Appeal

It was issued by His Eminence the “Grand Professor,” the Sheikh of al■Azhar, and since yesterday the newspapers have been circulating it among the people. It contains a grave warning and stern admonition urging people not to send their sons and daughters to missionary schools and institutes now that the true nature of these schools has become clear, and now that Islamic shelters and schools have been opened before them to provide for the education of boys and girls within purely Islamic environments that preserve their religion, morals, and national identity and protect them from every temptation and every assault.

There can be no doubt that when His Eminence the Sheikh of al■Azhar considered issuing this appeal—and when he actually issued it—he was fulfilling a duty imposed upon him by his position in this country and throughout the Islamic world. God Almighty commands all Muslims to enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and hasten toward goodness. This duty falls even more heavily upon those who have devoted themselves to religion and leadership among Muslims, especially when the state itself has appointed them for precisely this purpose and entrusted them with guiding people toward virtue and away from evil.

The Sheikh of al■Azhar has therefore striven to fulfill his duty toward God, toward Muslims, and toward the state. For this effort he deserves both God’s reward and the gratitude of the people, whether he has been successful or not, whether he has erred or been correct. Actions are judged by intentions, and every person receives according to what he intended.

We do not doubt that whoever enjoins right, forbids wrong, and calls people toward goodness has freed himself from responsibility for the sins of those who disobey. The full burden and guilt then fall upon those who are commanded toward righteousness yet refuse it, forbidden from evil yet persist in it, and invited toward goodness yet fail to respond.

We believe that Muslims will fulfill their duty toward God and toward themselves by obeying what is right and avoiding what is wrong, just as His Eminence the Sheikh has fulfilled—or at least striven to fulfill—his own duty sincerely and with the intention of reform.

Yet this appeal also invites reflection and perhaps contains lessons worthy of careful consideration. It urges us to think deeply from several perspectives, and some of these perspectives truly deserve prolonged reflection.

These missionary schools and institutes, established by missionaries and promoted among the people—or imposed upon the poor and the weak through pressure and inducement—are described by His Eminence as institutions specifically designed to draw people away from their religion. The Sheikh does not make this statement lightly or casually. He says it only after becoming convinced that it is an undeniable truth beyond doubt or dispute.

His Eminence therefore forbids Muslims from sending their sons and daughters to these schools and institutes, and, God willing, Muslims will listen to him.

But we would have preferred—and still prefer—that the Ministry listen to him before the general public does, or that the ruling authority respond before the people themselves respond. For as long as the Ministry is the shepherd of the people and responsible for its flock, as the noble Prophetic tradition cited by the Sheikh reminds us, then it seems to us that the sin incurred when Muslims send their children to these schools falls doubly upon the ministries that permit these institutions to exist while knowing, as the Sheikh knows, that they were created to lead people away from their religion.

It is not enough merely to command people toward virtue and forbid them from evil. The state must also make virtue easy and evil difficult. It is not enough to establish shelters and schools while knowing full well that missionaries possess many forms of temptation, persuasion, cunning, and deception capable of attracting at least some people away from these Islamic institutions.

Clearly the Sheikh of al■Azhar cannot forcibly prevent people from attending missionary schools, nor can he forcibly compel them to attend Muslim institutions. Nor can he close the missionary schools himself. Only the Egyptian Ministry possesses the authority and means necessary to prevent Muslims from entering these establishments that were prepared—as the Sheikh says, and as the Ministry itself knows—to lead their sons and daughters away from Islam.

Many proposals have already been offered to the Ministry. We ourselves proposed measures, others proposed measures alongside us, and even the Council of Senior Scholars proposed methods to achieve this goal. We would now like to know what the Ministry has actually done with all these proposals.

The Ministry has indeed supported the creation of Islamic shelters and called for their establishment. Yet the missionary schools, institutes, and shelters remain open. Their doors are still wide open, and

people continue to be invited openly and secretly to send their children there. These institutions still possess many attractions that may make them more appealing to some people than the shelters recently established.

What measures, then, has the Ministry adopted to separate people from these foreign institutions? What has it done to protect them from the dangers awaiting those who send their sons and daughters there?

All Egyptians demanded that the Ministry impose supervision and oversight upon these schools. What has become of this unanimous demand? How far has the Ministry progressed in drafting the legislation it promised long ago and which people continue to insist must finally be published after having been hidden away for so long?

Everyone remembers that the British government authorized its High Commissioner to discuss this supervision with the Egyptian Ministry. Everyone remembers the many discussions and rumors surrounding this authorization. English newspapers even reported that our Ministry had consulted the leading missionary organizations concerning the form this supervision should take.

We ourselves rejected English interference in this matter and rejected the idea of consulting missionaries about regulations intended to supervise their own institutions. But people now wish to know what became of this legislation. Has the Ministry abandoned it and contented itself with establishing shelters and relying upon the appeals and warnings issued by the Sheikh of al■Azhar? Or has it merely postponed the matter like so many other projects? Or is it still serious about it?

If the first possibility is true, then the Ministry should understand that shelters and religious appeals may lessen the evil but cannot eliminate it. If the second is true, then we would like to know why the legislation has not been announced publicly. The school year has already begun, and it would have been better to protect people from the dangers of these missionary schools before classes resumed and before tragic incidents repeated themselves.

We know that the Ministry has been occupied with its own affairs in recent weeks, but ministries are not established to occupy themselves with their own concerns. They exist to concern themselves with the people. We know also that the Ministry has been occupied with collecting taxes because the state needs money. Yet taxes are not collected for their own sake. The people’s money is gathered in order to be spent on the people’s welfare, and among the greatest of these duties is protecting the poor and weak from foreign aggression.

We know too that the Ministry faces internal political problems that may make it hesitant to anger foreigners and eager to conciliate them to some extent. But ministries are not established in order to preserve themselves in power through pleasing foreigners. They are established to serve the people and protect their interests firmly and without weakness. If they succeed in this, so much the better. If they fail, they must resign.

We hope that the Ministry will examine itself seriously and recognize that it was not established to concern itself with one matter while neglecting another, or to show firmness in certain issues and weakness in others. It was established to care for all the affairs of the state and defend all the rights of the state with equal firmness.

And yes—we hope that the Ministry understands, and that the Sheikh of al■Azhar reminds it if he has not already done so, that if parents who send their sons and daughters to institutions designed to draw people away from their religion are guilty and negligent, then those who permit these institutions to remain open without forcefully and openly preventing them from fulfilling their purpose expose themselves before God, before the people, and before the Sheikh of al■Azhar to a grave reckoning indeed.

Let the Ministry therefore show mercy toward itself lest it incur from the Sheikh of al■Azhar this terrible and formidable judgment.