

Rashid Rida's Struggle to Establish A Modern Islamic State

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Reform movements are important religious phenomena which have occurred throughout Islamic history. Medieval times saw the appearance of religious reformers, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Qayim al-Jawziyah and others; however, these reform activities differed significantly from the modern reform movement. The medieval reformers worked within Muslim society; it was not necessary to deal with the external challenge presented by Europe as it was for the modern Muslim reformers after the world of Islam lost its independence and fell under European rule. The powers of Europe believed that Islam was the only force that impeded them in their quest for world dominance and, relying on the strength of their physical presence in Muslim countries, tried to convince the Muslim peoples that Islam was a hindrance to their progress and development.

Another problem, no less serious than the first, faced by the modern Muslim reformers was the shocking ignorance of the Muslim peoples of their religion and their history. For more than four centuries, scholarship in all areas had been in an unabated state of decline. Those religious studies which were produced veered far from the spirit of Islam, and they were so blurred and burdened with myths and legends, that they served only to confuse the masses.

The 'Ulama were worst of all: strictly rejecting change, they still had the mentality of their medieval forebearers against whom al-Ghazali, Ibn Taimiyah and others had fought. Hundreds of years behind the times, their central concern was *taqlid* (the imitation of that which had preceded them through the ages). For centuries, no one had dared to question this heritage or point out the religious innovations it impaired.

In conjunction with their questioning of the *taqlid*, the modern reformers strove to revive the concept of *ijtihad* (independent judgement) in religious matters, an idea which had been disallowed since the tenth century. The first to raise anew the banner of *ijtihad* in the Arab Muslim world was Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani; after him Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh in Egypt, and after him, his friend and

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disciple, Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida. Both 'Abduh and Rida drew weapons with which to fight the *Muqallidin* among the 'Ulama from their interpretation of the *Qur'an*.

This paper will deal with the struggle of Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida and with his work toward the establishment of a modern Islamic state.

Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida was born in Lebanon in 1865 and died in Egypt in 1935. Besides his many books and articles, he is best known for his magazine, *al-Manar*, published in Cairo from 1896 to 1935, his *Qur'an* commentary known as *Tafsir al-Manar*. Unfortunately he died before the completion of the latter. He is one of the leading personalities in the Arab-Muslim reform movement in the modern period. Investing over forty years in the cause of reform in the Arab and Muslim world, he travelled, wrote, and lectured more than anyone else in the modern reform movement.

Sheikh Rashid was a devout Muslim who defended the cause of Islam throughout the world without distinction between sects or doctrines. He supported and praised the Shi'i Shah Muzaffar al-Din of Persia for his establishment of a consultative parliamentary government in his country and preferred him to the rest of the Muslim kings, because he felt consultative government (*shura*) was the government of the *Qur'an*.

He supported the government of the Young Turks when they restored the *Dustur* and the parliament in the Ottoman Empire, but he turned against them when they turned their backs on the *Dustur* and the parliament. Sheikh Rashid also turned against Sharif Husayn of Mecca when he found that the Sharif had betrayed the Arab and Muslim cause. Thus he supported the Su'udis when they drove out Sharif Husayn and his sons from the holy cities and took over the Hijaz.

In all these cases the primary motive for his support was the enrichment and preservation of Islam, sometimes reinforced by his belief in Arabism. With regard to the latter, Sheikh Rashid was a pan-Islamist all his life, and even though he placed special emphasis on the Arabs' role in Islam, he never was a regionalist or nationalist. Hazim Zaki Nuseibeh describes him as follows:

"Rida, a Syrian living in Egypt, was a pan-Islamist and not a pan-Arabist, although he was fully appreciative of the Arabs' central position in the destiny of Islam. . ."¹

To him Islam was One, and he called for Islamic unity even between Sunnism and Shi'ism. In fact, Sheikh Rashid considered the Caliphate of the Shi'i Zaydi Imam Yahya of Yemen more valid than the Caliphate of the Sunni Sharif Husayn of Mecca.

As I mentioned earlier, the 'Ulama rejected any ideas coming from the West. The following discussion between Sheikh Rashid and his teacher,

¹ Hazim Zaki Nuseibah. *The Ideas of Arab Nationalism*. New York, Cornell University Press, 1956, p. 124.

Sheikh Husayn al-Jisr, who taught Arabic and Shari'ah (Islamic law), reflects the conditions amid which Muslims lived toward the end of the 19th century. Al-Jisr was widely read in modern science, as is evidenced by his book *al-Risalah al-Hamidiyah* and when he asked Sheikh Rashid his opinion of his book, Sheikh Rashid commented as follows:

“The need for it is very strong, and nobody preceded our master with something similar to it in defending Islam. But I object that you mention scientifically proven facts, like the spherical shape of the earth and its orbit, in suppositional sentences which demonstrates your doubt about it.”

Al-Jisr retorted:

“You know the fanaticism of those ignorant of these sciences in our county. I did not want to give them a reason for attack.”

Sheikh Rashid responded to this:

“If one like you, trusted by the nation for his religious knowledge, does not encourage us to speak out frankly about proven facts, from whom can we expect it?”²

Although al-Jisr was advanced in some of his ideas, he did not approve of the lengths to which his pupil later went in his advocacy of reform. When the first issue of *al-Manar* appeared, he wrote to Sheikh Rashid as follows:

“*Al-Manar* has appeared, gleaming with unaccustomed yet pleasing lights (the title *al-Manar* means ‘the lighthouse’), except that these lights are made up of powerful rays that almost impair the vision.”³

It is appropriate to mention here the work of a prominent reformer, unknown to many scholars and readers, who influenced ‘Abduh and al-Jisr with his revolutionary ideas. Sheikh Husayn al-Marsafi is one of the men who helped shape the course of events in Egypt. Shortly before ‘Abduh began his series of articles on reform in *al-Waqa' i' al-Misriyan*, al-Marsafi wrote the small book, *Essay On Eight Words* or *Risalat al-Kalim al-Thaman*, which dealt with the same problems examined later by ‘Abduh. He formulated the theories advanced in this essay with the help of ‘Abduh who at the time was editor of *al-Waqa' i' al-Misriyah*. This arrangement permitted al-Marsafi to exercise considerable freedom in making what became the first open attack against the social corruption of religious men, government officials, and landowners.

² Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Al-Manar wal-Azhar*. Egypt, al-Manar Press, 1353 H./1934, p. 145.

³ Charles C. Adams. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*. New York, Russell and Russell, 1968, p. 178.

Sheikh Rasid carried the same message in his quest for reform. Both men adopted the same criteria:

“Marsafi’s criteria and arguments are mainly religious, but the book is most readable because of lively anecdotes about the life of Muhammad and his companions, quoted by the author to support his ideas of patriotism and public spiritedness. The worst element in society, in his view, was the demagogues who exploited religion for their own ends; they could only be driven out if the faith in all its truth and purity were taught.”⁴

In Marsafi’s view, the first sign of decadence in Islamic civilization came with the unrestrained life of luxury enjoyed by the leaders of the community who imported most of their luxuries from Europe. Calling for economic reform, he urged that Egypt develop her own industries and revive her ancient crafts. He sharply criticized the poor as well. To remedy the situation, he insisted that an entirely new educational system be created, a non-elitist system which would prepare men to be citizens of a modern society. At the elementary level, instruction would be based on the ethics of Islam.

Later, in ‘Abduh’s writings, educational reform became the major issue. He hoped it would be applied to the entire Ottoman Empire, and on two occasions he petitioned the government with his proposals for reform.⁵

Sheikh Rashid was also active in this aspect of reform, establishing *Madrasat al-Da’wah wal-Irshad* in Egypt and another school in Istanbul which was eventually closed because of government opposition. ‘Abduh saw the opening of such a school as the best way to unite the Ummah and open the eyes to political corruption without directly clashing with the government and perhaps threatening the reform movement itself.⁶

In the beginning, Sheikh Rashid went out of his way to avoid any semblance of political involvement, but such involvement ultimately became inevitable. In his first editorial for *al Manar*, Sheikh Rashid described the orientation of his magazine as “Ottoman-Oriented”, voicing Hamidian views, defending the Ottoman Empire rightly, and truly serving our master, the Sultan.⁷

He is said to have acknowledged “Ottomanism” as the nationality of the entire Muslim world, a theory in marked contrast to the European notion of nationality. He controverted the European definition of nationality which supposes that divergent tongues must necessarily

⁴ Jamal M. Ahmad. *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 22.

⁵ Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Shaykh Muhammad Abduh*. Cairo, al-Manar Press, 1350 H./1931. First edition, Vol. I, p. 413.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 892.

⁷ Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Al-Manar*. Cairo, 1898-1935. Vol. I, p. 13.

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⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 892.

⁷ Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Al-Manar*. Cairo, 1898-1935. Vol. I, p. 13.

create divergent nations. The Ottoman Empire was composed of many religions and languages. He wrote:

“Our happiness depends on rejecting the European definition of nationality, and on our agreement in making “Ottomanism” the bond of our nationality. I do not think that anyone of all the races living in the Ottoman Empire denies this and accepts the European concept of nationality.”⁸

‘Abduh was even more zealous in his defense of the Ottoman Empire. Dubbing it the Third Pillar of Islam, he wrote:

“Every Muslim who has a heart believes that protecting the Ottoman Empire is the third article of faith after the belief in God and His Prophet. Indeed, only (the Empire) is the protector of the faith; there is no power for the religion without it; praise be to God for this faith! For it we live, and for it we die.”⁹

This was the general feeling among Muslims toward the end of the 19th and during the early years of the 20th centuries.¹⁰ However, neither ‘Abduh nor Sheikh Rashid held much hope for the Ottoman Empire, nor for the ruling class of Turks in their efforts to revive the Empire and its people. Rather they counted upon the Arabs to do so, but the Arabs were both militarily and economically weaker than the Turks. Both reformers called upon the Arabs to educate themselves and to be trained militarily; through such education and training, they believed the Arabs could gradually take over the Empire.¹¹ History has revealed, of course, that the Arabs ultimately failed in this enterprise.

Despite Sheikh Rashid’s efforts to avoid any clashing with the authorities, his relationship with the government began worsening when Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi, astrologer and advisor to Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid, attacked Sheikh Rashid and his magazine, *al-Manar* for praising Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a man who al-Sayyadi hated very much.¹² This and many other incidents of harassment directed against himself and his family¹³ gave Sheikh Rashid the impetus he needed to unleash his pen against the Ottoman authorities. A. L. Tibawai notes:

“Rida’s revolt began as a quarrel with Abul-Huda, but this quarrel had fundamental causes. As an admirer of the

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

Ahmad al-Sharabasi. *Rashid Rida Sahib al-Manar*. Cairo, 1389 H./1970, pp. 140-141.

⁹ *Tarkikh al-Ustadh...*I, p. 909. Sharabasi. p. 141.

¹⁰ See Also: Majid Khadduri. *Political Trends in the Arab World*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 13-15.

¹¹ *Tarikh al-Ustadh...*I, pp. 914-915.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³ *Al-Manar*, VIII, p. 317, 355, and II, p. 223, 237.

strictest of the four schools in orthodox Islam, Rida had little respect for the Sufis and their claims. Moreover, he genuinely deplored the Sultan's disregard of Islamic democracy, government by consultation...."¹⁴

After many attempts to reconcile Sheikh Rashid with al-Sayyadi and the Ottoman authorities, Sheikh Rashid finally declared war on them in an editorial in *al-Manar*:

"...I wish politics had left me as I left it, and was peaceful with me as I was peaceful to it, but awkwardness and arrogance pushed it to declare war on me, my family, and my friends until its attack pushed me to my true nature, which is to unearth injustice done to my people, and to join the forces of the fighters against its unjust leaders and supporters..."¹⁵

He continued hereafter to attack the Sultan and his supporters. During this disruptive period he found some relief by publishing a book, *Umm al-Qura*, written by his friend 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi in *al-Manar*. This publication greatly increased the popularity of *al-Manar*, especially in Egypt.¹⁶ It should be noted here that *Umm al-Qura* was the minutes of a meeting of Umm al-Qura Society, which took place in Mecca toward the end of the 19th century, to discuss the problems of the Muslim world. Islamic scholars believe that these minutes are fiction and that the Society never existed. According to Sheikh Rashid, al-Kawakibi told him that the Society did not exist and the meeting actually took place during the Haj (pilgrimage) in 1316 H./1898 and was kept secret from the Ottoman Government and the Amir of Mecca,^{16a} and that al-Kawakibi expanded and corrected it six times, the last when he published it in 1317 H./1899.* Sheikh Rashid convinced him to revise it again in 1320 H./1902.¹⁷

Al-Kawakibi summed his own work as follows:

"Because the Society of Umm al-Qura is concerned only with the religious renaissance, it has found it necessary to pin its hopes on the Arabian peninsular and its dependencies, on its people and their neighbors, and to lay before the eyes of the Muslim nations the characteristics of the peninsula, its people, and the Arabs in general, in order to eliminate political and racial fanaticism as well as to explain why the society has shown preference to the Arabs."¹⁸

¹⁴ A. L. Tibawi. *A Modern History of Syria*. London, 1969, p. 184.

¹⁵ *Al-Manar*, XII, part 1, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ Ibrahim Ahmad al-'Adawi. *Rashid Rida, al-Imam al-Mujahid*. Cairo, n.d., p. 217.

^{16a} *Al-Manar*, X, part 9, p. 675.

¹⁷ *Al-Manar*, XXXII, part 2, pp. 114-115.

¹⁸ Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi. *Umm al-Qura*. Cairo, 1350 H./1931, p. 193.

*In another place of *al-Manar* it is said: that the year was 1318H (see f.n. 16a).

In 1907, Sheikh Rashid, Rafiq al-'Azm and others established in Cairo a political organization called Jam'iyat al-Shura al-'Uthmaniyah (The Ottoman Consultative Society); its purpose was to fight the tyranny of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid's government. The Society published its credo in *al-Manar* as follows:

"This Society was established in Cairo by members of different Ottoman races: Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds. The purpose of establishing this Society was to unite the Ottoman people of all races and religions, to work for making the Ottoman government a consultative and just one, because only a just government could protect the state from the dissolution through internal disagreement which only supposes tyranny and enslavement."¹⁹

On July 23, 1908, a group of Ottoman army officers forced Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid to reactivate the constitution of 1876. This occasioned general rejoicing in the Empire; the people trusted that the reactivation of the *Dustur* would assure their long-overdue freedom and equal rights.²⁰

During a formal day of celebration in Cairo, Sheikh Rashid expressed his feelings as follows:

"This day is a holiday for Ottomans in general and for Muslims in particular, it is a celebration for a consultative government which Islam established according to the word of God: 'Their affairs being counsel between them' (*Qur'an* 42/38.), and 'When there comes to them a matter, be it of security or fear, they broadcast it; if they broadcast it; if they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those of them whose task it is to investigate, would have known the matter'. (*Qur'an* 4/83)

He continued, explaining and commenting on these verses:

"Who are they 'in authority?' Some distorters, and some senile old men who claim that 'the men of authority' are the kings and sultans. This is clearly a false claim, because when this verse was revealed to the Prophet, he had no kings or sultans with him; rather he was consulting with the thinking men among the Ummah, these are the 'men of authority' without a doubt.

Do you see the guidance to consultative government and the authority of the Ummah? Is there more supreme care and emphasis in any other religion? If the Lord Of The

¹⁹ *Al-Manar*, IX, part 12, pp. 950-951.

²⁰ Muhammad Subayh. *Batalun La Nansah; 'Aziz 'Ali al-Masri wa-'Asruh*. Saida, 1971, p. 44.

Creations did not like the seal of the Prophets (i.e., Muhammad) to be absolute in running public affairs by himself without consulting with the sensible men of his Ummah, how might he agree or legislate for someone else less than the Prophet to do so?...²¹

Thus the regaining of the Duster and the parliament provided the opportunity of a life-time for Sheikh Rashid. It assured his dream for a consultative government which, he felt, was a basic principle of Islamic government.

However, he soon noticed the absence of the key idea of the people as the source of authority and power, as well as the source of direction for those to whom power was delegated. In addition, he noticed that the media ignored the subject completely. Not a single paper or magazine commented on the duties of the Ummah during this critical transitional period.

Sheikh Rashid's main concern was to make the Ottoman Empire a true Islamic State abiding by the Spirit and laws of Islam. Since the majority of the Ottoman peoples were Muslims, it was to them that he directed his advice about setting a good example for the other religious groups by coexisting harmoniously with them. He wrote:

"The first thing that *al-Manar* should urge and recommend to the Ummah is...that they should strive to attain harmonious relations with whom they live, and cooperation in matters which influence the country's development. By our actions we should refute the condemnations of those who attack Islam as a religion of fanaticism and aggression, saying that Muslims do not get along with anybody who does not follow their religion; and especially we should refute the claim that the turbaned 'Ulama are the ones who spread disunity among the people...it should be known that the liberal Muslims are the ones who took the initiative and called the liberal Christians and Jews in Egypt, Europe and the Ottoman provinces to take part in their struggle..."²²

In addition to the role of religion in reactivating and protecting the Duster, Sheikh Rashid emphasized its pivotal role in uniting the various Ottoman peoples in order to prevent a setback and a loss of the democratic rule of the Ummah:

"Racial fanaticism is more dangerous to the state than religious fanaticism, because religious disunity could only divide the Ummah into two major parts, whereas racial

²¹ *Al-Manar*, IX, part 6, pp. 466-468.

²² *Al-Manar*, XI, part 7, p. 540.

disunity could cut it into many parts and its evil reaches everybody. As a result, the Muslim Turk will fight the Muslim Arab, and the Christian Greek will fight the Christian Bulgarian, and so on.”²³

As always, Sheikh Rashid wanted the dominant element to take the initiative in these matters. He called upon Muslims, as the predominant religious group, to take the initiative in encouraging tolerance toward other religions. On the racial question, he called upon the Turks, as the strongest ethnic group in the Ottoman Empire, to work toward unity among the Empire’s different peoples.

“If the Arabs, or the Kurds, or the Albanians, or the Armenians, or the Greeks started the call for the abandonment of racial fanaticism nobody would listen to any of them. Their call would not have a tenth of the call of the Turkish element’s influence, because the Turks are the holders of authority in the state...”²⁴

Once Sheikh Rashid had addressed the Ummah in all its aspects, he turned to the leadership represented by the Committee of Union and Progress, defining their duties in leading the nation and praising them for the accomplishments of the Ummah. One may speculate whether Sheikh Rashid praised the C.U.P. because they deserved it, or because such praise was a diplomatic way of reminding them of their responsibility. Perhaps also he found the C.U.P. more praiseworthy in the beginning, before they developed the ideas of Turkanism and Turkicization of other peoples in the Empire. It is noteworthy to see how much Sheikh Rashid admired the C.U.P. for its accomplishments, and at the same time to see what he expected from them for the Ummah and for the Empire.

“All liberal Ottomans joined The Committee of Union and Progress, and all worked to protect the *Dustur*...It is the men of this united liberal party who now run the affairs of this kingdom; and what has been seen of their capabilities has won the admiration of the European nations and governments, as expressed in their newspapers. A month or more has already passed since the declaration of the *Dustur*, and there has been no criticism of the Committee’s actions, in spite of the fact that Europe watches it very closely without favoritism or flattery. They are doing so well that, as we say, ‘*Majlis al-Mab’uthan*’ (parliament) could not do better.”²⁵

²³ *Al-Manar*, XI, part 8, p. 331.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

Sheikh Rashid now addressed himself to the future duties of the Committee. As he saw it, the C.U.P. should focus on three major goals:

1. Wresting of authority, both civilian and military, from corrupt officials to whom the previous tyranny entrusted matters of State.
2. Ensuring the readiness of the Ummah for constitutional rule.
3. Improving the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and European nations, especially those, such as England and France, who were pioneers of freedom.

In addition, Sheikh Rashid approved the measures which the C.U.P. had already taken, of firing and imprisoning some ministers and high officials of the Hamidian government, and of limiting the Sultan's expenditures.²⁶

Sheikh Rashid never slackened in his belief that the masses were his most significant audience; that they were the Ummah, and he untiringly strove to assure them that it was they who had destroyed the tyranny of the sultans. In a speech given in Tripoli, he proclaimed the occasions of the declaration of the Dustur and the first meeting of *Majlis al-Mab'uthan* (parliament) national holidays for all Ottomans. He declared these the greatest holidays, noting that religious holidays were for a specific religious body only, but this day was for Ottomans of all creeds. He continued as follows:

"In this happy holiday, I congratulate the nation for another reason, that is, because the nation became the ruler of itself by itself. Verily, those representatives who met in the capital to discuss the laws of the country, to accept what they wanted and to reject what they did not want, were not chosen by the Sultan for this task. He and the men of government do not have the right to pick others or to reappoint the present ones once their term expires. Truly, it was the Ummah who elected them to take care of its matters, because this is its right, so the Ummah is the highest ruler. All the men of government, from the highest to the lowest, are hired with its money to take care of its interests."²⁷

Although Sheikh Rashid was enthusiastic in his support of the C.U.P.-headed government, he was not totally at ease with its leadership, since the C.U.P. lacked any non-Turkish members.

Despite the Dustur, Sheikh Rashid was suspicious of the new leaders of the Ottoman Empire, withholding his unqualified support. Before long, his hesitation was felt more widely, as people began to stand back and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 542-543.

²⁷ *Al-Manar*, XI, part 11, pp. 861-862.

view their new government more soberly. During a visit to Syria, Sheikh Rashid stopped in Beirut, recording this observation in *al-Manar*:

“I arrived in Beirut on the 26th of Sha‘ban 1327 H./1908 A.C. The people have already awakened from the rapture of the Dustur, and have returned to thought and consideration....”²⁸

The primary purpose of Sheikh Rashid’s visit to Syria was to explain the virtues of the Dustur, and to educate the people, enabling them to make the fullest use of the many privileges it offered.²⁹

Two days after his arrival in Beirut, he delivered a long sermon on the glory of Islam at al-Majidiyah Mosque. He challenged the Muslim people, asserting that the only way for them to revive the spirit of achievement and prosperity was to return to real Islam. Delineating his principles for reform, he summarized them as follows:

“We want to combine in our Ummah the interests of this world and the Hereafter. We are in great need of sciences, crafts, and modern industry—the benefits of which will not be realized unless we practice them in the principles of our religion, which are: The *Qur’an* and the Sunnah. There is no contradiction whatsoever between the two (this world and the Hereafter). If we do not combine the interests of this world and the guidance of religion we will never be able to stand on our own feet.”³⁰

In another speech in Tripoli, he deplored tyranny and explained to his audience the right of a nation to rule itself. He applauded the C.U.P., encouraging his audience to support it³¹ and he cautioned the Arabs, describing the illusions under which they lived, imploring them to take matters into their own hands and to depend upon themselves as the instruments of change. But Sheikh Rashid was greatly disappointed. Ultimately, the masses looked again to the government, expecting education and a higher standard of living to be visited upon them through no effort of their own, but solely through the intervention of an outside agency.

Events proved Sheikh Rashid was correct in his assessment of the men of the Committee of Union and Progress, for they turned their backs on the Dustur which they had revived. The Arabs, who for centuries had been ruled by the Turks, began considering national independence, apparently preferring strife and bloodshed to humiliation under the

²⁸ Muhammad Rashid Rida. *Rahalat Muhammad Rashid Rida*, comp. and ed. by Yusuf Ibish. Beirut, 1971, p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁰ *Al-Manar*, XI, part 10, p. 742.

³¹ *Al-Manar*, XI, part 11, pp. 836-841.

tyranny of this conceited and frivolous organization.³² Sheikh Rashid defended the Arabs, and at the same time explaining why the Muslim peoples had tried to revitalize the Ottoman Empire:

“During the last centuries in which the European powers became strong and agreed between themselves to enslave the Asian and African peoples, during that time, the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic state which the European powers recognized as legally equal to them. The Muslim peoples therefore strove for its existence, and attempted to raise its character very high. This devotion from the Muslim peoples gave it power in the eyes of the Europeans. The Ottoman Empire gained value in the eyes of the European countries because the Arab countries are the cradle of Islam and the homeland of civilization. The haughty leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress despised the Arabs and their land and their religion; they persecuted and humiliated them and tried to thwart their language which is the language of God’s book (*The Qur’an*), and His religion, to impose on them their Turkish language and to make the Arab lands pure Turkish.³³

When Sheikh Rashid sensed the direction in which the Committee of Union and Progress was heading, he traveled to Istanbul, the capital of the Empire. in an attempt to stop it. He spent a year there meeting, talking and discussing matters with Turkish ministers and leaders, and wrote a series of articles in the newspapers *Kalemat al-Haq* in Arabic, and in *Iqdam* in Turkish. Those articles were later published in *al-Manar*.

He introduced this series of articles, as was his habit, with an appropriate verse from the *Qur’an*:

“And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which God stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves.” (III/103)

After a short discussion of disputes between brothers, friends and neighbors, concluding with the advice that these could be most fairly resolved through negotiation, Sheikh Rashid analyzed the relationship between the Arabs and the Turks:

“The Arabs and the Turks are twin brothers of the tree of the True Religion,* full brothers of the Ottoman Union, and two strong pillars of the Islamic caliphate structure, so the bond between them is worth maintaining forever, as Kamal Bey

³² *Ibid.*, p. 214.

³³ *Ibid.*

*i.e., Islam.

Namiq, the leader of the Turkish literary renaissance, described it: 'If there is anybody who desires to dissolve the bond this would be Satan, and if there is anyone who could conquer this Satan, it would only be God.'³⁴

Commenting on Namiq's words, Sheikh Rashid continued:

"This is what was and this is what should be as long as God wishes, but there are two Satans, not just one who desires to untie the fast bond between these two elements which mix as well as hydrogen and oxygen in forming water. Those two Satans are the Satan of European policy, and the Satan of ignorance."³⁵

The European states never won Sheikh Rashid's trust, he suspected their intentions toward Arab independence, as one can learn from his writings explaining European policy toward the Ottoman Empire, Islam and the Arabs. Voicing a distrust which proved to be well-founded, Sheikh Rashid noted two types of anti-Ottoman European policy, one official, the other individual. He commented:

"...the first are the imperialists who use this policy for their own benefit. They spread the idea of independence in the Ottoman Arab provinces to deceive the Arabs and make them split from the Empire. And what does Europe want after that?: To put the Arab provinces under her protection or to add them to her colonies, and in the name of independence from the Ottoman Empire to block their road to true national independence.³⁶ The second kind of European to develop this 'satanic policy' toward the Ottoman Empire was the private citizen among the Europeans who would sincerely like to help the Arabs be independent."

Here Sheikh Rashid gave an example of one of these; a friend of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh asked 'Abduh to write a charter for the independence of the Arabian Peninsula and the establishment of an Arab state, but 'Abduh convinced him that the separation of the Arabs from the Turks would weaken both, ultimately harming Islam itself.³⁷

Sheikh Rashid's attempts to unify the two major elements of the Ottoman Empire proved fruitless—he was unable to reason with the imperious Turkish officers of the C.U.P. When he finally left Istanbul he was deeply disturbed—convinced that the Committee of Union and

³⁴ *Al-Manar*, XII, part 11, p. 818.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 823.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 824-825.

Progress would bring ruin to the Empire and that its continued persecution of the Arabs would arouse their national consciousness. Thus certain of the dissolution of the Empire, Sheikh Rashid turned his attention to Arab revival. The new Arab nation, he felt, should be based on knowledge ('ilm), and sound economy, and national unity, in order to make the Arabs' existence independent of the Ottoman Empire, and to insure its integrity after the Empire's demise.³⁸

Since it was clear that the Turks were unable to save the Empire, Sheikh Rashid, in 1909, formed an organization called al-Jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah (The Arab League) for this purpose.³⁹

The founding principle of this organization was two-fold:

1. To work for unity between the leaders of the Arabian peninsula.
2. To work for reconstructing and defending the Arab provinces, and to form a bond between all the Arab organizations in Syria, Iraq, etc.

The leaders of the Arabian peninsular provinces accepted the principles of this organization and lent it their support.

Despite his failure with the Turks and his initial success with the leaders of the Arabian peninsula, Sheikh Rashid did not give up his idea of maintaining an Ottoman Empire founded on two principles: Islam and Ottomanism. Again he reiterated:

"The Muslims are one Ummah composed of nations and tribes differing in ideologies, races and languages, but the countries and governments are united by the unity of religious belief and the brotherhood of faith. The Ottomans are one Ummah composed of nations and numerous tribes differing in everything, even in religion and ideologies, but they are united only by the Ottoman political and national unity."⁴⁰

He preached the revival of the two unions, the Islamic and the Ottoman. In his opinion, there was no essential antagonism between the two. But even as he pleaded for unity, he recognized the depth of the hostility separating Arab from Turk and realized that the harmony he advocated was not within reach. He commented:

"It seems that the nature of human society at this time does not accept this way of forming the Ottoman union (al-Jami'ah al-'Uthmaniyyah)."⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

³⁹ Mahmud Salih Mansi. *Harakat al-Yaqzah al-'Arabiyyah*. Cairo, 1977, p. 315. Amin Sa'id; *Al-Thawrah al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra*. Cairo, n.d., Vol. I, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁰ *Al-Manar*, XV, part 2, p. 732.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 837.

Realizing that all attempts made to keep harmony between the Arabs and Turks had failed, especially after the C.U.P. leaders stepped up their oppression against the non-Turkish elements of the Empire, Sheikh Rashid called for decentralization in government.⁴²

Sheikh Rashid appealed to the people to act, to block the C.U.P. from destroying the Empire. The last stronghold of Islam; he called upon them especially to remember the defeat that the Ottoman Empire suffered in Libya and the Balkans under the leadership of the C.U.P.⁴³ He implored them to form a local militia to assure self-defense since the central government had proven itself unable to protect the country against external attacks as had been the case in Libya and the Balkans.

In 1912, a group of Arab leaders, Sheikh Rashid among them, established in Cairo "The Decentralization Party" (Hizb al-La-Markaziyyah al-Idariyyah al-'Uthmani). Their platform stated:

"The best type of government is a constitutional government, and the best type of constitutional government is a decentralized one, especially in those kingdoms having numerous sects, languages, customs, traditions, and manners. Such situations make it impossible that a nation be governed by one law in which such differences are not taken into account...."⁴⁴

The Turkish government did not act quickly enough to remedy the deteriorating situation in the Arab provinces. World War I and the eventual fall of the Ottoman Empire resulted in much different developments than anticipated. Obviously, no longer was there a need for decentralization, so Sheikh Rashid advocated the establishment of an independent Arab state.

In the interim the major European powers, notably Britain, took advantage of the situation and started secret negotiations with Sharif Husayn Ibn 'Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, tempting him to revolt against the Turks with a promise that Britain would help him to establish an Arab Kingdom under his kingship.

On the 9th of Sha'ban, 1334 H. (June 10, 1916) Husayn Ibn 'Ali launched a formal rebellion against the Turks and declared his independence in the Hijaz.⁴⁵ Sheikh Rashid supported Sharif Husayn apparently unaware of Sharif Husayn's dependence on the British until he met with the Sharif, who told him emphatically: "I have absolute trust in the British."⁴⁶ There had always been mutual distrust between Sheikh Rashid and the British, so much so that the British did not want Sheikh

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 840.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴⁵ George Antonius. *The Arab Awakening*. New York, Capricorn Books, 1965, p. 195.

⁴⁶ Rahalat, p. 204.

Rashid to travel to the Hijaz and back in the Sharif's company out of fear that he would turn the Sharif against them. To this end, the suggestion was made to Ronald Storrs, the British Officer in Cairo during World War I, that:

“Someone has been telling me that Rashid Rida (editor of the Moslem journal *al-Manar*) is coming to Hijaz and that he will do his best to make the people ignore the English. Please take strict measures to keep him in Egypt or deport him altogether to Malta.”⁴⁷

Sheikh Rashid was permitted to go to Hijaz—it would not have been advantageous to the British to interfere with a Muslim's religious duties.

Despite Sheikh Rashid's distrust for the British, they were able for a while to convince him and many Arab leaders of their sincerity in helping the Arabs establish an independent Arab Kingdom. Sharif Husayn, motivated by personal ambition, helped the British to deceive the Arabs. When the Arab leaders, including Sheikh Rashid, finally discovered the real intention of Britain and her allies toward the Arab State, it was too late to do anything of significance to rectify the situation.

Sharif Husayn ultimately became an autocratic ruler who trusted nobody and accepted advice from nobody except his British allies who finally abandoned him, engineering his downfall and expulsion from the Hijaz.

Sharif Husayn's government was overthrown by 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud. To the Muslim world, and particularly to Sheikh Rashid, he brought new hope that a true Islamic State would be established in the “Cradle of Islam”—the Arabian peninsula. Sheikh Rashid enthusiastically supported the Sa'udis as the saviors of Islam until his death in 1935.

In conclusion, I would like to comment that Sheikh Rashid was a man dedicated to the cause of Islam. Alongside his lifelong battle against social and political corruption, he fought all innovations which were not in harmony with the guiding principles of Islam. As reflected in *al-Manar* as well as his other major works, Islam, to Sheikh Rashid was a religion and a nationality; he considered himself and the Arab peoples as religion and a nationality; he considered himself a Muslim first; then an Arab. He accepted Turkish rule for himself and the Arab peoples as long as the Turks abided by the Islamic Shari'ah, but when they turned their backs on Islam he declared war on them and worked relentlessly to save the Arabs from the Turkish yoke of oppression. Initially he hoped that the Turks and the Arabs could coexist equally within the framework of the Ottoman Empire, an empire which he dubbed the last stronghold of Islam. But when the Turkish leadership adopted the Western idea of

⁴⁷ Ronald Storrs. *Orientations*. London, Readers Union, 1939, p. 173.

nationalism, Sheikh Rashid rejected and condemned it, for he felt it could lead only to the destruction of the Empire from within. This is exactly what happened.

Sheikh Rashid was alarmed when he learned of the Turkish attempts at Turkicization of the non-Turk elements in the Empire, especially of the Arabs, because he believed that the destruction of the Arabs would inevitably lead to the destruction of Islam. He and his friends raised the call for the decentralization of the Empire, but when this failed, he called for Arab revival and independence. Thus the "Arab Nationalism" of Sheikh Rashid was a bid, not for racial or national supremacy, but for the survival of Islam. He expressed his point of view through the publication of the book *Umm al-Qura* by 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi. In his dispute with the Young Turks, he reiterated his assertion that Arabic, the language of the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah, must therefore be the official language of Islam. Thus, we find him initially supporting Sharif Husayn of Mecca in his revolt against the government of the Young Turks, believing that this revolution would realize the Arab and Muslim dream of establishing an independent Arab Islamic state. Discovering the loyalty of Sharif Husayn and his sons to the British, he withdrew his support and, in fact, contributed effectively to the Sharif's downfall. He additionally opposed Sharif Husayn and his sons for their deviation from the rules of the Shari'ah and the principle of Shura. Finally, Sheikh Rashid realized his dream of such a state in the rise of Ibn Su'ud and the Wahhabis in Najd and the Hijaz.