

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
**Jihad By The Pen**

**Symposium at Harvard Divinity School – May 6, 2006  
By Amjad Mahmood Khan – Los Angeles, California, USA**

ت وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ۝ مَا أَنْتَ بِبِعْمَلِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ ۝

*“By the inkstand and by the pen and by that which they write.  
Thou art not, by the grace of thy Lord, a madman.”*

**(Sura Al-Qalam, Chapter 68, Verses 1-3)**

It goes without saying that Islam today is under intense media scrutiny. If you run a Google search, on average nearly 150 articles are written about Islam per week. The pace of publication is frantic.

Professors, politicians, pundits, and priests – it seems that most everyone these days has a view of Islam. The clatter surrounding Islam in the media is loud and unmistakable.

Take only the past 6 months. You may have read one of a slew of articles written by Professor James Arlandson of southern California, whose website “answering-Islam.org” systematically attacks the life and character of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and Islam’s holy book, the Qur’an. Or you may have heard a recent interview of commentator

Pat Robertson who remarked that Islam is an inherently violent religion that wants to dominate and destroy other religions. Or you may have read the editorial by journalist Rich Lowrey of the *National Review*, who suggested blowing up the holy city of Mecca in retaliation for terrorist attacks. Islam has been called everything from a “car-burning cult” to a “primitive and paranoid ideology.”

And Islam isn't just a target of extreme views. For example, earlier this week, Elie Wiesel, the famous author and Nobel peace prize winner told an interviewer: “All the crises in the world today have Islam as a component.”

With Islam under a virtual microscope these days, you may ask how Muslims have responded to the scrutiny. There are some Muslims who respond to criticisms against Islam with violence and hostility. They interpret Islam as permitting a violent struggle against non-Muslims. They mobilize the passions of a disillusioned base of Muslims by formulating a nationalistic and xenophobic ideology somehow rooted in Islam. We hear about this group of Muslims in the media quite a bit. On the other hand, there are some Muslims who don't respond to

criticism against Islam through violence and hostility, but instead begin to doubt the core principles of Islam. These Muslims apologize for their faith and seek to introduce massive change within it, including, for example, doing away with whole verses of the Qur'an they cannot explain. We also hear about this group of Muslims in the media quite a bit.

But somewhere between these two poles of Muslim responses is an often unrecognized third group of Muslims. These Muslims don't resort to aggression or apologies in dealing with criticism of their faith. Indeed, these Muslims tackle the criticism head on and expend their energy clarifying Islam's essential teachings. Who are these Muslims, and where did they come from?

My talk this afternoon tries to answer these questions through a brief history lesson. Over a century ago, a solitary voice emerged in the remote parts of India that shook the foundation of conventional Muslim wisdom. This voice was of a man who began what has become one of the most dynamic and positive moderate Muslim communities on earth. Indeed, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad set forth an entirely new brand of Islam

that has become as relevant and as analytically useful today as it was over a century ago.

In the next several minutes, I will discuss who this man was, how he revolutionized conventional Islamic thinking concerning jihad, how he practically waged a jihad by the pen in his life and defended Islam in an unprecedented manner, and finally, how his Community today continues the intellectual struggles he once endured.

You may ask: why do we need to study the life and teachings of a Muslim thinker of the Nineteenth Century? What sets this man, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, apart from other Muslim contemporaries? To answer these questions first requires some understanding of how the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, described the fate of Islam after his death. Indeed, relatively little study is done on what Muhammad prophesized to come after him.

In brief, Muhammad predicted that a “Mahdi” or reformer would come after him who would reform Islam internally at a time of great trepidation for the religion. Muhammad also predicted the advent of a Messiah who would render Islam a great service at a time of great

difficulty. The “Mahdi” and the Messiah would be one in the same person, according to Muhammad. Muhammad proclaimed that at the time of the coming of the Mahdi and Messiah, Christianity would be in ascendancy and Islam would be in gradual decline. Muslims would become weak, poor, faithless, and materialistic. They would say their prayers without sincerity of the heart. They would keep copies of the Qur’an only as ornaments without understanding its deep meanings, and they would build lavish Mosques without caring for the number of worshippers inside.

The timing of the coming of the Mahdi and Messiah is a subject of great discussion within Muslim circles. Suffice it to say, in the Nineteenth Century, Islam faced enormous trials and tribulations of the kind Muhammad predicted. Not only was Christianity gaining ascendancy, Muslims around the world were in a state of disarray. In 1882, some 125 years ago, Muhammad Shareef, a prominent Imam of Banglore, India summed up the state of Islam at this time as follows:

***“Islam is being attacked from all directions. On one hand, Christians are maligning Islam, its Holy Founder, Muhammad, and its Holy Book, the Qur’an. On the other hand, Muslim leaders are***

***dumbfounded and trying [desperately] to fit Islam into western ideas. The followers of all religions are eager to put out the light of true Islam.”***

In this era, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad gained eminence. Born in the small remote village of Qadian, situated in the district of Punjab, India, in 1835, Ahmad came from a noble, land-owning family. Various tutors educated him, but he acquired knowledge of Arabic and Persian mostly on his own. He received no formal education. Throughout his youth, he used to spend his time in prayer and supplication. He remained mostly secluded and anonymous among his peers. He would immerse himself in the study of the Qur'an and worship so much so that at a young age he claimed to have communion with God.

Under a divinely inspired urge, he was moved to embark on a literary project which would not only help to safeguard Islam against hostile attacks, but would clearly and demonstrably establish its relative superiority over all faiths. He resolved to set forth the excellences of Islam in a monumental work which he designated *Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya* (“arguments in favor of the renaissance of Islam”). By May of 1879 he made enough progress on his work to make a public

announcement. He published the first two parts in 1880, the third part in 1882, and the fourth part in 1884. The book's goal was to defend Islam from accusations and to set forth conclusive proofs of Islam's truth from the Qur'an. The work received wide-ranging critical acclaim. Many prominent commentators across South Asia referred to it as an unprecedented work on Islam. One book reviewer commented that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, by writing this book, had safeguarded the honor of all Muslims in the world. Imam Shareef of Banglore commented:

***“Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya is a peerless publication in its proof of the truth of the Qur'an and of the Prophethood of [Muhammad]. The author has proved the truth of Islam by such positive arguments that every just person would acknowledge that the Qur'an is the Book of Allah, that the Prophethood of [Muhammad] is righteous, that Islam is a faith established by God, and that a Muslim is instructed in the truth . . . Every argument is clear, every proof is bright. The book is a mirror of faith and is full of the Qur'an to the brim. It leads to the straight path, it is a torch that lights up the true way. It is a treasury of truth, it is a mine of guidance, it acts as lightning on the stores of the enemy and burns up all his arguments. For the Muslims it is a bright proof as to the truth of Qur'an. It has unsettled and disturbed every enemy of religion.”***

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's flow of revelations and visions continued, gathering momentum, until in 1882 he received a revelation that he was to be the appointed one, the promised reformer, the one commissioned

by God to serve His cause. In 1889, he claimed to be the Promised Messiah foretold by Muhammad, and on March 23, 1889, he founded the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

It was at this time that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad began to reexamine conventional Muslim interpretations of core Islamic principles. In particular, he began to question the validity of the conventional understanding of “jihad.” Describing the state of Islam as Muhammad predicted, he announced that the time of jihad through physical force was over. The brutal wars fought directly against Islam during the Prophet’s time had ended, and a new era had emerged whereby the true jihad was one of spiritual self-reflection and rational argumentation. As predicted by the Muhammad, the Mahdi and Messiah would come to end violent jihad – “*yuda ul harb.*” Instead, to successfully defend Islam, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad argued that a new battle had to be fought in history, he argued: a battle without weapons or blood, without territories lost or territories gained – a battle of ideas where the ultimate weapon became the pen. He described this new understanding of jihad as follows:

***Islam par jo humlay ho thay hai(n) wo qalam kay zareey ho thay hai(n). Isleey zaroore hay kay qalam hee kay zureey unka jawab deea jaavay. Allah tallah Quran sharif may aik mokaam parr furmatha hai kay jis kisam kee tayareeya(n) tumaray mukhalif kurthay hai(n), thum bee vaisee hee tayareea(n) kuro. Ub kufaar kee thayareea(n) jo Islam kay khilaf ho rahee hai(n) unko dhaiko. Wo kis kisam kee hai(n)? Yay nahee kay wo foojai(n) jama kurthay ho(n). Nahee. Bulkay who tho thura thura kee kitabay or risalay shaya kur thay hai(n). Isleey humara bee fardh hay kay hum bhee un kay jawab may qalam uta ai(n) or risalo or kitabo(n) kay zareeyay un kay humlo ko rokai(n).***

***“It is with the pen that Islam is being attacked. That is why it is necessary that the pen should be used to rebut the attacks. God the Almighty says in the Holy Quran that you should make preparation to defend yourselves with the same kind of weapons as the opponents happen to use. Think of the preparations that the opponents of Islam are now making. They are not lining up armies. They are publishing magazines and books. We also should, therefore, pick up our pen and answer their attacks with magazines and books.”***

*(Malfoozat, Vol. 8, p. 20)*

Contrary to what his opponents proclaimed, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad acknowledged the necessity of 3 types of jihad. Jihad-e-Akbar or the “Greater Jihad” was the jihad to purify one’s soul. Jihad-e-Asghar or the “Lesser Jihad” was the jihad of limited physical self-defense. Finally, Jihad-e-Kabeer or “the grand Jihad” was the jihad to propagate the truth of Islam through the Qur’an. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad coined the term

“jihad by the pen” to describe Jihad-e-Kabeer. It was the only jihad in his view that was necessary to withstand the intellectual attacks on Islam in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. In Islam’s defense, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad used the very same weapon his opponents used: the pen. Indeed, the Qur’an alludes to this intellectual weapon in the verse I recited at the beginning of my speech:

بِأَنزَالِ الْقُرْآنِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ۚ مَا أَنْتَ بِمَعْمُورٍ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ ۚ

***“By the inkstand and by the pen and by that which they write. Thou art not, by the grace of thy Lord, a madman.”***

Here, Allah swears that by whatever test of knowledge the claims of Muhammad are to be examined, he will be found to be the sanest and wisest of men. All the literary efforts expended to discredit Muhammad, all the ink spilt to assault him, would prove futile.

Indeed, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad waged a jihad by the pen like none other. His entire life was dedicated to silencing Islam’s opponents through the written word. In a span of 26 years (from 1882-1908), he wrote over 80 books. He responded to Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. He wrote in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. He

wrote about every major facet of Islam and responded to every major criticism against Islam. Between 1882 and 1890, he responded to 90,000 letters, or over 30 letters a day on average – all in the defense of Islam. He was a vigorous and prolific writer, and his work consistently received critical acclaim.

Writing for the *Vakil* newspaper in Amritsar, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad called Mirza Ghulam Ahmad “the victorious advocate of Islam . . . who revolutionized our religious and intellectual world.” Even one of his bitterest enemies, Maulvi Muhammad Husain of Batala, had this to say about his writings: “Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has proved himself so steadfast in the service of Islam through his pen that few instances are to be found among the Muslims. . .” Indeed, as the ultimate sign of the strength of his commitment to jihad by the pen, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed that he was told in a revelation on June 17, 1901:

***Allah talla nay is ajiz ka nam Sultanul-Qalam rukha. Or meray qalam ko zulfikqar ali fur maya.***

***Allah had named me Sultan-ul-Qalam, the King of Pens, and has called my pen the Zulfikar Ali or the sword of Ali.***

***(Al-Hakam, Vol. V, No. 22, page 2)***

Given his strong views against jihad by force, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad faced tremendous opposition. Some Muslims accused him of conspiring with the British to attack Islam; others branded him a heretic and opponent to Muhammad. In response, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote several books describing his core belief set and dispelling myths about his message and mission. He wrote long tracts about his profound love for Muhammad. At one instance, for example, he said:

*That light of high degree that was bestowed on perfect man was not in angels, was not in stars, was not in the moon, was not in the sun, was not in the oceans and the rivers, was not in rubies or emeralds, or sapphires, or pearls; in short, it was not in any earthly or heavenly object. It was only in perfect man whose highest and loftiest and most perfect example was our lord and master, the Chief of the Prophets, the Chief of all living ones, Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him.*

**[Ruhani Khazain, Vol.5, pp. 160-162].**

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's main purpose was to reaffirm the sanctity of Islam by disclaiming the violent teachings erroneously associated with it. In his view, this jihad would truly honor the tolerant teachings and examples of Muhammad.

In the short time allotted to me, I cannot possibly do justice to the depth and breadth of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's jihad by the pen. Living in an isolated corner of India, he managed to engage with some of the most prominent opponents of Islam. He would not just write personal rebuttals to what was published against Islam; he would disseminate his responses to the public at large, working tirelessly to raise money for publication.

As one example, he challenged one of the leading Christian-American preachers of the Nineteenth Century and a foremost opponent of Islam, Dr. John Alexander Dowie of Zion, Illinois. His written exchanges with Dr. Dowie were made public across Europe and America; scores of newspapers published his written challenges to Dr. Dowie. Millions of people became witness to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's international jihad by the pen. It was truly a sight to behold. So successful was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's challenge to Dr. Dowie that the *Boston Herald*, a newspaper familiar to all of you here, ran a feature article on June 23, 1907 with the headline: "Great is Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Messiah Foretold the Pathetic End of Dowie."

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad passed away in 1908, but not before creating the first moderate Muslim movement in the world. He left behind followers firmly committed to his revolutionary beliefs and eager to continue his bloodless intellectual jihad. What began as a movement of only a few hundred followers has now spread to a dynamic Community of tens of million spread in over 160 countries of the world. The official motto of the Community is: “Love For All, Hatred For None.” The spiritual leader of the Community, His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad, resides in the United Kingdom, where the Ahmadiyya headquarters are based. Ahmadis today continue to propagate the ideas Mirza Ghulam Ahmad originally taught.

For example, in response to the recent cartoon controversy in Europe, where dozens of demeaning cartoons of Muhammad were printed and reprinted in European papers, the Ahmadiyya Community was the first organized group of Muslims to send a series of letters and articles to the appropriate authorities in Copenhagen condemning the cartoons. Not surprisingly, given their strong opposition to violent jihad, the Ahmadiyya Community was also among the first Muslim groups to

strongly condemn the violent counter-protests of Muslims in the Middle East.

After 9/11, many Muslim leaders in this country borrowed Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's benign interpretation of jihad to denounce the terrorist attacks. This was a massive irony, since these same Muslim leaders would never previously acknowledge that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was even a Muslim. But gradually, many Muslims are coming to terms with what jihad in Islam is really about. Members of the Ahmadiyya Community are considered to be the most persecuted minority Muslims in the world, yet they continue to project a refreshing alternative to the aggressive and apologetic Muslims who dominate Islam's airplay in the media. I invite all of you to study this Community further.

I end now with a saying of the Prophet Muhammad. In one sentence, he beautifully captured the essence of jihad by the pen. He said: "The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr." May Muslims all around the world heed the words of their beloved founder. Ameen. Thank you.