



WITH THE NAME OF GOD, ALL-MERCIFUL, MOST MERCIFUL

LETTERS REGARDING THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD BY MARTIN LINGS

First published as: AL-KANADI [The Canadian], Abu Bilal Mustafa, et al., *Letters against Martin Lings' Biography of the Prophet*, Ipswich, UK: *Jam'iat Ihyaa' Minhaaj Al-Sunnah (JIMAS)*, 1990, 17 pages A5

Contents

INTRODUCTION (p. 1)

ABU BILAL'S INITIAL LETTER OF CAUTION (pp. 2-3)

MARTIN LINGS' RESPONSE (pp. 4-6)

ABU BILAL'S COUNTER-REPLY (pp. 7-12)

INTRODUCTION

Martin Lings' biography of the Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) has gained wide popularity over the recent period, and it continues to be sold and recommended unabated. This is so in spite of what we have come to know of both its author and the book itself. We are thus prompted to issue this booklet containing three letters that were printed in the Saudi Gazette regarding the Seerah. The first letter was written by our esteemed brother, Abu Bilaal (may God have mercy upon him); the second being Lings' reply to it and the third comes from Abu Bilaal as a counter-reply. Mr. Lings sent no further response after the counter-reply from our brother Abu Bilaal. The letters appear as they had been published with minor spelling and printing corrections.

It is hoped that a reading of these letters will – if Allaah so wills – help the Muslims protect themselves from being influenced by false ideas and values and enable them to distinguish the misguided and misled amongst us. May Allaah establish our feet firmly in the path of our Messenger Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and protect us from ever compromising truth with error willingly, aameen.

[*Jam'iat Ihyaa' Minhaaj Al-Sunnah*, UK, 1990]

ABU BILAL'S INITIAL LETTER OF CAUTION

Sir,

Congratulations on the opening of a religious section in your newspaper, entitled *The Message*. I trust it will be of great service disseminating valuable information regarding various aspects of the Islaamic faith.

However, I must admit that I was dismayed to see that you have begun a serial of excerpts from Martin Lings' biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). The reason for this is that the book – although it's [purportedly] a document of the Prophet's life as portrayed in the Glorious Qur'aan and the authentic Sunnah, I would like to draw your attention to a few facts which I trust will clarify my point.

Mr. Lings draws heavily on sources which, although ancient, are not fully trustworthy; for example: al-Waaqidi's *Maghaazi [Military Expeditions]*, and al-Azraqi's *Akhbaar Makkah [History of Mecca]*. The former is replete with forged and weak traditions, and its author, al-Waaqidi has been unanimously assessed by critics of hadeeth literature to be rejected as a narrator of traditions. This heavy dependence of Mr. Lings upon spurious sources for his narrative renders his biography unreliable as an exposition of the impeccable life and times of the Prophet of Islaam. There are in fact quite a number of examples in the book which clearly indicate certain gross errors as well as distorted views of the author; however, lack of space permits me to mention only a few, in brief.

At the beginning of his treatise (pp. 1-2), Lings chooses to quote from the distorted texts of the Bible's *Book of Genesis* (ch. 15 v. 5), rather than rely on authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the story of Abraham and how he settled his wife Hagar and son Ishmael at Makkah. The Biblical account put Ishmael's age at 13, whereas the traditions of al-Bukhaari indicate that he was a suckling babe at the time of their arrival in Makkah. It could be said, with justification, that the age difference is of minor significance – and this can be readily conceded – however, there is a vital issue at stake here; viz., Mr. Lings' view of what is to be regarded as dependable source material for his writing.

When he was justifiably criticized for his quoting from the Bible instead of Islaamic sources in an article entitled "Unscrupulous Writing about the Prophet" in a local newspaper, Mr. Lings later replied, "I myself am more prepared to accept what Divine Revelation tells us than what was handed down in Arabia by word of mouth from generation to generation."

He further labels the authentically established Islamic version of the story as traditions of the Arabs. Thus he considers the interpolated and distorted text of the Bible "Divine Revelation", whereas the authentic narrations of the Prophet related to us on the authority of al-Bukhaari are mere "traditions of the Arabs", and therefore – it is assumed – unreliable. The Prophet has said, "Verily, I have been given the Qur'aan and that which is like unto it, along with it," i.e., the Prophetic Sunnah which we are obliged to accept as another aspect of the final Divine Revelation; if it has been verified to be transmitted to us in a dependable manner.

The second example is Mr. Lings' rendering of the relationship between the Prophet and Zaynab, for this creates the impression of a passionate romantic love affair between them. He paints a picture of Zaynab at her house who – being lightly clad – upon hearing of the Prophet's arrival at her door, was so eager to greet him that she leapt to her feet and ran to the door, to invite him to stay until her husband Zayd returned (p. 213). That is, she was improperly dressed, and the Prophet was overcome with passion, amazed at her beauty. Mr. Lings' borrowed his "story" from certain forged

narrations of al-Waaqidi et al., and these were aptly described by some critics [as] absolutely unacceptable for a Hollywood film. Obviously, such material is absolutely unacceptable for such a sacred subject as the life of the Prophet Muhammad, his virtuous wives and righteous Companions.

The final example I will mention – and perhaps the most detrimental – which clearly points to gross misconceptions and distortions of the Prophet's Seerah by Mr. Lings' – is the incident of the Prophet's entry into Makkah on the Day of Victory. It is well known that he was commissioned by Almighty Allaah to purify the Ka'bah of all signs of polytheism, by ridding it of all the idols surrounding it. Furthermore, the Prophet ordered his companions to destroy and efface everything which remained inside the Ka'bah by way of painting or sculpture, and to remove such before he entered inside to pray. This has been authentically related in the compilations of al- Bukhaari et al. Lings on the contrary, relates another "story" (p. 300) gleaned from the forged narratives contained in his so-called "dependable ancient sources" (i.e. al- Waaqidi, al- Azraqi et al). This "story" totally contradicts what has been authentically related regarding this incident and contradicts the essential principle of Tawheed , for Lings' writes the following: "Apart from the icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus and a painting of an old man said to be Abraham, the walls inside (the Ka'bah) had been covered with pictures of pagan deities. Placing his hand protectively over the icon, the Prophet told 'Uthmaan to see that all other paintings, except that of Abraham, were effaced."

I ask: Can it be believed that the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would protect such icons of Mary, Jesus and Abraham in this manner, and that he would allow these idols to be left intact inside the sacred Ka'bah , the very symbol of pure unadulterated Tawheed ?! The answer should be quite obvious to anyone possessing firm faith and good sense, for if such a story were true- and it certainly isn't – then it follows that the Prophet affirmed the very symbols of polytheism and by implication, it indicates that he approved of the distorted existing versions of the previously revealed religions of Christianity and Judaism, symbolized by his protection of their two respective icons.

And that is precisely the aim of Lings mentioning this forged tale, since it is consistent with the false doctrine and philosophy to which he adheres and which he avidly propounds in his other writings, namely, The Perennial Philosophy. The principal theme of Perennialism is that all religions are in reality one, and mutually supportive and acceptable; it is merely their "outer" manifestations which appear to differ! Refer to Lings' book, *The Eleventh Hour* (pp. 71, 74, 77, 80). He furthermore believes in reincarnation (pp. 26-29) and the pagan theory of pantheistic monism, i.e., the union of man and God (pp. 104, 106).

Needless to say, such aberrant doctrines and tenets are totally contrary to the pure and unadulterated teachings of Islaam as contained and preserved in the Gracious Qur'aan and the authentic Prophetic Sunnah ; the sole criteria for distinguishing truth from error and falsehood.

Sincerely,

Abu Bilaal Mustafaa al-Kanadi

Imaam, Medical City Mosque,

King Khaalid National Guard Hospital,

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

MARTIN LINGS' RESPONSE

Sir,

Having discussed my life of the Prophet as unreliable, Mr. Kanadi goes on to say that "lack of space permits him to mention only a few examples of the gross errors as well as distorted views of the author." In fact, only three are mentioned but we may assume that these are the worst, that is, the grossest and most distorted. Let us examine them.

The first is now out of date, because in the latest edition of my book, the Biblical statement that Ishmael was 13 when he came to Makkah has been omitted and replaced by what is generally believed by Muslims, namely that he was a babe in arms.

Mr. Kanadi may be unaware of this; but in any case he has no right to accuse me of labeling traditions of the Prophet as traditions of the Arabs. If I had found recorded any statement by the Prophet himself that Ishmael was a babe at that time, I would have immediately accepted it without bothering to consult Genesis in order to remind Christian and Jewish readers of the promises which their Bible records as having been made by God to Abraham on behalf of Ishmael.

As to the second example of my gross errors and distorted views, it has to do with what led up to the Prophet's marriage with Zaynab. Let your readers look at page 213 and they will find that, like the rest of my book, it is full of the greatest veneration for the Prophet. He is portrayed as a man in total domination of his desires, a man who is not prepared to let his own individual feelings sway his behavior from the norm in any respect. The incident in question has, for all men, a great spiritual value, which is, to say the least, not characteristic of Hollywood films! The account of the Prophet's visit to the house of Zaynab and of his sudden consciousness of his love for Zaynab is given not only by Ibn Sa'd in his *Tabaqat* from which I have taken it, but also by Tabari, Baydawi, the Jalayn and others of the great Qur'an commentators. The Prophet's exclamation upon his first awareness of the love in question is quoted throughout Islamic literature:

Glory be to God, the Infinite! Glory to Him who disposeth men's hearts!

These words have become a precious part of our Islamic heritage, and they are indeed worthy of meditation, for the lesson they teach us is profound. We have here a supreme example of true spiritual objectivity which does not allow the strongest emotional impact to divert it from the remembrance of God, Allah. It is also highly significant that it was God who put this love into his heart. But as to our critic, he glosses my words, "amazed at her beauty" by "overcome with passion"; and since I and my sources have been at such pains to show precisely that the Prophet was not overcome – indeed, that is the main point of the page in question and no reader could be in doubt about it – Mr. Kanadi is here guilty of no less than a serious calumny against me and those whom I have followed.

As to the third example of my gross errors and distorted views, it has to do with an icon of the Virgin and Child which a Christian had painted on an inside wall of the Ka'ba.

According to all authorities, on the day of the Victory of Makkah the Prophet entered the Holy House and ordered the effacement of the paintings on its walls. Some accounts do not mention any exception; according to others the Prophet placed a protective hand over the icon while ordering that the other paintings should be effaced except one of Abraham. In my book I mention both accounts; the reader can take his choice. But the authorities for the exception are good; al-Waqidi quotes Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri; and al-Azraqi quotes Ibn Ishaq which shows that the incident must have

been abridged by Ibn Hisham. I wished to mention it because it is particularly pleasing to Western readers. But as to exactly what happened on that occasion God knows best: *Allahu a'lam*.

Our critic would do well to ponder these last words instead of claiming to have absolute certainty that the men who believed this incident to be true are wrong and that he is right, men who lived incomparably nearer the time of the Prophet than we do and who were no less set than we are on recording the truth.

Moreover we must remember that the Prophet was bent on destroying the pagan idols and the paintings of the deities which the Quraysh and the other Arabs worshipped. The icon was in a different category, not pagan and not worshipped by Quraysh who were even accustomed to laughing at the mention of Jesus (Qur'an 43:57). How can anyone claim to be absolutely certain that at the moment in question the Prophet was not moved to make a gesture of *adab* towards a brother Messenger? *Allahu a'lam*. But Mr. Kanadi writes, "If such a story were true – and it certainly isn't – then it follows that the Prophet affirmed the very symbols of polytheism and by implication it indicates that he approved of the distorted versions of the previously revealed religions of Christianity and Judaism." Our critic is here on very unsafe ground; for whatever the truth of the above story may be, no one doubts that after the Victory of Makkah the Prophet made treaties with various Christian communities and these pacts bound him to protect their churches, all of which contained icons similar to this painting in the Ka'ba. Moreover he expressly invited a delegation of Christians from Najran to make use of his mosque in Madina for the performance of their Christian rites. But Mr. Kanadi comes dangerously close to criticizing the Prophet, for what is implied in the story which he says is false is also implied in the undisputed act of spiritual generosity which we have just mentioned. It is likewise implied by the pacts, for to protect icons is a positive gesture, wherever they may be, it means allowance if not approval. Moreover and above all, by identifying the existing versions of Christianity and Judaism with polytheism, Mr. Kanadi thereby reflects the clear distinction made by God between polytheism, Mr. Kanadi thereby reflects the clear distinction made by God between polytheism, which Islam absolutely forbids, and Christianity and Judaism which He compels Islam to allow and to protect until the end of time.

Having said say about my *Life of the Prophet* he adds, in case his readers are not yet shuddering at my gross errors and distorted views, three calumnies in connection with my other books. Firstly he says that Lings has mentioned "this forged tale since it is consistent with the false doctrine and philosophy to which he adheres and which he propounds in his other writings, namely the Perennial Philosophy. The principal theme of Perennialism is that all religions are really one, and mutually supporting and acceptable." That is not correct: he should have said 'That all true religion is in reality one.' The Qur'an defines the Perennial Religion in the words, *Verily, religion with God is Islam* [Qur'an 3:19]. But we have to understand the word *Islam* here in its wider sense for the Qur'an affirms that Jesus and his companions were Muslims and it says the same of every messenger of religion and his first followers. Perennial Philosophy is not in the least concerned with pseudo-religion, nor is it concerned with various distortions and deviations from true religion. Mr. Kanadi should not write about what he does not understand. Then he accuses me of believing in reincarnation, a charge which is the opposite of the truth since reincarnation is one of the false beliefs which my writings continually refute. Thirdly he says that I believe in the theory of pantheistic monism, i.e. The union of man and God. No, I do not believe in pantheistic monism; but I do believe in a blessing which is greater than Paradise (see Qur'an, IX, 72) namely *Ridwan* [Divine Pleasure], and which was defined by God on the tongue of His Prophet in a *hadith qudsi* in terms which suggest a certain measure of union: "My slave ceases not to draw near to Me with devotions of his free will

(*nawafil*) until I love him; and when I love him I am the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the foot on which he walks. (Bukhari, LXXXI, 37)

Now let me put to your readers the following question. How is it that this book which since its publication in 1982 has been so highly praised by Muslim scholars all over the world, and has been awarded first prize in a competition for the best life of the Prophet by a panel of Sirah experts specially chosen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Pakistan – how is it that it should be dismissed as unreliable by a relatively new convert to Islam who has certainly not had the time to acquire the qualifications of the eminent authorities just referred to? Moreover it was not merely a question of a prize: Such was the enthusiasm of these authorities that the government of Pakistan decided to distribute copies of my book free of charge amongst members of their armed forces, and they produced a special edition of 15,000 copies to be printed in Lahore for the purpose. Quite independently of this, a scholar from the Muslim community of Cape Town writes in his review of the book: “This work should be translated into Arabic so that the whole of the Arab world may drink from it. It should be the prescribed text on the Nabawi period in all institutions of learning everywhere, in madaris, colleges, institutes and universities, as well as in all libraries, local, municipal, institutional, mosque and personal.”

The chief criticism made by Mr. Kanadi is that I have drawn heavily on *Kitab al-Maghazi* which “is replete with forged and weak traditions and its author al-Waqidi has been unanimously assessed by critics of hadeeth literature to be rejected as a narrator of traditions.” Our readers will by now have come to realize that the words gross and distorted, so persistently used by Mr. Kanadi of me, are in this case something of a boomerang. The truth of the matter in question is that there are certain books, including al-Waqidi’s, which are precious and almost indispensable mines of information about the early years of Islam and which are consequently to be found in every self-respecting library throughout *Dar al-Islam*. Within this venerable class of books some scholars have judged that *Kitab al-Maghazi*, contains more weak hadith than, for example, the works of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Sa’d. Not one of them would say that al-Waqidi’s masterpiece is ‘replete with forged traditions’, because in the first place only God – and the forger – can know whether a tradition is forged. On the other hand, it is universally admitted that many so called ‘weak traditions’ may in fact be true. In any case, in drawing upon all my sources, I have been at great pains to be selective.

Mr. Kanadi and I are both of Western and non-Islamic extraction. One of the great differences between us is that I am more than 80 years old and I entered Islam over 50 years ago. I have had therefore more time to learn something about Islamic ways and in particular about Islamic *adab*. I am also old enough to have learnt that there is a margin where different opinion alone is correct. If Mr. Kanadi had written to the *Saudi Gazette* and said, ‘Since you have begun a series of excerpts from Martin Lings’ biography of the Prophet, might I suggest that you do not include pages 213 and 300 (he might have wished to mention other pages also) because they contain information which in the opinion of some authorities may not be accurate’ – if he had written this, I would have found his intervention altogether admissible.

Is it not somewhat ironical that while he is pouring abuse upon me and my book, the publishers are being besieged by Muslim organizations from all over the world with requests to make my book more easily available inasmuch as it is the perfect antidote to the poison of the present attacks which are now being made against Islam and the Prophet?

Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din, known as Martin Lings

London

ABU BILAL'S COUNTER-REPLY

Having read Martin Lings' response (*Saudi Gazette*, March 10) to my previous criticism of his biography of the Prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam), as well as his adherence to the Perennial Philosophy, and finding it untenable, I am obliged to reply by – way of counsel (*naseehah*) – for the sake of Allah, His Messenger and the Ummah of believers.

First, I must commend Mr. Lings' on his ability to admit at least some of his errors and for his willingness to correct them; for reversion to the truth is a virtue, as it is rightly said. On the other hand, it distresses me greatly to see him struggling under the influence of certain unfortunate misconceived notions about Islaam in general, and the Prophetic Sunnah, in particular.

Take for example, Mr. Lings' insistence on retaining his romantic account of the Prophet's falling in love with Zaynab as recorded in Ibn Sa'd and the commentaries of at-Tabari, al-Baydaawi, and others whom he designates authorities – as if they were somehow infallible. I reiterate that these narrations have been assessed by the scholars of Hadeeth criticism to be rejected (*mardoodah*) due to the weakness of the narrators and the disconnection of the chains of transmission; a fact which renders them unacceptable for the purpose of application in matters of Religion. That is the reason given by Ibn Katheer, the hadeeth scholar and commentator, for his refusal to include them in his famous tafseer which is an abridged version of at-Tabari's commentary. Refer to [Ibn Katheer's] *Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-'Azeem* (6/420).

Another example is Mr. Lings' facile attempt to defend the fabricated story of the Prophet (on the Day of Victory over Makkah) which has him placing his hands protectively over icons of Jesus, Mary and Abraham inside the Ka'bah, and leaving them intact instead of having them effaced. Frankly, I am amazed at Mr. Lings' obvious lack of familiarity with the noble Hadeeth sciences, especially Hadeeth criticism which deals with the assessment of the degree of veracity of Prophetic traditions. It is a thoroughly precise and exacting science which is the exclusive property of the Muslim Ummah as no other peoples possess anything remotely near to its thoroughness and precision.

Such a noble science protects our faith from the invasion of blameworthy innovations and inventions, for nothing is accepted in matters of Religion unless it is related on the authority of an acceptable *isnaad* (chain of transmitters).

In light of the above, let us look at a few of Mr. Lings' untenable pronouncements relating to some aspects of hadeeth criticism. Take, for example, his outlandish statement regarding al-Waaqidi's *al-Maghaazi*, "Not one of (the scholars) would say that al-Waaqidi's masterpiece is replete with forged traditions,' because in the first place only God – and the forger – can know whether a tradition is forged!!" Now the truth of the matter is that the eminent specialists in the branch of hadeeth sciences known as '*Ilm al-Rijaa*' have unanimously rejected al-Waaqidi as a narrator of prophetic traditions. A cursory glance at their ruling regarding him will be enough to refute Lings' totally erroneous claim. The great hadeeth critic Ibn Hajar relates that al-Imam ash-Shaafi'i has said of al-Waaqidi's books: "They are all lies." An-Nasaa'i states that "al-Waaqidi was well known for his fabrications of prophetic traditions."

Imam al-Bukhari and Imaam Ahmad call him "a liar whose narrations are to be rejected." Abu Daawood emphatically says of him: "I'd never record or relate his hadeeths; I have no doubt at all that he used to forge traditions." Other eminent Hadeeth scholars have variously described him as a liar, forger, counterfeiter, rejected, etc. For details see Ibn Hajar's *Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb* (9/363 - 368).

So much for Mr. Lings' bold claim that "not one of the scholars would say al-Waaqidi's masterpiece is replete with forged traditions'." I agree with Mr. Lings'; truly al-Maghaazi is a masterpiece – in forgery that is! As for the latter part of his claim that "only God – and the forger – can know whether a tradition is forged", it is like saying: "Only God – and the forger – can know whether a certain bank note is forged." Surely he must realize that Hadeeth scholars employ a meticulous scientific system of research with exacting standards; they can tell a forged hadeeth as accurately as an expert on counterfeiting tells a phony bill from an authentic one. Moreover, I wonder if Mr. Lings' realizes the ramifications of his statement, for it necessarily follows that we cannot in certainty say that anything is forged – since only God and the forger can know for sure – and by extension, why not use these hadeeths freely as Mr. Lings' does in his books; and is the common practice by the various adherents to the various deviated sects and cults.

The other gross and baseless generalization made by Mr. Lings' is that "it is universally admitted that many so -called 'weak traditions' may in fact be true." Firstly it must be emphatically stressed that there is no such universal admittance as claimed. Secondly, the theoretical possibility that a certain weak tradition may be true is not at all the point at issue here. The fact of the matter is that once a hadeeth has been assessed to have the degree of weakness – after taxing research and scrutiny – it is no longer permissible – by consensus – to apply it in matters of *Deen*. Mr. Lings' usage of certain sources previously mentioned for the sake of brevity – calls into question the author's claimed "scrupulous and exhaustive fidelity to authentic and reliable sources." (back cover, 1986 edition).

After including weak and forged hadeeths in his seerah, can Mr. Lings' really claim that he has been "at great pains to be selective?"

Now to return to the claimed story of the Prophet's protection of the icons and Mr. Lings' attempts at fanciful sophistry in explaining how such a forged story might be possible.

He claims that the icons of Jesus, Mary and Abraham were in a different category than the other idols, "not pagan and not worshipped by Quraysh" and other Arabs. Does Mr. Lings' think that these statues, icons and paintings were placed inside the Ka'bah solely for the purpose of decoration?! Obviously they were placed there to be worshipped along with Allaah, as is related in the Qur'aan wherein the pagan Arabs are quoted as saying about their idols: "We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah." Such polytheists would not have had the least compunction about worshipping a few more idols such as the three icons mentioned, since they hoped that all of these might bring them near to Allaah!

As for Mr. Lings' question: "How can anyone claim to be absolutely certain that at that moment in question the Prophet was not moved to make a gesture of *adab* towards a brother Messenger?," the reply is from two points of view. Firstly, there is to be found in the compilation of Ibn Khuzaymah et al. an authentic hadeeth which serves as devastating reply to Mr. Lings' untenable suggestion of *adab*. It is related that the Prophet also was shown the statues of Abraham and Ishmael, the former depicted clasping diving arrows, whereupon he ordered for them to be turned out of the Ka'bah and toppled upon their faces, resulting in their being smashed to pieces. Would Mr. Lings' suggest that the Prophet has shown "poor" *adab* to his brother Messengers here by having their images toppled on their faces and destroyed? Such a "gesture of *adab*" as suggested by Mr. Lings' is obviously totally erroneous in light of the preceding hadeeth.

Secondly, it must be asked: would such an alleged act of "protecting" the icons of Jesus, Mary and Abraham not be considered a gesture of bad *adab* towards Allah the Exalted and His inviolable House, the very symbol of *Tawheed*?

Mr. Lings then goes on to claim that the story of the Prophet's supposed protection of the icons in the Ka'bah is supported by his "spiritual generosity" for he allowed Christians to make use of his mosque; and by the pacts and treaties which allowed them to have icons in their churches. The reply to this argument may be phrased in the following questions: Does Mr. Lings wish to imply that the Prophet allowed them to set up their icons in his mosque for the performance of their Christian rites? If the answer is an emphatic "No!" – which I trust it must be – then the analogy presented bears no weight whatsoever. The same may be said regarding the treaties for the mere fact that *dhimmi*s are allowed to have icons in their churches in no way constitutes the slightest "proof" for Mr. Lings' opinion that such icons could be "protected" by the Prophet and left inside the House of Allah which was dedicated to His sole worship.

Furthermore, since it has been unconditionally established that the story of the icons is a fabrication transmitted by way of certain known forgers of traditions, and it is contradicted by authentic narrations of al-Bukhaari which consistently verify the Prophet's having completely destroyed and/or effaced all of the idols, paintings and icons inside as well as outside of the Ka'bah, it is a gross error that one draw upon this concocted story and then claim anything is validly implied therein.

Moreover, Mr. Lings unwittingly comes dangerously close to committing a grave transgression against the Prophet of Islaam (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam), by upholding this forged tradition, for it necessarily follows from his untenable rendition of the auspicious event of the Conquest of Makkah that the Prophet failed to carry out the Divide Order to purify the most sacred House of its defilement caused by the presence of various idols. This amounts to an accusation of negligence on his part, or even contravention of the Divide Command.

However, this is only "the tip of the iceberg" regarding Mr. Lings' various misleading pronouncements concerning Islaam in particular and religion in general. Despite his outright denial in his letter of a belief in pantheistic monism (i.e. the unity of man and God), he admits to it in the same breath since he opines (wrongly, course) that the *hadith qudsi* he quoted "suggests a certain measure of union." Obviously, any "measure" whatsoever of union constitutes union. Furthermore, he clearly espouses the doctrine in his book, *The Eleventh Hour*. For example on p. 10 he says, "The Kingdom of heaven is within you. This truth is the basis of esoterism, the science and discipline of inwardness, and the aspiration of the esoterist goes beyond salvation to sanctification, which in its highest sense is deification, that is, union (the Hindu yoga) with the Absolute Infinite Perfection of the Divine Essence. This extinction of all relativity is the nirvana of Buddhism; and in Islamic mysticism the saying that 'the Sufi is not created' testifies to the same ultimate Reality." In another pronouncement on this subject Mr. Lings' quotes from the master and veritable "High Priest" of Perennialism Frithjof Schuon who claims that "On the one hand, space together with time, then the existence of things, and then their qualities, 'prove' God; on the other hand, they 'are' God, but seen through the veil of 'Outwardness' or of 'Distance'." (p. 107) In fact, this statement indicates adherence to a belief in the essential union between the rest of creation and God! The doctrine of "union" with God is rejected by Islaam which maintains a clear distinction between the created and the Creator.

As far as reincarnation is concerned, I stand by my claim that Mr. Lings' subscribes to this concept precisely according to the definition of the term, which is, "Rebirth in new bodies or forms of life" (Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 722). True, Mr. Lings does not subscribe to the theory that a human (or other being) can be reborn into the same world twice. As for being reborn into a number of other worlds and existences, he confirms that such a thing – in his view – is the real state of affairs as is witnessed from the following quotations from his *Eleventh Hour* "But a man can, after death, 'become an ape' in the sense that he can pass on into another state of existence in which, having

lost his centrality, he might occupy a position analogous to that of an ape in this world; and ape could 'become a man' in the sense that through some mysterious workings of Divine Grace he might, after his death in this world, be born at the centre of the world that comes 'next' to it on the rim of the *samsara*, the great wheel of universal existence." (p. 26)

After explaining the doctrine of the *samsara*, Mr. Lings' boldly avers: "But truth has its rights, and nothing less than the full doctrine of the *samsara* is capable of giving a concept of the universe adequate to what contemplative intelligence demands as a symbolic basis for meditating on the Divine Infinity." (pp. 27-28)

Again on p. 28, Mr. Lings clearly reaffirms his belief in continuous rebirths by posing the following question, "If beings had no existence previous to this life, how can we explain the birth of thousands of souls day after day into conditions spiritually so unfavorable as to offer no apparent hope of salvation? But if one is aware that our position in this state was 'earned' in our previous state upon the great round of existences, the problem no longer looms so large. The state of those countless people in the modern world who do not seem to have been given 'a fair chance' can only be the result of their having already developed a centrifugal impetus in one of the *samsara's* other worlds." (pp. 28-29)

Islam of course, includes no such belief in previous existences.

Finally, Mr. Lings' claims that I don't understand the true nature of his Perennial Philosophy since I said that its principal theme is that all religions are really one, mutually supportive and acceptable. He opines that I should have said, "All true religion is in reality one." However, this playing with semantics is something of a boomerang for it follows that there must be other "true" religions besides our present Islaam! However, since Islaam (as taught by the final Prophet and Messenger Muhammad) supersedes all previous divine revelations and religions, the fact is that the only existing true religion is one – as contained in the Message of Muhammad (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam). In spite of this truism, Mr. Lings makes it clear in his other writings that he considers all present day "traditional" religions to be equally valid forms of worship. Let's hear what Mr. Lings himself says on this subject. Drawing upon the writings of the Perennial master Frithof Schuon once again, Mr. Lings avers that "the dogma that there is only one valid religion, namely 'ours', may serve as an example of an argument that is psychologically somewhat outworn ... Modern man cannot help having a broader view of the world than his ancestors had ... This broader view may enable him to be impressed by religions other than his own, and at the very least it compels him to see that their existence makes the worldwide spread of his own religion impossible (!) If other religions were false, what of the glory of Him who allowed them to established themselves, with their millennial roots, over so vast an area?" (p. 68, *The Eleventh Hour*)

And in speaking about esoterism (the so-called "inner" path of mysticism) Lings mentions what the Hindus call *jnana-marga*, the way of knowledge or gnosis. He points out that "The mention of *jnana* does not mean, in this context, a movement towards Hinduism. For each seeker the way in question could be, in principle, any one of the orthodox esoteric paths which are now operative." (p. 77) That is, any one of the established "orthodox" paths of esoterism (e.g. esoteric Buddhism, Hinduism, Islaam etc.) is acceptable as a means to spiritual guidance!

Mr. Lings borrows extensively from the writings of Rene Guenon which claim Hinduism as another valid way of worship. On p. 80 of his *Eleventh Hour*, Mr. Lings states that "Another advantage of Hinduism as a basis for the exposition of universal truth is the comprehensive breath of its structure ... Hinduism's breadth of structure is matched by its unequalled length of span across the centuries

as a fully valid way of worship , by reason of its providential escape from the degeneracy which other religions of its own age suffered in the normal course ... To make this most ancient religion the basis of a doctrinal exposition is thus to offer the Western world for those few who are capable of taking it, a mysterious and purely positive renaissance of relatively primordial heritage which has long been out of reach."

Lings further says of Rene Guenon, "A note which is sounded in all his writings is the need for orthodoxy, a term which has become, in academic use, almost a synonym for narrow and fanatical esoterism, but which Guenon re-establishes in its true sense, while extending its guarantee of rightness beyond the limits of one religion only. In his perspective it takes on a vast significance to include, for all seekers of religious truth, every form of worship that has its origin in Divine intervention and has been faithfully transmitted from generation to generation by an uninterrupted process of tradition." From the above statements it is clear that Mr. Lings' agrees to the concept of "orthodoxy" as expounded by Guenon, who extends its guarantee of "rightness" beyond the limits of one religion only, to include every form of worship claiming to "divine intervention" and a faithfully transmitted "tradition." It must be questioned at this point: Which religion is not claimed by its followers to have been instigated by "divine intervention" and to have been "faithfully" transmitted, generation after generation? On the basis of such claims it follows that every such "religion" must be accepted as "orthodox", and therefore valid, as an effective approach to God!

Mr. Lings' hoped to escape from the realities of this thorny issue by claiming I don't "understand" the Perennial Philosophy. Let us say – for the sake of argument – that I do not understand. But what about his colleagues and supporters of the Perennial movement – do they also not understand, Mr. Lings? Take for example, Mr. Gai Eaton, your fellow Perennialist and a prolific expounder of the Perennialist Religion's false doctrines. In his book *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, Mr. Eaton – while expounding on the unity and acceptability of religions – states, "Are we to suppose that God mocks sanctity when it is achieved by methods other than our own? ... To rest one's faith upon such suppositions is, in the words of Martin Lings, 'to think ill of Providence'." (p. 37)

According to this statement, sanctity – a higher stage than mere salvation – can be achieved through religions other than Islam; to think otherwise is – according to Mr. Lings' – to think ill of Divine Providence. Dear readers, do you think that Mr. Eaton, an eminent Perennialist in his own right, has also not "understood" where his colleague and co-perennialist is really at?

And what of Mrs. Aisha Gouverneur, an ardent supporter of Perennialism and industrious purveyor of Perennial literature including *The Eleventh Hour*, through her so-called "Islamic Texts Society." Does she also not understand the Perennial Philosophy as conveyed in the writings of Mr. Lings', Gai Eaton, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al? Listen to what she "understands" about Perennial doctrine as indicated by recorded statements made by herself during a lecture before an audience of Western lady converts at Jeddah on January 7, 1989, "How can you believe that God would send to Hell people who are sincerely practising their religions?" In the following lecture (Jan. 7, 1989) she insisted, "All religions are alike; they are like the spokes of a wheel going to a central hub. It doesn't matter which one you take, as long as it takes you where you're going." (i.e. to God) Now let's just compare this to the following quotation from Mr. Lings' *Eleventh Hour*:

"Religions in their outermost aspects have often been represented as different points on the circumference of a circle, the centre of which is the Divine Truth. Every such point is connected to the centre by a radius which stands for the esoterism of the religion in question." (p. 71)

I ask: Did Mrs. Gouverneur the Perennialist devotee not understand the writings of such Perennial heavyweights as Martin Lings, Gai Eaton et al? I dare say that the answer must be quite obvious to the reader.

From the preceding brief exposition, it should be apparent that I have indeed understood what I'm writing about. Mark my words: There is no attempt at calumny here against Mr. Lings; it is he alone who has reaped blame and censure upon his own person and reputation by insisting on following the perilous path of Perennialism rather than adhering to the straight path of unadulterated Islaam as contained in its inviolable sources of infallible Revelation, about which Prophet has said, "I have left among you two things; you will never go astray so long as you hold firmly to them: Allaah's Book and my Sunnah."

Abu Bilal Mustafaa al-Kanadi

Jeddah