

MUSLIM RESPONSE TO MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES
IN EGYPT: WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
AL-AZHAR HIGH CORPS OF 'ULAMĀ (1925-1935)

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Introduction

The history of Christian missions has been written predominantly from a Christian, missionary perspective.¹ Missions have been scarcely studied from the viewpoint of the people the missionaries worked among, in the case of the present research: the Muslims in the Middle East in the early twentieth century.

The available studies on the history and thought of missions among Muslims are in fact incomplete, for they do not give detailed accounts of the reactions and interpretations of the people they had been sent to. Moreover, they do not tell us whether the missionaries themselves were aware of the Muslim positions and writings, and the influence of their movements on mutual Muslim-Christian perceptions and misperceptions. However, there are only a few accounts of what the missionaries did and how Muslims reacted to them. We still need to examine how Muslims, in various regions and under different circumstances, perceived the missionaries and their work.

The following article is an attempt to study the response of *Hay'at* (or *Jamā'at*) *Kibār al-'Ulamā*, the Corps of High 'Ulamā, to the missionary work in Egypt.² Although the main theme of this volume is

¹ See, for instance, Erich W. Bethmann, *Bridge to Islam: A Study of the Religious Forces of Islam and Christianity in the Near East* (London, 1953), Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The Great Century A.D. 1800-A.D. 1914 in Northern Africa and Asia*, vols. 4-6 (London, 1945), Julius Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions in the Near East* (New York, 1970, reprint from the first edition of 1910), Dennis H. Phillips, "The American Missionary in Morocco," *The Muslim World* 65/1 (1975), 1-20, Lyle L. Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record* (South Pasadena Calif., 1977).

² The Corps was founded as a result of the Al-Azhar Organization Law of 1911. This law strengthened the position of Sheikh Al-Azhar in supervising the individual conduct of the 'Ulamā and *Fuqahā* connected with educational and religious establishments. It was also committed to discussing theological, religious and social

chronologically limited up till 1914, I would argue that the reaction of Al-Azhar scholars during the 1930s came as a result of the missionary activities (social, medical and schooling services) in the foregoing decades. The missionary question reached its peak in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries in the late thirties after the abolition of the Capitulatory System. Historians often identify the period from approximately 1882 to 1932 as the heyday of mainstream Anglo-American Protestant missions, in which some missionary leaders took a militant, confrontational approach to Muslim evangelization insofar as they invoked a language of battle-readiness, conquest, and warfare to describe their work and to rally supporters.³

The choice of Al-Azhar is due to its prestigious religious position, not only in Egypt, but also in the whole Muslim world. Al-Azhar's stance was, however, severely criticized as being feeble and incapable in defending of Islam against Christian missions. Even though Al-Azhar rector and conservative Sheikh al-Ahmadî al-Zawâhirî (1878–1944)⁴ requested the Corps of 'Ulamâ to constitute a committee that would collect missionary works and publish replies to them,⁵ the Egyptian press (especially *Al-Balâgh* and *al-Siyâsa*) condemned him, his institution and the government for their lenient attitude towards missionaries.⁶

Although the group of High 'Ulamâ of Al-Azhar was founded in order to carry the burdens of the desired religious reform, to shoulder intellectual endeavour in Egypt and the East,⁷ they were heavily criticized by other 'Ulamâ for not performing their lofty aims as they were only concerned with useless debates about doctrine: "What types of waters are permissible for ablutions and what are not,

subjects. For more, see Muhammad Abdel-Mun'im Khafâjî, *Al-Azhar fî Alf 'Am* (Cairo, 1474 AH/1955), 127–131. Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and fatwas for Dâr al-Ifîâ* (Leiden, 1997), 146–150. Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Arabic Translation), trans. H. Fawzî al-Najjâr (Cairo, 1994) 140.

³ Heather Sharkey, "Empire and Muslim Conversion: Historical Reflections on Christian Missions in Egypt," *Islam and Muslim Christian Relations* 16/1 (2005), 43–60.

⁴ For more details about his life, see Khafâjî, *Al-Azhar fî Alf 'Am*, 165–169.

⁵ Khâlid Muhammad Na'im, *Al-Judhûr al-Târikhiyya li Irsaliyyât al-Tansîr al-Ajnabiyya fî Mîs'r 1756–1986: Dirâsah Wathâ'iqiyya* (Cairo, 1988), 228.

⁶ B. L. Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel to Egyptians Sitting in Darkness: The Political Problem of Missionaries in Egypt in the 1930s," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20/4 (1984), 22.

⁷ Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 148.

confirming or denying the miracles of saints, or whether the strata of the heaven are made of silver or gold etc.”⁸

The confrontation between Christian missionaries and the Al-Azhar ‘Ulamâ took place in the early thirties when the ‘Ulamâ met to investigate the matter.⁹ Al-Azhar ‘Ulamâ thereupon convened two consequent meetings (26 June and 17 July 1933) in which they published their manifestoes to the Muslim community. The response of the Al-Azhar ‘Ulamâ came as a direct reaction to some news about incidents in missionary institutions. The press attack against missions reached its height during the late twenties and the early thirties. The news of missionary behavior in their institutions was a hotly-debated issue in the Egyptian press. Missionaries were charged of using hypnotism, torture, bribery and jobs, enticing children by sweets, kidnapping, adoption of babies, abusing the Prophet Muhammad, burning the Qur’ân and using it for toilet paper etc.¹⁰

The main source of the study will be the religious journal *Nûr Al-Islâm* (Light of Islam), the mouthpiece of Al-Azhar Sheikhdom. *Nûr al-Islâm* was firstly published in al-Muharram 1349/1930 during al-Zawâhiri’s rectorship of Al-Azhar under the supervision of the Department for Preaching (*Qism al-Wa’z*), which was established by Sheikh Mustafâ al-Marâghî (1881–1945), one of the reform-minded Azhari scholars.¹¹

The response of Al-Azhar is mostly studied in the context of Egypt’s political situation of that time. In her study, Barbara L. Carter concentrates on the political background of missionaries in Egypt in the 1930s.¹² The article gives important details about the anti-missionary press campaign 1932–1933. The materials chiefly depend, inter alia, on the Foreign Office archive and various Egyptian

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ A. Chris Eccel, *Egypt, Islam and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation* (Berlin, 1984), 354.

¹⁰ “Current Events: ‘The Anti-missionary Campaign in Egypt’,” *The Muslim World* 24 (1934), 84–86; “Contro l’attività dei Missionari protestanti in Egitto,” *Oriente Moderno* 13,7 (1933), 373–375.

¹¹ More about his life, see, Anwar al-Jundî, *Al-Imâm al-Marâghî* (Cairo, 1952). Khafâjî, *Al-Azhar fi Alf ‘Am*, 169–181. Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Tahtâwî, “Muhammad Mustafâ al-Marâghî,” *Al-Azhar Magazine* (1414/1993), 715–722. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 152–53. When al-Marâghî took the office for the second time in 1935, the name of the mouthpiece of Al-Azhar Sheikhdom was changed into *Majallat Al-Azhar*, which is still being published in Cairo under the same title.

¹² Carter, “On Spreading the Gospel,” 18–36.

newspapers which led the anti-missionary press campaign, such as the three Wafdist periodicals: *Al-Balâgh*, *al-Jihâd* and *Kawkab al-Sharq*, as well as the Liberal Constitutionalist *al-Siyâsa* and *al-Kashkâl*, and others. According to Carter, by 1930 there were 450 foreign missionaries in Egypt with an Egyptian native staff of about 1500 and an annual expenditure of \$700,000. She argues that missionary work became a hot item in the press, when an American missionary passed out tracts out to Al-Azhar (1928).¹³ Carter does not mention the name of this American missionary. Other sources indicate that it was Samuel Zwemer, the American missionary, who entered Al-Azhar two times to distribute missionary pamphlets among the students (to be discussed below). According to Carter, the ‘Ulamâ were not only understandably concerned with missionary activity but also felt themselves to be threatened by the vigorous stance of the Committee for the Defense of Islam.¹⁴

In another political study, the Egyptian writer Târiq al-Bishrî has briefly commented on the stance of Al-Azhar in his work on the relationship between Muslims and Copts in Egypt.¹⁵ The Egyptian press was not only concerned with the missionary activities in Egypt, but also with other missionary activities in other Muslim countries. According to Al-Bishrî, for example, there was a missionary incident in Turkey (1928) that was widely discussed in the Egyptian press in particular and in the Muslim world in general. It is reported that the administration of a missionary Protestant school for girls once compelled some Muslim pupils to kiss the cross every day, and made an attempt to distort the image of the Prophet Muhammad in front of the girls.¹⁶ In its comment on the act, *Al-Balâgh* (6 March 1928), a Wafdist newspaper, did not only fight against the missions in Egypt, but it was highly concerned about “the [. . .] effect of them on young generations with converting them from their parents’ religion [. . .]. Oriental countries suffered a lot from the pains resulted from missions, which work hard to demolish the national culture and spirit inside youngsters.”¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵ Târiq al-Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn wa al-Aqbât fî Itâr al-Jamâ’ah al-Wataniyya*, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1988), 517–520.

¹⁶ Ibid., 454–455.

¹⁷ Ibid., 454.

In his study on the Wafd opposition party, Leland Bowie briefly hints at the response of Al-Azhar against missions. He claims that the opposition parties in Egypt, including the Wafd, seized on the issue and used it to berate the dictatorial Sidqî regime for alleged laxity. The Wafdists demonstrated certain opportunism on the question of foreign mission work in Egypt. In addition, Bowie suspects that the Wafd party decided to play on the religious sentiment of political advantage. His suspicion is based on the assumption that the multireligious Wafd articulated a much harder line than the Committee for the Defense of Islam (discussed below).¹⁸

The present approach is an attempt to highlight the confrontation of Al-Azhar with missionary activity as a religious response to a non-Muslim religious movement in the Muslim world. It presents the speeches which the scholars signed as manifestations for their meetings. Other critical Muslim groups to Al-Azhar started to launch their anti-missionary campaigns distrusting the role which Al-Azhar and the government as well were supposed to play in this regard.

As compared to their approach, we shall study other voices raised against missionary work in order to understand the response of Al-Azhar high scholars in relation to that of other religious responses in Egypt during that time, such as those of *Al-Manâr*, the Muslim Brothers Society (founded 1928), and the Committee for the Defense of Islam, headed by Sheikh al-Marâghî. Sheikh Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ, (1865–1935), the founder of the famous *salafî* journal *Al-Manâr*, accused Al-Azhar and al-Zwâhirî of “making a poor defense against unbelief and the attacks of the Christian West.”¹⁹ As a *salafî* movement, the Society of Muslim Brothers laid the blame on Al-Azhar for being unable “to oppose the state and its colonial wire-pullers.”²⁰

Missionary incidents (1920s–1930s)

In 1921, an international missionary conference was held in Hilwân, a province at the outskirts of Cairo. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the future of missionary work in Egypt in the light

¹⁸ Leland Bowie, “The Copts, the Wafd, and Religious Issues in Egyptian Politics,” *The Muslim World* 67,2 (1977), 123–124.

¹⁹ Daniel Neil Crecelius, “The Ulama and the State in Modern Egypt” (Princeton University, PhD dissertation, 1967), 314.

²⁰ Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 156–57.

of the internal political developments in view of the new Egyptian constitution, and the modernization of the society as an important factor influencing their activities.²¹

The period 1925–1935 witnessed an observable increase of missionary work in Egypt. The anti-missionary press campaign culminated during the period 1931–1933 with the coming of the unpopular and undemocratic regime of Sidqî. The reaction of Al-Azhar to missionary activities was pointed out in light of the political conflict between Sidqî's regime and other opposition parties. In February 1930, a Coptic Roman Catholic gave a lecture at the American University in Cairo in which he was critical of Islam and the Prophet. At the same time, Kâmil Mansûr, a convert from Islam, defamed the Prophet in a meeting at the American Mission in Ezbakia.²² In April, Al-Azhar students went on strike, and Sheikh Al-Azhar (al-Marâghî) told the Acting Minister of the Interior that the government should punish Kâmil Mansûr. He also, however, noted his gratitude for the zeal the government had shown for defending Islam.²³

In 1926 the founder of the Arabian Mission, Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952),²⁴ attempted to distribute missionary publications among Al-Azhar students. Like many Orientalists of the time, Samuel Zwemer had a free license from the Egyptian Ministry of *Awqâf* (Religious Endowments) with which he was entitled admission to mosques, monumental places and museums.²⁵ Sheikh Abdel-Wahhâb Khallâf, the Director of Mosques, warned him that he could lose the license in case he repeated the action.²⁶ On 17 April 1927, the anti-missionary sentiments ran high after he for the second time entered Al-Azhar mosque to distribute missionary tracts among the students,

²¹ Na'im, *al-Judhûr al-Târîkhiyya*, 194–197

²² Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel," 21–22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ About Zwemer's life, see Alfred DeWitt Mason and Frederick J. Barny, *History of the Arabian Mission* (New York, 1926), J. Christy Wilson, *Apostle to Islam: A biography of Samuel M. Zwemer* (Grand Rapids, 1952), Id., "The Epic of Samuel Zwemer," *The Moslem World* 42,3 (1953), 79–93, Id., *Flaming prophet: The Story of Samuel Zwemer* (New York, 1970), Vander Werff, *Christian Mission*, 224–267, Alan Neely, "Zwemer, Samuel Marinus," in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (New York, 1997), 763.

²⁵ M. Sulaymân, *Al-Ajânîb fî Misr: 1922–1952*, (Cairo, 1996), 303–304.

²⁶ *Al-Balâgh* (19 and 22 April 1928), quoted in Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn*, 456–458. See also: Sulaymân, *Al-Ajânîb*, 303–304; Na'im, *al-Judhûr al-Târîkhiyya*, 100–101.

accompanied by three other foreigners, including a woman. They attended the class of the *tafsîr* given by Sheikh Surûr al-Zankalûnî, while he was explaining some passages of *Sûrat Barâ'ah*. Zwemer clandestinely distributed three missionary tracts: “*Da’wah ilâ al-Qibla al-Qadîma*” (A Call to the Old Direction of Prayer), “*Sharh Asmâ’ Allâh al-Husnâ*” (Commentary on God’s Beautiful Names), and “*Tafsîr âyat al-Kursî*” [155:9] (The Interpretation of the Throne Verse).²⁷ Understandably, the students and teachers reacted strongly against the Christian mission within their institution, and provoked by Zwemer’s actions, about three thousand Azharîs went on strike and tore up his missionary publications.²⁸

The public opinion was preoccupied by the incident for a while. As a result, a group of Al-Azhar ‘Ulamâ were delegated to meet the then Prime Minister Mustafâ al-Nahhâs demanding him to stop all missionary activities in Egypt, and ban the distribution of such missionary treatises and tracts on streets, clubs and public transports. Zwemer was deprived of his license. The American Commissioner had also officially apologized for the incident, and the Commissariat ordered Zwemer out of Egypt. He left on a steamer to Cyprus, but two weeks later he returned on the same steamer.²⁹

Many Egyptian writers were alarmed by the incident. The prominent Egyptian writer ‘Abbâs Mahmûd al-‘Aqqâd (d. 1964) ridiculed Zwemer’s act as:

[. . .] a scene from an American movie [. . .] whenever the Americans interfere in something, they turn it from ‘seriousness’ into ‘jest’, and from ‘sobriety’ into ‘childishness’. The Americans, who were unknown during the appearance of Christianity, come to the birthplace of Jesus in the East in order to ‘save’ his religion, and in what way! Through such ‘monkey business’.³⁰

The problem was also discussed in the Egyptian Parliament. In one of the parliamentary sessions Khalîl Abû Rihâb, Abdel-Hamîd Sa’îd and Mahmûd Latîf interpellated both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior to investigate the government’s role in protecting

²⁷ About the tracts, see, *Summer 1914 Edition of the Descriptive Guide to the Nile Mission Press and other Publications suitable for Work in Oriental Lands among Moslems, Jews and Christians* (Cairo, 1914), 13–14. Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn*, 457.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Wilson, “The Epic,” 89.

³⁰ *Al-Balâgh* (20 April 1928), as quoted in Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn*, 457.

religious institutions against such missionary attacks. The president of the Young Men's Muslim Association (Y.M.M.A) Abdel-Hamîd Sa'îd, a member of the National Party, mentioned that "American missionaries spread the 'germs' of strife and disorder in Egypt through their lectures and publications." He commented that "what encouraged the missionary work was the silence of the government being afraid of the ghost of the Capitulatory System. Missionaries are hired forces working for the sake of Colonialism in the East. And it is not enough to get the license back from the priest [Zwemer]. Those people, however, ought to be put under surveillance, and banned from entering mosques."³¹ In his comment, Mahmûd Latîf, another MP, demanded that the American Commissariat should help Egypt to expel Zwemer altogether.³²

The government's reaction came as a disappointment to the critical MP's. In his reply, the Prime Minister spoke about the immunity given to the foreigners, including missionaries, by the Capitulatory System, and how it imposed many confinements on the government. In this respect, he tried to calm down the situation stressing his government's concern about the case of Zwemer promising that such acts should not be repeated. Meanwhile, he mentioned the apology of Zwemer and the Commissariat, and praised the wise position taken by the Azharîs.³³

Also some of the Copts expressed their discontent with the incident. Kalîm Abû Yûsuf, an Egyptian Copt, commented on Zwemer's act, undermining the English claim that their presence in Egypt was to protect the Christian minority. Had such an act been committed [by a Muslim] in a church, he said, Britain would have used it to support its allegation about Muslim fanaticism. In conclusion, he addressed the Muslims saying: "You should never think that the Copts' censure is not less than that of the Muslims. We, Copts, are very concerned about our brotherhood and sympathy with you [Muslims]."³⁴

³¹ Bishrî, *al-Muslimân*, 518.

³² *Ibid.*, 518. See also: Sulaymân, *Al-Ajârib*, 304. Sulaymân quotes the information he used from the Parliamentary archives: 3rd Parliamentary Group, 3rd Term, vol. 2, session 50 (23 April 1928), 762.

³³ *Ibid.*, 457-458.

³⁴ *Al-Balâgh* (April 25, 1928), quoted in *Ibid.*, 457. Cf. Sulaymân, *Al-Ajârib*, 304.

Anti-missionary poems were also composed by Egyptian poets. Al-Sâwî Sha'lân, an Egyptian poet, wrote a very critical poem after the departure of Zwemer to Cyprus, in which he accused Zwemer of atheism and riot-making. He also reminded him of the Inquisitions and that Al-Azhar would remain "a strong fort."³⁵ Mahmûd Ghunaym, another poet, composed a poem under the title "Traders of Doctrines," in which he described missionary work as "danger permeating in the name of Jesus and Mary" fearing that it would "disintegrate the bond of love" with Christians in Egypt. In his poem, he maintained that "any ingratitude to Egypt will be ingratitude to both Muhammad and Jesus. For him "Jesus is too great to be used as a ladder to greediness; and while his task was to disseminate peace, blood had been shed in his name."³⁶

The news had also dealt with the missionary behaviour in their medical institutions. The English missionary hospital in Old Cairo enjoyed wide popularity. According to Sulaymân, the hospital focused on the treatment of tropical diseases, such as bilharzia, with which most of the Egyptian farmers were infected. Sulaymân notes that the treatment in the hospital was for free in the early morning. After 8:00 a.m., tickets were to be made out to patients for 5 piaster in order to attract poor people to come early and attend the morning religious sermons before having treatment.³⁷ In the hospital, missionary tracts were distributed among the patients. Some missionaries also helped illiterate patients to understand the contents of the publications. It is further reported that before giving any medical

³⁵ As quoted in Na'im, *al-Judhûr al-Târîhiyya*, 204

كأمثال الظبا، أبت القفارا فتبعث في فؤادك ما توأرى وذلك الله ذروتها اندثارا تحطم دونهاق دارا أجئت تظننا قوما سكارى ولأمانتريدولا قارارا	ألا أتلع زويمر ويمر والعذارى ترتل في كنائسها صلاة بأن معاقل التفتيش ولت وأن الأزهر المعمور دار سكرت بخمرة التضليل طيشا وأنت ملحد لا بين تبغي
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³⁶ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 205

باسم المسيح ومريما ينبنا أن تقصما مدوالمسيح كليهما ن إلى المطامع سلما موباسمه جرت الدما	خطر تغلغل في الحبي إني أعبد عر المودة من عرق مصر يعق أحه أكبرت عيسى أن يكو فلطالما نشر السلا
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³⁷ Sulaymân, *Al-Ajâmb*, 294-295.

treatment, physicians would ask the patient about the religious sermon delivered in the morning. Patients had to attend religious sermons inside the hospital, while receiving treatment.³⁸

The same was true for other missionary hospitals in other towns. In Munûf (North Egypt) there was another English missionary hospital. In this hospital, the tickets had Christian phrases in the Egyptian dialect written on them, such as “Jesus Christ has come to the world to save sinners. Death is the return for sin, but God’s reward is eternal life [. . .]. We are your servants for the sake of Jesus.”³⁹

During the graduation ceremony of the American University in Cairo (AUC) in 1931, the Palestinian revolutionary Abdel-Qâdir Mûsâ Kâzim al-Husaynî (1908–1948)⁴⁰ was among the graduates receiving their diplomas. When his name was called to receive his diploma, al-Husaynî torn it out on the stage shouting at the face of the President of the University: “I am in no need of a diploma from your imperial and missionary institute.”⁴¹ Al-Husaynî started to shout in the name of Palestine and its people. The act astonished all attendants. The impact of Al-Husaynî’s stance extended to a wide discussion in the press, especially after it was reported in the press that the Egyptian government had expelled al-Husaynî out of Egypt to Palestine.⁴² Early in 1932, the Egyptian newspapers (especially, *al-Balâgh*, *al-Jihâd al-Siyâsa*, *al-Kashkûl* and *Kawkab al-Sharq*) intensified their campaign with publishing more details about al-Husaynî’s incident and other alleged reports of kidnapping Muslim students by missionaries at the AUC. *Al-Siyâsa* (6 February 1932), for instance, reported that “a Muslim student has been kidnapped by missionary

³⁸ Ibid., 295; quoted from the Parliamentary archives: 8th Parliamentary Group, 1st Group, vol. 2, Session 32, 1487 (19 August 1942).

³⁹ The passage in Arabic Egyptian dialect: “*al-Masîh Yasû’ Gâh lid-Dunyâ ‘Alashân Yikhallas al-Khâtî’in. Ugrat al-Khatyyah hiyya al-Mût, Ammâ ‘Atiyyatu Allâh fa hiyya Hayâh Dâ’imah [. . .] Wi Ihnâ Khaddâmkum ‘Alashân Khâtir Yasû’*,” Ibid., 289, as quoted from *al-Balâgh*, 3157 (July 4, 1933).

⁴⁰ He was born in Jerusalem, and received education at the AUC. He participated in revolutions against the British government. In 1937 he had been wounded and transferred to Damascus; then he moved to Baghdad where he received training at the Military College. He was employed for some time at the Iraqi Army. He was killed during war 1948, and buried in the Jerusalem Mosque. Khayr al-Dîn al-Ziriklî, *Al-A’lâm* (Beirut, 1979), 4, 47–48

⁴¹ Na’im, *Al-Judhûr al-Târikhiyya*, 222.

⁴² Ibid., 222.

members of the AUC after being hypnotized,” while missionaries rejected such stories altogether.⁴³ *Al-Kashkûl* strongly attacked the AUC as a “hidden source of missions.”⁴⁴

Al-Salâm school and orphanage, directed by Miss Marshall, an English missionary, constituted a popular missionary center at Port Said. The administration of the school were said to have used different means to attract the pupils to come to their school. They were said, among other things, to use the investigation of the conditions of poor families to try to convince these families to enroll their children in the school. Al-Salâm school had two other branches, in Manzalah and Dikrnis (two towns in al-Daqahliyya province, nearby Port Said).⁴⁵ It is reported that around seventeen Muslim girls were baptized there.⁴⁶ Among the girls baptized were Nazla Ibrahim Ghunaym (who was later married to a Christian, whose name was Zakî Israel), ‘Aydah Nu’mân (who later had the Christian name, Marta Bolous), and Jawhara ‘Allâm (later, Laylâ ‘Abdel-Masîh).⁴⁷ The case of Nazlah preoccupied the focus of public opinion (April-August, 1933). Muslim writers severely criticized Tâha Hussein, when he wrote: “it is sure that Islam will not weaken, nor Christianity will be strengthened due to the conversion of Nazlah Gunaym.”⁴⁸ Following this incident, one of the judges of Tanta *Shar’î* Court publicly stated that “those apostates had two choices [. . .], either to return to Islam or to be stoned to death,” a declaration that had shocked Egyptian secularists.⁴⁹

In 1933, another *cause célèbre* occurred in al-Salâm orphanage. A fifteen-years-old girl named Turkiyya Hassan al-Sayyid Yûsuf was beaten up by her missionary instructor. It was claimed that this had happened as an attempt to convert the girl to Christianity by force. The girl adopted Christianity, but very soon recanted her faith. The girl then went to the police to file a case against her teacher for having beaten her and having compelled her to adopt Christianity. The teacher denied this accusation by saying that she had beaten

⁴³ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁵ Sulaymân, *Al-Ajârib*, 295.

⁴⁶ Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn*, 459.

⁴⁷ *Al-Siyâsah*, 3138 (June 15, 1933). As quoted in, Sulaymân, *Al-Ajârib*, *passim*, 289–304.

⁴⁸ Na’im, *al-Judhûr al-Târikhiyya*, 224

⁴⁹ Ibid., 245

the girl because she did not study her lessons well. The girl, nevertheless, maintained that the teacher punished her because of her rejection of the teacher's statement: "Jesus has chosen you. I am not beating you, but I am trying to kill the Satan, which prevents you from believing in Jesus."⁵⁰ The act provoked Egyptians against all missionary activities in the country.⁵¹ Some missionaries rejected the story as having been invented by the girl. F. F. Johnston, a chaplain of Port Said, maintained that the teacher rebuked her with mild disciplinary punishment for pedagogical reasons.⁵²

Petitions and protesting telegrams were sent from everywhere in Egypt to King Fu'âd and the government, asking them to close all missionary schools. The problem was also vigorously argued in the Parliament, bringing forth a statement of facts by the Minister of Interior (14 June 1933). It is reported that a group of men with clubs attacked the house of a Protestant pastor in Cairo (25 June 1933). Even though the accident, according to the press, was slight, it was yet symptomatic of the Muslim aversion to missionary work.⁵³ In Parliament, the Minister of the Interior claimed that Turkiyya was beaten solely because she had been rude to her teacher. However, the teacher was expelled from Egypt. The government also ordered that Muslim girls at the missionary school had to return to Muslim institutions and that the government should take care of orphans and needy children. The Minister announced a grant of 70,000 Egyptian pounds to start establishing new governmental orphanages.⁵⁴

Two manifestos of the Corps of Al-Azhar High 'Ulamâ

In response to all these missionary activities in the 20s and 30s, the Corps of Al-Azhar High 'Ulamâ held two successive meetings at which they deliberated on possible proper solutions of the question of missions. After both meetings the Corps issued a manifesto to the

⁵⁰ Sulaymân, *Al-Ajâmb*, 305. Cf. Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel," 34.

⁵¹ See "Hawla Hawâdith al-Tabshîr," *Majallat Nûr al-Islâm* (1352/1933) 4/3, 210; "Current," 85; "Contro," 372-373.

⁵² "Contro," 373.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Al-Ahrâm* (15 June 1933), quoted in "Contro," 373. Cf. Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel", 24.

Muslim community stating the Islamic rulings towards the problem as well as what steps the whole Muslim community should take.

On 26 June 1933 the Corps, presided over by Sheikh al-Ahmadî al-Zawâhirî, for the first time convened to discuss missionary work. In the meeting they discussed a detailed report of the news circulating in Egypt about the missions of that time.⁵⁵ After the deliberation on missionary activities in the country, the Corps decided to send an appeal to the government demanding them to take strict measures to “eradicate such evil” in order that Muslims would feel assured about their religion and the Qur’ân, and that Muslim children may be safeguarded against any missionary attempt to entice them away to Christianity. The ‘Ulamâ came out with practical steps for solving the problem: they decided to start donating money for a project against mission. According to the report, Sheikh al-Zawâhirî contributed 200 pounds, Sheikh Abel-Majîd Salîm (1882–1954), the then Muftî of Egypt (1928–46),⁵⁶ 100 pounds, Sheikh Muhammad Abdel-Latîf al-Fahhâm (d. 1943), the then deputy of Al-Azhar Mosque,⁵⁷ 50 pounds, Sheikh Husayn Wâlî (d. 1936), the head of Al-Azhar Fatwâ Council,⁵⁸ 50 pounds, and many other high scholars other sums of money.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the ‘Ulamâ issued the following statements to the Muslim community.

Manifesto to the Muslim Ummah

O Muslims! Be aware! The news of those who call themselves *mubashshirîn* (missionaries) has become widespread in the whole country. And you have become acquainted enough with their terrible means to evangelize Muslim children and the weak-minded. They are not even ashamed of those peculiar and notorious activities they follow to convert Muslim youngsters who are not aware of their religion.

When they are at the end of their wits, according to the press, they resort to hypnosis and sometimes to terrorism and torture.

With astute tricks, missionaries spread in cities and villages: they

⁵⁵ *Majallat Nûr al-Islâm*, 203–208. See also a detailed report about the meeting and its declaration in “Manifesto del Corpo dei grandi ‘ulama’ contro l’opera dei Missionari protestanti,” *Oriente Moderno* 23,7 (1933), 373–375. The translation of both manifestoes from Arabic is mine, except the Qur’ânic passages which are quoted from the Translation of the Meanings of the Holy Qur’ân by Abdullâh Yûsuf ‘Alî (Saudi Arabia, 1410 A.H.)

⁵⁶ For his biography, see Khafâjî, *Al-Azhar fî Alf ‘Am*, 1, 188–89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, part 2, 25–26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

⁵⁹ *Majallat Nûr al-Islâm*, 208.

cunningly appeared in the shape of “the messengers of mercy.” They have established hospitals for treating the poor for free, and schools where they teach poor children without payment, and orphanages where they keep the needy; such work is double-edged “from out mercy is shown, whereas deception and dishonest are embodied alongside.” Unaware of their scheming, the weak-minded and the poor come to their hospitals, schools and orphanages, but they do not know their real dangers.

O Muslims! They try to trick the poor and the needy through these institutions. Missionaries at their hospitals, make use of the poverty and illness of some Muslims to keep them away from Islam. They also teach Muslim children things at their schools against the Qur’ân and the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet was described to the children in a very terrible and fearful form. They trump up against Islam and the ever-Glorious Qur’ân what they wish. They also compel the children to observe the Christian prayers, employing the weakness of the children to make them doubt Islam so they may finally convert them to Christianity.

Also in the orphanages they seize the opportunity and get the poor, who are hard pressed, giving them shelter and food; then missionaries can have a free hand over their religious doctrines and push them away from Islam. When they [missionaries] fulfill their purpose, they spare no effort to sever the relationship between the christianized person and his family, or sometimes they send him away to another country.

O Muslims! It is the duty of the ‘Ulamâ to remind you of the obligations of Islam and what you should do against such activities, which are harmful for your religion, children, brothers and community. It is obligatory upon you to foil the missionary work and keep your dear children away from them. Islam obligates all of you to desert everyone who lets his children learn in such noxious places and misleading environments.

Whosoever allows his family to go to such notorious places, after their terrible acts have been exposed to everybody, will deviate from the way of Islam, if he is aware and accepts the results missionaries aim at. You must abandon him. You must not even feel inclined to him. Consequently, he would feel guilty for what he has committed against his religion and his family, and refrain from transgression, getting his son out from “darkness to light.”

O Muslims! Do you accept your children to follow a religion other than Islam, while Allah says: “If anyone desires a religion other than Islam [submission to Allah] never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost.”⁶⁰

Do you accept them to convert them from Islam, while Allah says:

⁶⁰ The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat Al-‘Imrân [3:85].

“And if anyone of you turns back from their faith and dies in disbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will abide in the Fire.”⁶¹

Do you accept to be deceived by the tricks of missionaries and leave your children in their hands, and Allah says: “O ye who believe! If ye listen to a faction among the People of the Book, they would [indeed] render you apostate after ye have believed.”⁶²

Do you accept to give your daughters in marriage to those who adopt a religion other than Islam, at whose disposal their religion and life will be. Be aware of your dignity and enthusiasm towards your religion and good lineage!

O Muslims! Behold! You will be brought before Allah in the Hereafter, so do not neglect your religion.

O Muslims! You have been informed that the missionary work is based on [their activities] in the hospitals, schools and orphanages, which they establish in villages and towns in order to trick the unlucky and poor people everywhere. Islam, however, urges you to eradicate this ‘epidemic’; you should establish similar hospitals, schools and orphanages in order to safeguard your religion and prevent the poor and the needy from going to such ‘epidemic’ places. Allah says: “And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to [your] destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth those who do good.”⁶³

And He also says: “And spend something [in charity] out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before death should come to any of you and he should say ‘O my Lord! Why didst Thou give me respite for a little while? I should then have given [largely] in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of the good’.”⁶⁴

And Allah also says: “The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn; it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth and Allah careth for all and He knoweth all things.”⁶⁵

O Muslims! It is the duty of the whole Muslim community—the government, the people with all classes and the ‘Ulamâ—to establish hospitals, schools and orphanages similar to the missionary ones so as to safeguard Islam and Muslim children, every one according to his financial ability.

It is also the duty of the scholars to share with money, and to give advice and guidance based on clear-cut evidences to the people according

⁶¹ The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat al-Baqarah [2:217].

⁶² The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat Al-‘Imrân [3:100].

⁶³ The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat Al-Baqarah [2:195].

⁶⁴ The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat al-Munâfiqûn [63:10].

⁶⁵ The Holy Qur’ân, Sûrat Al-Baqarah [2:261].

to the Islamic rulings. The government also has to protect the religion, to preserve the people and safeguard children from the 'claws' of missionaries. They should prescribe strict laws in order to root missionaries out of Egypt. "Who is better in speech than who calls [men] to Allah, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those who bow in Islam'?"⁶⁶

On 17 July 1933, the Corps of the High 'Ulamâ assembled for a second time at Al-Azhar Mosque. They proposed to organize a campaign in order to protect Islam and Muslims against the "danger of mission," in which many of the high scholars took part. The campaign had an executive committee presided by the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. It also had a committee that was in charge of preparing a draft law for the work of the organization, while there were also affiliated committees to support the objectives of the project in other larger towns, such as Alexandria, Tantâ, Zaqâzîq, Dusûq, Demiatta, and Assyût.⁶⁷ At the end of the meeting the Corps issued another manifesto for the Muslim community.

Manifesto to Muslims

O Muslims! You have already known about the earmarked money, assembling groups, plotted tricks, and cunning means, which the so-called missionaries take up as an attempt to corrupt Islam and breach its bond.

Everything has already been disclosed; and no carelessness is excused. You have proudly rejected the movements of those misleading missionaries [. . .] Due to their religious obligations, the 'Ulamâ amongst you have formed a group for organized work and well-contrived plans. The group [of the 'Ulamâ] has started work, seeking the Divine Providence and the Prophetic guidance; and it is certain about your Islamic enthusiasm and your religious munificence that you will give your money in the way of Allah according to your capability, answering Allah's call: "Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly."⁶⁸

O Muslims! It is shameful of you if you do not work; and such missionary groups spend their efforts and money, and establish their edifices [i.e. missionary institutions] in order to dissuade and mislead people

⁶⁶ The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat Fussilat [41:33].

⁶⁷ *Majallat Nûr al-Islâm* (1352/1933), 4/4, 276-280. The report also mentions a list of the names of the grand scholars having worked for the organization. The secretary of the fund was Sheikh Ma'mûn al-Shinnâwî (1880-1950), the then head of the Faculty of *Shari'ah*.

⁶⁸ The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat al-Anfâl [8:60].

from the way of Allah. After [their] attacks, we have to start working as a sign of solid faith and firm belief, proudly holding them up to ridicule for their futile attacks and abortive attempts; and Allah's saying [in the Qur'ân] will come true: "The Unbelievers spend their wealth to hinder men from the path of Allah, and so they will continue to spend; but in the end they will have regrets and sighs; at length they will be overcome."⁶⁹

O Muslims! The 'Ulamâ are very concerned with the defense of Islam. However, they never prefer riot; they advise you to be patient and remind you that any violence or impudence in this respect will impede the fulfillment of the 'Ulamâ's work: "Invite [all] to the way of Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching."⁷⁰

O Muslims! The world is witnessing a struggle between the truth and the falsehood; and the attack of the falsehood can never be more determined than the resistance of the truth. You will never accept their spending to be more than what you should spend so as to protect your religion, preserve your dignity and safeguard your children against the loss of Islam. "Let the man of means spend according to his means: and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given Him."⁷¹

The 'Ulamâ know perfectly well that you need not be urged to spend, but they only remind you that "Those who spend their wealth in the cause of Allah, and follow not up their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury,—for them, their reward is with their Lord: on them shall no be fear, nor shall they grieve."⁷²

In the two manifestoes, the Al-Azhar High Scholars attempted to stress their role as 'protectors' of Islam against foreign missionary activities. The Corps showed a thorough opposition and a considerable deal of unhappiness with missions, exhorting Muslims not to approach any missionary institution. In their manifestoes to the Muslim community, the High Scholars quoted extensively from the Qur'ân. In their response, the 'Ulamâ showed patent rejection of all missionary endeavors among Muslims. Their position was very strict towards what they perceived as reprehensible missionary behavior, in order to mitigate the public resentment among Muslims. In these, they also asked the government to take legal measures so as to "uproot" mission work and safeguard Islam against "insidious missionary

⁶⁹ The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat Al-Anfâl [8:36].

⁷⁰ The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat al-Nahl [16:125].

⁷¹ The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat Al-Talâq [65:7].

⁷² The Holy Qur'ân, Sûrat al-Baqarah [2:262].

attacks.” However, one still wonders whether it is true that the Al-Azhar ‘Ulamâ (in their reaction to missions) “*had* no weapon [. . .] except a tongue of refined eloquence and a pen of sharpened style”⁷³ The heavy criticism laid upon Sheikh al-Zwâhirî made him head the Governmental Anti-missionary Committee, which collected a lot of money for the purpose of combating missions. But after the resignation of its head the committee was dissolved with no real results; and its collected funds were spent for other purposes. After the campaign died down in September 1933, Sheikh al-Zawâhirî, the head of the Corps, issued a *fatwâ* that strongly condemned Muslims who enrolled their children in missionary schools. The Foreign Office was unhappy about the *fatwâ*.⁷⁴

The statements of the first manifesto can be clearly discerned as more severe. According to Carter, the British Residency found the manifesto of the Corps “violent and yet the government had argued with the ‘Ulamâ for three days in an apparently successful effort to get them to tone it down. A somewhat docile committee of ‘Ulamâ was then set up to study the problem, while other ‘Ulamâ were busying themselves with directing fundraising activities for establishment of orphanages and schools.”⁷⁵

Other responses to missionary activities

Sheikh Rashîd Ridâ, the founder of the famous journal *Al-Manâr* and a close disciple of Muslim Egyptian modernist Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), devoted much of his writing to defending Islam against missionary attacks.⁷⁶ In the present paper, it is difficult to discuss all the details of his views and reactions to Christian mis-

⁷³ Daniel Crecelius, “Nonideological Response of the Egyptian Ulama to Modernization,” in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500* (Berkeley, 1972), 219.

⁷⁴ Carter, “On Spreading the Gospel,” 26.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

⁷⁶ About Ridâ’s views on Christian missions, see Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London, 1933), 196ff., Ayoub, “Muslim Views,” 49–70, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1789–1939* (London, 1962), Christine Schirrmacher, *Mit den Waffen des Gegners*, (Berlin, 1992), Eliezer Tauber, “Rashid Ridâ as Pan-Arabist Before World War I,” *The Muslim World*, 79 (1989), 104, Umar Ryad, “Islam and Christian Missions: Missionary Activities and Muslim Responses in Egypt (1895–1935)” (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden University, 2000).

sions. The following part focuses on the criticism of *Al-Manâr* to Al-Azhar's mild criticism to missions, and on the conflict between Al-Azhar and *Al-Manâr* during the period under discussion, especially with regard to missionary activity.

The conflict started after the resignation of Sheikh al-Marâghî, who was a good friend of Ridâ's and a staunch disciple of Muhammad 'Abduh as well.⁷⁷ After the appearance of the first issue of *Majallat Nûr Al-Islâm*, Rashîd Ridâ commended it in his journal. Ridâ, furthermore, wished that the magazine would fulfill its objectives of propagating the Islamic values, the same as he had been doing for many years in his *Manâr*. One of these objectives, according to him, should be the combat against the increase of missionary activities in Muslim countries.⁷⁸ However, after a few years of the publication of the magazine, Ridâ expressed his disappointment with the lax position taken by Al-Azhar and the Corps of its High 'Ulamâ. In his criticism of Al-Azhar's attitudes towards missions, Ridâ claimed that although the Egyptian press in the 1930s was preoccupied with the news of missionary events in the country, the Al-Azhar scholars, who were supposed to be the religious leaders of the community, had not taken a proper stance against missionary activities.⁷⁹

The background of the conflict between *al-Manâr* and Al-Azhar with regard to missions goes back to the discussion between Rashîd Ridâ and the anti-*Salafî* Sheikh Yûsuf al-Dijwî (1870–1946), a member of the Corps of Al-Azhar's High 'Ulamâ (1932)⁸⁰ on the understanding and interpretation of many Islamic themes. Al-Dijwî was the first Mufî in *Nûr al-Islâm*.⁸¹ He was one of Rashîd Ridâ's greatest protagonists in Al-Azhar. Al-Dijwî gave a number of *fatwâs* attacking the Wahhâbî kingdom in Saudi Arabia; Rashîd Ridâ was one of the Wahhâbî regime's supporters.⁸² *Nûr al-Islâm* defended itself bit-

⁷⁷ Muhammad Sâlih al-Murrâkîshî, *Tafkîr Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ min Khilâl Mijallat al-Manâr 1898–1835* (Tunisia and Algeria, 1985), 420–21.

⁷⁸ Rashîd Ridâ, "Bâb Taqrîz al-Mathbû'ât al-Jadîda," *al-Manâr* 31,2 (Rabî' al-Awwal 1349/24 August 1930), 155.

⁷⁹ Idem, *Al-Manâr wa Al-Azhar* (Cairo, 1953), 15 (Quoted below, *Azhar*). Cf. Abdullâh al-Najdî al-Qusaimî, *Shuyûkh Al-Azhar wâ al-Žyâdah fî al-Islâm* (Cairo, 1351 AH), 12–13.

⁸⁰ About his life, see, *Al-A'lâm* (1979) 8, 216–217. See his work, *Rasâ'il Al-Salâm wâ Rusul Al-Islâm* (Epistles of Peace and Apostle of Islam), written of the people of America (Cairo, n. d.).

⁸¹ Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 152–53.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 153.

terly, but soon lost the prospect of the issues in the exchange of insults and countercharges with *Al-Manâr*. It moreover accused Ridâ of unbelief.⁸³ The debate between both sides was very intense and serious. It later developed into hostility and serious friction between the two men.

Their controversy was mainly about religious issues. The issue concerning us here is the question of the status of Muslim pupils at missionary schools. Dijwî maintained that Ridâ had a completely mistaken opinion, when he issued his *fatwâ* for the Muslim students at the American College in Beirut. In this *fatwâ*, he allegedly allowed them to attend the prayer with the Christians in the church. According to Dijwî, Ridâ forgot that “this would implant these Christian rituals in their [Muslim students] pure hearts, and that what they would hear from missionaries and priests there would be engraved in their naïve minds.”⁸⁴

The problem goes back to the *fatwâ* published in *al-Manâr* in 1909 (12, 16–29 and 637–640) with regard to the refusal of Muslim students at the American College in Beirut to attend the Christian religious classes. In his reply to Dijwî, Ridâ claimed that Dijwî’s words were quite different from what he declared in his *fatwâ*. Dijwî, according to him, falsely interpreted the statements cited in *al-Manâr*.⁸⁵

In 1909, Ridâ issued a *fatwâ* to Muslim students of the American College of Beirut, who were obligated to attend Christian religious classes and that they would remain in the school while keeping the Islamic bond firmly. He stressed the academic significance of such Christian institutions in the Muslim world. Due to their societal benefits in spreading science and technique among Muslims, Ridâ accepts the need for such schools, even when they are sometimes harmful for one’s belief. Those who were in need of the advantages of such schools let their children join them; but those who were concerned about the doctrines of their children never trusted them.⁸⁶ He held the view that Muslims must leave such schools if they have schools like the Christian ones, or they may remain there, if they could avoid the disadvantages of any instructions incompatible with

⁸³ Crecelius, “The Ulama and the State,” 314–15.

⁸⁴ Yûsuf al-Dijwî, “Sâhib al-Manâr,” *Majallat Nûr al-Islâm* 3:5 (Jumâda al-Ulâ 1351/1932), 337.

⁸⁵ Ridâ, *Azhar*, 106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

Islam. As it is impossible to leave such schools, Muslims could remain there till similar Muslim educational methods exist.

He advised Muslim students to accomplish other important acts so as to overcome any religious side effect, such as: 1) to study Muslim books explaining the truth of Islam and the differences between Islam and Christianity, 2) to study Muslim works refuting the doctrines of the Bible, 3) they should preserve all Islamic acts of worship at these schools, such as the five daily prayers, and to fast on the days they are required to attend the Christian religious classes, and 4) to keep their concern of competition with those people, trying to combine both religion and science, and to establish schools as such. Despite Ridâ's acceptance of Christian schools, he continued to warn the people that they should carefully watch the religious education of their children. He also attempted to convince the Muslims of Beirut to take their children out of the American College and other missionary schools, and raise funds for the establishment of an Islamic College that would replace such institutions.⁸⁷

In 1928, Hasan al-Bannâ (1906–1949) founded the Muslim Brothers Society in Egypt. He had frequented the circle of Rashîd Ridâ in his youth, and tried to carry on *al-Manâr* after Ridâ's death.⁸⁸ The Islamic message (*da'wâ*) was one of the most important tasks of the Muslim Brothers. In his early stage of activism, Hasan al-Bannâ expressed his admiration of the short-lived *Dâr al-Da'wâ wâ al-Irshâd* (Society of *Da'wa* and Guidance),⁸⁹ established by Sheikh Rashîd Ridâ in 1912 when he moved to Cairo.⁹⁰ The idea of such a society first occurred to Ridâ when he was a student in Tripoli-Syria, where he used to frequent and read the literature provided by the American missionaries in that city, and he wished that the Muslims had had similar societies and schools.⁹¹

On many occasions, the Muslim Brothers expressed their disappointment that Al-Azhar had not been able to defend Islam, or to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁸ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 360; Khalîl 'Alî Haydar, *Mudhakkarât Hasan al-Bannâ* (Kuwait, 1989), 161–64.

⁸⁹ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928–1942* (Lebanon, 1998), 57.

⁹⁰ The Society of *Da'wâ* and Guidance was inaugurated in March 1912. The study started immediately on the second day of inauguration. See Hasîb al-Samarrâ'î, *Rashîd Ridâ al-Mufassir* (Baghdad, 1397/1977), 304.

⁹¹ Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 196.

convey “the appropriate message of Islamic faith” to Muslims. In the early part of his life, al-Bannâ joined the Sufi Hasâfiyya Society for Charity based in his birthplace Al-Mahmûdiyya (northwest of Cairo) with a twofold aim: to fight for the preservation of Islamic morality, and to resist the work of Christian missionaries in the town. After his move to Cairo, al-Bannâ “suffered a profound shock at the religious state of the city; eventually he found his way to the leaders of the Al-Azhar and poured out his anguish over the debased condition of Islam and Muslims. His revulsion at the sense of futility in Al-Azhar in the face of the currents battering away at Islam can be said to mark his disenchantment with it as a citadel of the defense for Islam.”⁹²

The ‘Ulamâ of Al-Azhar were accused by the Society as being servants of a foreign occupation and “oppressive economic and political overlords”; the Brothers viewed the scholars of Al-Azhar as civil-servant ulamâ and agents of the Egyptian government. The Society, besides, bemoaned the state of stagnancy of Al-Azhar as a great Muslim institution. They accused Al-Azhar to be a leading voice of the Muslim world which failed to play its role as the spokesman for a living and dynamic Islam. Al-Azhar had not been vigorous enough in its resistance to encroachment on Islamic preserve by foreign ideas and values.⁹³ Al-Bannâ brought his own anxiety to the Sheikhs of Al-Azhar, and bitterly disputed the futile resistance and evident resignation in the face of “the missionary and atheistic currents” disrupting the Muslim society.⁹⁴

During the first five years after the establishment of the Muslim Brothers, fifteen branches originated in different towns. Most of these branches were established in areas where missionary centers were found. The Muslim Brothers warned Muslims not to contact missionary establishments.⁹⁵ According to the Muslim Brothers, a missionary was a major agent of cultural imperialism and therefore a chief object of their criticism. “It was natural,” remembers al-Bannâ, “that there should be a clash between the two [Brothers and mis-

⁹² Richard Mitchel, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London, 1969), 211–12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5. See also Haydar, *Mudhakkarât Hasan al-Bannâ*, 22 and Bishrî, *al-Muslimûn*, 471.

⁹⁵ Haydar, *Mudhakkarât Hasan al-Bannâ*, 78–79.

sionaries] in view of the fact that one of them defends Islam and the other attacks it."⁹⁶

In the early 1930s, the Society of Muslim Brothers organized a campaign against missionary work in Egypt. The goal of the campaign was to discourage parents from Christian missionary schools. The Society, therefore, publicized the incidents of Muslim girls mentioned above as "forcibly converted to Christianity."⁹⁷ Secondly, they sought to influence government policy.⁹⁸ The First General Conference of the Society of Muslim Brothers (May 1933) concerned itself primarily with the issue of Christian missionary activity and the means of combating it. A letter was sent to King Fu'âd outlining the Society's belief in the necessity of having a grip on the activities of the foreign missionaries.⁹⁹ Thirdly, practical measures were taken by appointing affiliated committees in various districts over the country. The committees were meant to warn the inhabitants of villages and areas where missionary services were said to exist, especially the Canal Zone and in Al-Bahr al-Saghîr area.¹⁰⁰

The Society embarked upon creating small-scale projects for Muslims. Immediately after the case of conversion at Salâm Protestant School in al-Manzala, a small town nearby Port Said (mentioned above), the society's branch in the town interfered to get the girl out of the school.¹⁰¹ Since the girl had converted for economic reasons, the Society thereupon organized a workhouse-school (*mashghal*) for women, in an attempt to provide a livelihood for the destitute of the area.¹⁰²

The weekly magazine and mouthpiece of the Muslim Brothers *Majalat al-Ikhwân al-Muslimîn* was founded according to the recommendations of the Second General Conference.¹⁰³ The magazine followed the anti-missionary efforts of the Brothers all over Egypt. It attempted also to arouse the zeal of Muslims through the publication of news, essays and poetry against missions.¹⁰⁴ The Muslim

⁹⁶ Mitchel, *The Society*, 231. Cf. also Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 155.

⁹⁷ Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 112-13.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See for the text of the letter, Haydar, *Mudhakkârât Hasan al-Bannâ*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁰ Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 113.

¹⁰¹ Bishrî, *al-Muslimîn*, 472. Mitchel, *The Society*, 247.

¹⁰² Mitchel, *The Society*, 247.

¹⁰³ Haydar, *Mudhakkârât Hasan al-Bannâ*, 161-62, Mitchel, *The Society*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Bishrî, *al-Muslimîn*, 472-73.

Brothers' resistance against missions was one of the factors that earned the Society more credibility and 'special status' among the Muslim public of this time.¹⁰⁵

As a reaction to the missionary incidents cited above, two different meetings in *Jam'iyyat al-Shubbân al-Muslimîn* (Y.M.M.A) in Cairo were held by around more than four hundred scholars (including some Azharis who were not members of the official Corps of Al-Azhar) and other intellectuals concerned with the Islamic affairs. The two meetings were held in reaction to the missionary activities. In the meetings, they decided upon some general resolutions, which could be applied by a committee. The committee was convened under the name of *Jam'iyyat al-Difâ' an al-Islâm* (the Committee for the Defense of Islam). The Committee was headed by Sheikh Muhstafâ al-Marâghî. It gained wide popularity in the whole Egyptian country.¹⁰⁶ Muhammad Husayn Haikal, the editor of *Al-Siyâsa* (one of the newspapers that led the anti-missionary campaign) and Hasan al-Bannâ were members of the Committee. Several committee members held seats in parliament.¹⁰⁷

The Al-Azhar High 'Ulamâ convened their assemblies immediately after the establishment of the Committee (June 1933). As a former rector of Al-Azhar at that time, al-Marâghî was very critical of the role of Al-Azhar. The British Residency noted that al-Zwâhirî, the rector of Al-Azhar and many other scholars felt that their role as the 'public defenders' of Islam was being undermined by al-Marâghî.¹⁰⁸

The Committee statements called the missionaries "wolves in sheep's clothing" and missionary activities "criminal and abominable."¹⁰⁹ The Committee raised funds and soon established branches in different provincial cities over Cairo.¹¹⁰ In July 1933 an orphanage run by French nuns in Kafr al-Zayyât (al-Gharbiyya province) was besieged.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 473. Cf. Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ About the meeting see "Muqâwamat al-Mubashshirîn wa Takhûdhul al-Muslimîn," *al-Manâr* 33,4 (Rabî' al-Awwal 1352/June 1933), Bishrî, *al-Muslimîn*, 459, Sulaymân, *Al-Ajânib*, 307-308. Sulymân quotes his information from *al-Siyâsah* Newspaper, June 23 and July 7, 1933. Cf. "Ancora contro I Missionari protestanti in Egitto," *Oriente Moderno* 13,7 (1933), 375-376.

¹⁰⁷ Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel," 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ *Times* (24 June 1933), as quoted in *ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

The French Legations complained and appealed to the Capitulations. A large anti-missionary demonstration was held in Tantâ (another town in al-Gharbiyya province). The British Residency also intimidated the King that the British had the right to protect foreigners in Egypt and could well be pressed by other foreign governments to take action. As a result, the government forbade anti-missionary gatherings including the meetings of the Committee for the Defense of Islam. The High Corps of ‘Ulamâ was the only organization which could safely continue the work of collecting donations.¹¹¹ Carter claims that the Committee advised people to boycott all missionary institutions but also begged them, in at least one sentence—it is not clear which sentence—to remain calm.¹¹² The assumption of the Committee was that doing mission involving peaceful persuasion could be accepted, but no Muslim would willingly be enticed to convert to Christianity. Only coercion could bring about such a change.¹¹³ At the propositions of the meetings, the members passed some recommendations to be carried out by the Committee: 1) to submit a petition to King Fu’âd about missionary activities, stressing the importance of diminishing the missionary attacks against Islam and the Muslim community; 2) to send another similar petition to the Egyptian government, asking them to take strict decisions towards the ‘illegal’ missionary work; 3) to send messages to the ministers plenipotentiary, to attract their attention to the danger of the consequences of missionary activities and asking them to use their influence to stop the missionary arguments against Islam and Muslims; 4) to publish a public announcement to the whole Muslim community, warning the people against the enrollment of their children in missionary schools, as well as entering their hospitals and orphanages; 5) to appeal for public subscription in order to establish Muslim institutions instead of that of missionary institutions; 6) to hold a committee, consisting of Muslim scholars and writers for the Islamic propaganda and publications; 7) to write messages to the Christian Patriarchs, stating that the resistance is only directed against missionary attacks on Islam, and the Committee is keen on maintaining a good relationship between Muslims and other religious groups

¹¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹¹² Ibid., 26.

¹¹³ Bowie, “The Copts, the Wafd,” 123–124.

living in the same country on the basis of the national mutual understanding.

A similar position was taken earlier by the *Jam'iyat al-Shubbân al-Muslimîn* (Y.M.M.A), which was founded in 1927–1928. One of the main tasks of the Association was to distribute a publication exhorting Muslims to promote the native schools and to put Muslims on their guard against missionary schools.¹¹⁴ In summer 1930, the central branch of the Association published an article in which it is held that the Egyptian law allows the missionary societies to expound the beauties of their religion, but *does not* forbid them to attack the religion of the overwhelming majority by insults and criticism. Such attempts create disorders and undesirable dissensions between the two groups of the Egyptian people. In a letter to the Minister of Interior it is added that the movement of reform and revival is disturbed by such attacks on the foundations of Islam.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

The public role of the scholars of Al-Azhar as 'protectors' of Islam was threatened. As becomes clear from their statements, the scholars were trying to uphold their religious responsibilities towards the Muslim community. The attempts of Al-Azhar against missions can be seen as a response to other anti-missionary religious endeavours. The meetings of Al-Azhar, for example, were held immediately after the establishment of the Committee for the Defense of Islam.¹¹⁶

The petition sent by the Muslim Brothers to King Fu'âd (May 1933) became the forerunner of many such communications to Egyptian heads of government in the name of Islam.¹¹⁷ In the resolutions of their first assembly, Al-Azhar Corps of High Scholars demanded that an appeal be sent to the Egyptian government to take strict measures to save Muslims from the 'claws' of missionaries.

¹¹⁴ About the Association, see H. A. R. Gibb, *Wither Islam, A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World* (London, 1932), 102–170.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121–122

¹¹⁶ Fakhr al-Dîn al-Zawâhîrî, *Al-Siyâsa wa Al-Azhar* (Cairo, 1945), 315. As quoted in Carter, "On Spreading the Gospel," 34.

¹¹⁷ The most notable of these is a letter addressed by al-Bannâ in 1936 to King Farûq, his prime minister Mustafâ al-Nahhâs, and the heads of Arab governments, Mitchel, *The Society*, 13–15.

In the second manifesto there is no mention of such an appeal. The Committee for the Defense of Islam followed the same line and sent a similar petition to the government. In my view, they too tried to establish affiliated committees to support their anti-missionary campaign in other Egyptian big cities, in an effort to gain the reliability other organizations, such as the Muslim Brothers, had started to earn among the Muslim public. It was the very idea of the Muslim Brothers and the Committee for the Defense of Islam to establish such affiliated branches.

Rashîd Ridâ was very critical of the delayed response of Al-Azhar in defending Islam against missionary allegations and attacks. However, his criticism also included scholarly and theological discussions with Al-Azhar. Unlike many of Al-Azhar scholars, Ridâ was not a rejectionist, but he was ready to discuss and argue with missionaries. Moreover, he opened the pages of his *Manâr* to their questions and inquiries about Islam.¹¹⁸

The Committee for the Defense of Islam had a more moderate position towards the whole affair. The recommendations of the Committee to a great extent reflected nationalistic feelings in Egypt of the time, as did their calls for the national unity between Muslims and Copts. It was of importance for the organizers of the Committee to send messages to the Christian Patriarchs, indicating that the idea of establishing such a committee was an attempt to combat missionary arguments against Islam, and that it was never meant to ruin the relationship between Muslims and the other religious communities living in the same country.

¹¹⁸ See Umar Ryad, "Rashîd Ridâ and a Danish Missionary: Alfred Nielsen and Three Fatwâs from Al-Manâr," *Islam Christiana* 28 (2002), 87–107.