realize that they indeed spelled the death-knell for the Christian faith by establishing fact that the earth moves round the sun, contrary to what is repeatedly spelled in the Bible that the earth is immovable and at the center of the universe. This one single discovery has harmed Christian religion more than anything else. Thus, in truth, these great scientists should be called heretics and greatest enemy of Christianity despite their attachment with that religion.

One more issue need to be addressed is that Christians also readily mention the name of Johannes Gregory Mendel, the father genetics, who was a priest. Since Mendel was a priest, his contribution to science makes a compelling case for Christianic contribution in the true sense of it. Yet, one must consider that the great discovery of Mendel has turned to be another "giant blow" to the Christian faith. Mendel's discovery was a huge milestone in the field of biological sciences. It has helped scientists to create genetically modified organisms (foods), cloning of animals, human embryos and by now, a few incidences of human cloning have also been reported. These are scientific adventures at the forefront of biological sciences at this time and the Christian clergy has been fiercely opposed to these developments over the years. Mendel's genetics is also proving Darwin's ungodly Theory of Evolution, increasingly true against the doctrine of Creationism, solidly held by Christianity. In reality, Mendel's discovery in genetics has spelled the ultimate destruction of Christianity. Thus the question arises: was the Christian God wise enough to let his favorite man, Gregory Mendel, to discover something which is challenging the God's existence today. No, the omniscient and most wise God cannot be so stupid. In the Bible, God does not seem so generous and tolerant either. Hence, Mendel's discovery in genetics has nothing to do with Christianity; instead, has spelled a death-knell for Christianity at best. Therefore, Christian religion has contributed nothing to the making of our civilization. However, people from Christian background have contributed heavily solely because they were naturally talented and were often inspired by the doctrine of rational freethinking, which always has acted as defiance to the Christian doctrine. The same is true for Islam and Judaism.

Whilst summarizing the contribution of Christian religion to civilization, author Helen Ellerbe writes in her book "The Dark Side of Christian History":

"The Church had devastating impact upon society. As the Church assumed leadership, activity in the fields of medicine, technology, science, education, history, art and commerce all but collapsed. Europe entered the Dark Ages."

This fact is echoed by Michael Hart in his book, "The 100", where he gave no credit but instead only discredited to the Christian faith for the rise of modern science and civilization in Christian Europe. He wrote:

"Even though modern science first arose in the Christian nations of Western Europe, it seems inappropriate to think of Jesus as responsible for the rise of science. Certainly, none of the early Christians interpreted the teachings of Jesus as a call for scientific investigation of the physical world. Indeed, the conversion of Roman world to Christianity was accompanied and followed by a drastic decline in both the general level of technology and the general degree of interest in science."

Bertrand Russell also gives a vivid account of how Christianity hindered and degraded everything that the modern civilization stands for. He writes:

"Religion prevents our children from having a rational education; religion prevents us from removing the fundamental causes of wars; religion prevents us from teaching the scientific co-operation in place of the old fierce doctrines of sin and punishment. It is possible that mankind is on the verge of a golden age; but, if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that guards the door and this dragon is religion."

In fact, like the boom of the so-called Islamic Golden Age, the flourishing of human civilization in the post-Dark Age Europe, is also solidly credited to the pre-Christianity Greek Rationalism, instead of Christian faith itself. In this regard, Michael Hart in his "The 100" writes:

"That Science did eventually arise in Europe is indeed an indication that there was something in the European cultural heritage that was favorable to the scientific way of thinking. That something, however, was not the sayings of Jesus, but rather Greek rationalism, as typified by the works of Aristotle and Euclid. It is noteworthy that modern science developed, not in the heyday of church power but rather on the heels of the renaissance, a period during which Europe experienced a renewal of interest in its pre-Christian heritage."

Bertrand Russell also laughed at those modern Christians who claim how rationalistic Christianity is! He then describes how the onslaught of generation of freethinkers on Christian faith which eventually emasculated the latter and it indeed cost a heavy price on part of rationalists and freethinkers. He wrote:

"This (persecuting) attitude has been reserved for Christians. It is true that modern Christian is less robust, but it is not thanks to Christianity; it is thanks to the generations of

freethinkers, who, from the Renaissance to the present day (1920s), have made Christians ashamed of many of their traditional beliefs. It is amusing to hear the modern Christian telling you how mild and rationalistic Christianity really is and ignoring the fact that all its mildness and rationalism is due to the teaching of men who in their own days were persecuted by all orthodox Christians..... The gradual emasculation of the Christian doctrine has been effected in spite of the most vigorous resistance and solely as a result of the onslaughts of freethinkers."

Religion's Contribution to Morality and Governance

While talking to religious friends, I repeatedly hear that religions have contributed heavily in shaping people's morality and system of Governance around the world. Some of the overly enthusiastic modern Christians even go on to claim that all state laws of the Western democracy have been derived from the Bible. Let us discuss about Democracy, the most appreciated and preferred system of Governance today. Thomas Jefferson, the father of modern democracy, who governed America about 200 years ago, made some stunning statements (in agreement with Russell's) about his disagreement and frictions with Christianity:

"Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity." [Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, 1782.]

"They [the clergy] believe that any portion of power confided to me, will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly; for I have sworn upon the altar of god, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man. But this is all they have to fear from me: and enough, too, in their opinion." [Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Sept. 23, 1800]

"History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes." [Thomas Jefferson to Alexander von Humboldt, Dec. 6, 1813.]

"Christianity neither is, nor ever was a part of the common law." [Thomas Jefferson, letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper, February 10, 1814].

President Jefferson's comment that "Christianity neither is, nor ever was a part of the common law" surely refute any claims that Christianity may have any role in the best system of Governance of today and his other statements only shows that Christianity fiercely resisted the emergence of secular democracy in America. However, Christian religious rulings were added to the common law of the clergy-led Europe which has been typified by the Dark Age of cruelty and social degradation. Let us not forget that the clergy-ruled Europe may have burned an estimated 9 million women alive labeling them as

"witch" as per Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. Whoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death." [Exo 22:18-19] If American were ruled by the Biblical laws today, we would still have seen slavery, persecution of non-Christians, burning of atheist and apostates at the stakes and stoning of adulterers to death etc. The modern immigrants from Asia and Africa, who enjoys equal rights today, would probably be working as slaves without any civil rights and liberties as the Black people have experienced for hundreds of years.

We, however, witness the contributions and influence of Islamic Laws, called Sharia, derived from the Koran and Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's actions and sayings) in Governance of many Islamic countries today. Secular democracy has not evolved in the Muslim world. Sharia-based ruling system in Muslim countries has brought about immense miseries to the people: there are gross violations of fundamental human rights, the religious minorities are continually persecuted, women's rights have been miserably poor, and Muslim countries are desperately backward in education, science, technology, medicine and wealth. Sharia-based Taleban-rule in Afghanistan is the most tragic example of that.

About the contribution of religions on people's morality, I must agree that the foundation of religions is solely based on the concept of morality and righteousness as a means of avoiding the fear of punishment in hell. However, today majority of the people in most parts of the world do not reconcile with the vicious and cruel concept of morality spelled in religious scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Today, most people do not believe in stoning adulterers to death or flogging offenders in public for pre-marital sex. These customs of punishments, although prescribed in these religions as morally righteous, are considered criminal in the civilized society. As the world moves forward towards greater civility the religious concept of morality faces extinction or at best becomes criminal. A civilized world does not have a place of the so-called cruel morality prescribed by the religious scriptures.

Concluding Remarks

Going back to the statements of Thomas Jefferson about religions, we must realize that Jefferson was the president of America some 200 years ago. And the kind of vicious comments he used to make towards the religious clergy as an incumbent president, it is easy to understand what kind of struggle he had to endure to in order to found the ground of present-day democracy, a great pillar of our modern civilization. By this time, it is safe to draw the conclusion that Islam and other Abrahamic religions or any other religions for that matter, have contributed virtually nothing or very little to human civilization but instead has only hindered its progress and prosperity and brought immense brutality and sufferings to mankind. If not for the religions, our world would have been a lot more civilized, just, peaceful and advanced today.

(This essay was published in Islam
Watch (www.islam-watch.org) on 11Apr, 2005. – Bangarashtra)

Online:
25 July, 2009