

Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Hakim

Advocate of dialogue and rapprochement

Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim al-Hakim who died on 29 April 2002 in Najaf, Iraq, aged 78, belonged to a well known family of sayyids. Al-Hakim family genealogy passes through Ibrahim Tabatabai, a great-great-grandson of Imam al-Hasan, grandson of the Prophet, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*.

Sayyid Muhammad Taqi received a traditional education at the ancient religious academy (*Hawza*) in Najaf and his primary education was supervised by his father Sayyid Sa'id, an *'alim*. Among his teachers at the higher level were the Grand Ayatullahs Muhsin al-Hakim, Abu'l Qasim al-Khu'i, Husayn al-Hilli and Mirza Hasan al-Bujnardi.

On becoming a *mujtahid* he taught *Bahth al-Kharij*. Along with several *'ulama'*, Al-Hakim set up a foundation, Muntada al-Nashr, in 1944 to bridge the

gap between a traditional *hawza* education and one within a modern academic framework. The foundation supervised a college where these reforming measures were put into practice. He taught there until its closure in 1958.

The same year he played a leading role in founding, in Najaf, the *Kulliyat al-Fiqh* (College of Jurisprudence), where he was dean (1965-70). It was shut down by the regime in 1991. History, English, psychology and sociology were also taught there. He became professor at the College of Higher Islamic Studies, University of Baghdad, in 1964, and taught the principles of comparative jurisprudence (1967-70). He also supervised postgraduate thesis at the faculties of Divinity and Arabic at Baghdad University.

He was a highly respected figure in academic circles beyond the Arab world. In 1967 and 1973, respectively, he was elected to membership of the prestigious Academies of the Arabic

Language in Cairo and Damascus.

A life-long advocate of dialogue and *rapprochement* between Islamic schools of thought, he visited Cairo in 1964 at the invitation of the Shaikh al-Azhar for discussions with leading *'ulama'*.

Among his several published books figure a notable two-volume work on Abdullah bin 'Abbas, the Companion of the Prophet, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*. His encyclopaedic work on comparative jurisprudence was first published in Beirut in 1963 and its sequel, *The general bases of comparative jurisprudence* last year. He also wrote extensive introductions to books including one to a volume on the 9th century (CE) philosopher and polymath al-Kindi by Sayyid Muhammad Bahr al-'Uloom (1962).

Though Al-Hakim eschewed politics, he was put under house-arrest (1983-87) after a fortnight spell in prison.

Ayatullah al-Hakim is survived by his wife, three sons and four daughters.

A B D R Eagle

Mary Whitehouse 1912-2001

Life-long struggle against immorality

At a packed meeting in the Birmingham Town Hall on 5 May 1964, Mary Whitehouse said, 'If violence is shown as normal on the television screen, it will help to create a violent society.' The next day *The Times* reported: 'Perhaps never in the history of the Birmingham Town Hall has such a successful meeting been sponsored by such a flimsy organisation.' For more than 30 years Mary Whitehouse was a household name that evoked enthusiastic support or prejudiced hostility. Born on 13 June 1910 she died on 23 November 2001.

She specialised in art and taught at Wednesfield School, Wolverhampton. She was senior mistress at Madeley School (1960-64), Shropshire, where she became aware of the profound effect television was having on the moral values of the girls in her care.

Mrs Whitehouse together with her husband and **Reverend Basil** and **Mrs Norah Buckland**, launched the *Clean-Up TV Campaign* in 1963. She organised a petition of half a million signatures to the BBC and co-founded the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association in 1965. The Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) was set up by the government in 1989 as an advisory body. A nationwide Petition for Public Decency was launched in 1972 that led to the enactment of the Indecent

Displays Act in 1981.

An intensive campaign in 1984 to outlaw 'video nasties' led to the introduction of a Private Members' Bill in parliament which required videos to be classified by age suitability.

In 1981, Mrs Whitehouse had initiated a unique private prosecution against the play *Romans in Britain*. The judge held that the theatre is not immune from the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 1956. The same year the Association submitted evidence to the Council of Europe's Hearing on Violence at Assisi and published recommendations to the government on Cable TV and Direct Broadcasting by Satellite.

Mrs Whitehouse was widely respected for her courage, sincerity, and transparent honesty. Her most important legislative success was the enactment of the Protection of Children Act in 1978 that made child pornography illegal. She worked hard to counter the immorality and exploitation of pornography and obscenity by consistently campaigning for effective amendment to the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Her legacy, which continues to drive the Association (renamed mediawatch-uk), is the belief that the media, with huge influence, should be used to strengthen society, not undermine traditional moral and ethical values.

John C Beyer

Edited and abridged from a larger version. John C Beyer is Director of mediawatch-uk

Kaifi Azami 1915-2000

His oasis was a mirage

Eminent Urdu poet and film lyricist, Kaifi Azami, 87, died in a Mumbai (Bombay) hospital, 10 May 2002.

Kaifi being his *takhallus* or poetic name, he was born **Akhtar Husain Rizvi**, in 1915 in an Uttar Pradesh village, Mijwan, in Azamgarh. He joined the Communist Party at 19 and remained a Marxist. Besides the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1975), Sahitya Academy Award (1975) and a quite a few others, he had also received the prestigious Indian civil award, Padma Shri. However, a few years later he returned the award in protest against the Indian government's policy of neglect and discrimination towards the Urdu language.

In 1993 a close Hindu friend from the film industry, **Mahesh Bhatt**, advised him to leave Bombay as it was 'unsafe for you to live here alone'. The city had just had a ferocious outbreak of anti-Muslim riots in which over a thousand Muslims had been killed. But Kaifi said to him, albeit with a 'sad smile', 'nothing will happen to me. This is my country, no one will hurt me.'

After his death Mahesh Bhatt wrote: 'Kaifi *Sahib* believed in that oasis called secular India. But after [the recent carnage in] Gujarat that oasis turned into a mirage.'

M H Faruqi