CHAPTER SIX

THE ART OF POLEMICS: TAWFĪQ ŠIDQĪ’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO AL-MANĀR AND RIDĀ’S USE OF THEM

The present chapter will shed light on the contributions of the above-mentioned Egyptian physician Muḥammad Tawfīq Šidqī, who is considered to be the most prolific polemicist in al-Manār. In a general sense, the thrust of the approach of Šidqī in his polemics was not innovative in the subjects he dealt with. It did not differ much from the earlier Muslim tradition that considered the Holy Scriptures as falsified, but containing many parts which could be used as a source for apologetics in verifying Islamic tenets. Like all Muslim authors in the field, one of his major concerns was to find proofs of Muḥammad’s prophethood in the Bible. He selected Biblical passages extensively, which he depicted as inappropriate, and raised many questions about them. From the bulk of these quotations we will select some salient features that are typical of his approach. His treatment sometimes stood apart from the tradition of earlier Muslim writers. The new dimension of his methods, as we shall note, was that he made wide use of the writings of the Rationalist Press Association. In his analysis of Biblical Criticism, he also used his own medical expertise and scientific interpretations, especially on the Christian set of narratives of Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

We have already mentioned that Šidqī’s stridently articulated views against Christianity and missions brought him into conflict with the colonial authorities, and consequently endangered the existence of al-Manār. Šidqī’s works did not please the contemporary missionary quarterly, The Moslem World as well. In reviewing Šidqī’s A View on the Scriptures, Rev. R.F. McNeile of Cairo wrote that he was not in the least surprised, nor did he intend to complain that an educated Muslim used the methods and results of Biblical Criticism, which to him were wholly incompatible with the belief in an inspired book. He complained about Šidqī’s method, describing it as ‘wholly out of

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date.’ In his view, Ṣidqī was ignorant of living scholars, and not a single one of his long list of authorities was a highly recognised scholar of the New Testament. He was only fond of quoting agnostics [...] In his evaluation, the first part of the book was ‘disingenuous,’ the last part was ‘far worse.’ He concluded:

We are ashamed to defile a printed page by repeating his statements [...] we are willing to grant originality to Dr. Ṣidqī in such points, and are tempted to ask whether they are not reflections of a society, or at least the state of mind, to which the uplifting of women, the casting out of devils, is unthinkable. [...] Dr. Ṣidqī is in government employ. What would be the result of a Copt in a similar position, who published articles one-tenth so revolting to the Moslem as these are to the Christian?

Riḍā, nevertheless, was proud of Ṣidqī’s polemical contributions. He always saw his replies to missionaries as unprecedented. No previous scholars, according to him, had ever dealt with similar subjects, especially the concept of Qarābīn (sacrifices) in previous religions, as his friend did. He constantly recommended Muslims, who used to read works of missionaries or to attend their gatherings, to study Ṣidqī’s works very carefully. In a letter, he enthusiastically told Shakīb Arslān that one of the Chinese Muslim scholars had already translated the work of ‘Aqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā’, which he wrote together with Ṣidqī, into Chinese. Without mentioning the Chinese Muslim by name, he added that the translation had been published in his Muslim journal as a response to missionary propaganda in their town. The clue which allows us to identify this Chinese Muslim is Riḍā’s reference to him as one of his mustaftīs, who regularly sent al-Manār letters concerning the ‘shameful’ situation of Muslims in China. In al-Manār, we find a certain ‘Uthmān Ibn al-Ḥāj Nūr al-Ḥaqq al-Ṣīnī al-Ḥanafī, who regularly lamented to Riḍā about the situation of Sino-Muslims and their lack of religious knowledge and piety. He was the director of an Islamic journal in the Chinese province Guangdong. His journal was much influenced by Riḍā’s thoughts, and sometimes published full chapters from al-Manār translated into Chinese.

4 Arslān, ʾIkhā’, p. 570.
5 Al-Manār, vol. 31/1 (Muḥarram 1349/May 1930), pp. 75-76. About his questions for fatwās in al-Manār, see, Riḍā’s response on his questions concerning China.