

TRANSCENDENTAL THOUGHT

An International Reviewed Journal
Of Islam And Interfaith Dialogue



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Message from The Editor Dr. Seyed Hashem Moosavi

Islam is a universal religion, the first prerequisites to which are open-heartedness and a devotion to dialogue. These two characteristics give birth to a passion for debate and regular reevaluation of thoughts, whether in jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, or mysticism.

Interfaith Dialogue as an Inevitable Necessity

The generation of new religious understanding is clearly unattainable without analysis and reflection into the religious text. On the other hand, the contemporary threat of atheism requires the solidarity of the faithful from all religions, demanding a search for commonalities among them. These common factors cover a wide range, from beliefs and practices to religious sentiments, from the topics of monotheism and resurrection to discussions on law, jurisprudence, and even ethics. The identification of similarities will determine the extent of cooperation among religions and prevent the loss of resources on parallel concerns.

The menacing flood of doubt and criticism channeled through the media on the existence of God and the conflicts of religion and science, church and state, moral

and social implications of faith, and the jurisdiction of religion target all religious creeds. No single ideology is capable of answering all these challenges. Withstanding this demoralizing movement demands inter-faith cooperation, for the ideology of atheism does not target any particular belief system, but rather aims at the roots of belief as a whole. For this, the faithful from all schools of thought have to share resources and experiences, best achieved through publications and journals.

Another point of interest in interfaith dialogue is the role of faith in daily life. We may want to analyze the influence of religion or the extent of its presence if any, in the interactions of individuals or the society, in which case regardless of the content of a particular belief system, the general criteria of the existence or absence of belief is under scrutiny. This may then require the coverage of a number of sample groups with an array of ideologies.

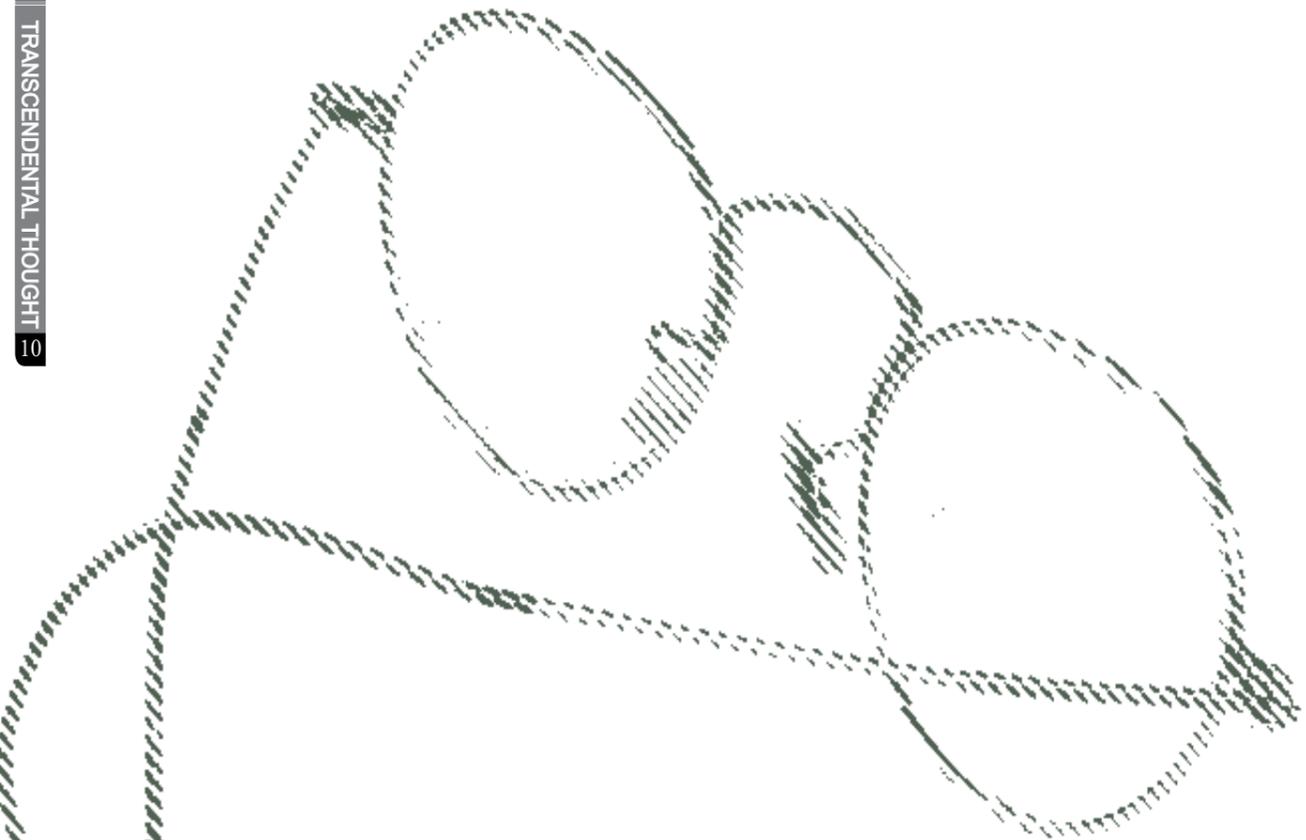
Comparative Studies as a Requirement to Interfaith Dialogue

One requirement in religious studies is the comparative research. These analyses cover a wide scope of topics from legal aspects to theological perspectives and ethical issues. Some examples may include resurrection in Islam and Judaism, apostolate in Islam and Christianity, divinity in Islam and Hinduism, politics and administration in Islam and Confucianism, asceticism in Islam and Buddhism, and messianism in Islam and Zoroastrianism. Two conditions are of prime importance in

the comparative study of religions: the first is to study the existing literature of each religion diligently, and the second and more important condition is to avail of no other than primary sources in this regard.

Defense of Truth, the Noble Aim of Interfaith Dialogue

The most popular trend today in interfaith dialogue is theological critique, which is of considerable significance in its own rite. However even a fair and correct critique on religion demands meticulous research into its foundations; for a lack of knowledge easily discredits the outcome. If we intend to defend the truth, would our ignorance of the teachings of the faith under scrutiny not sabotage this truth instead? We must be particularly cautious not to accuse, for false accusation is tantamount to lie, a sin rebuked by almost all religions. If we expect our critiques to fair in their judgments and not evaluate us by a single sentence they heard here and there or by a single book they read, we shall in turn be fair in our critiques of them; neither denying their strengths by exposing their weaknesses, nor closing an eye on their shortcomings in total admiration. It is therefore upon us to avoid unethical techniques in our defense, for the righteous end demands righteous means.



Chiara Lubich's Spirituality of Unity:

An Invitation for Universal Brotherhood

By: Ma. Concepcion O. Abaya
Focolare Movement Philippines

This paper aims to unfold how Chiara Lubich's¹ charism of unity as a collective way of being and a way of life, is a challenge and an invitation towards a more humane international order that could be a channel for collaboration and dialogue among religions and help bring about universal brotherhood.

Whether in the field of human social relations or in the spiritual realm of religions, man, being God's creature and a social being tended to aspire for communion with His Creator and his fellow human beings. Lubich highlights this in her philosophy of being.

Lubich's Philosophy: Being in Communion with Absolute Being

Lubich explains that in every language and culture, the concept of being is affirmed. Human beings are immersed in communion with everyone and everything. So, being cannot be negated since it is around us (the various realities) and within us (our inner lives). This being which is common to all - their becoming, their limits, and the very cessation of their existence reveals that all that exists is rooted in a Being which simply and absolutely is.

The same for our inner lives. Through faith, we are aware of such being. This awareness is light, and at the same time, confession of the Absolute Being, of the most pure Light. Human beings invoke and seek this most pure Light as its guarantee, certainty, and final destination.

To say "I" is opening oneself, in communion with the being of all things, saying that

the Absolute Being is."

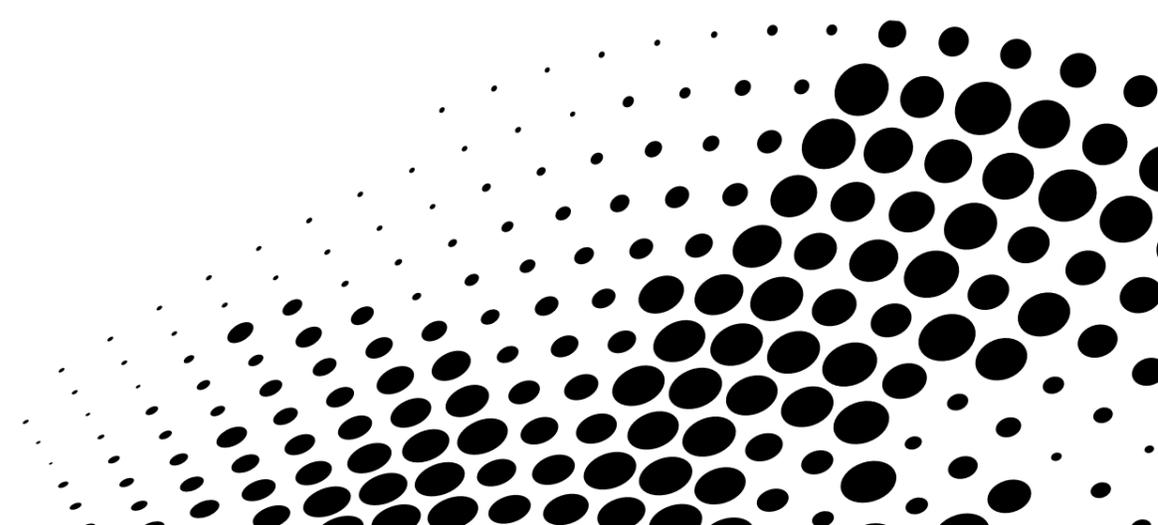
I am myself when I give myself to the other, when out of love I am lost in the other. For instance, I have a flower and I give it; I deprive myself of it. In depriving myself, I am losing something of myself (this is non-being); in reality, because I give that flower, love grows in me (this is being).

Thus, my subjectivity is, when it is not-that is, when it is completely transferred, out of love, into the other. And because we live our nothingness, we affirm with ourselves the superiority of God, His being-Everything. At the same time, because we are nothing by being love in the present, God's immense love opens the way for us to participate, such that we are "nothing" of ourselves and "everything" because of Him. In short, "I am when I am not."²

Lubich's Spirituality of Unity: God - Love

The above philosophy of being was fertile ground for the discovery of God- Love amidst the ruins of the Second World War. Lubich understood that God was constructing a new reality in their hearts. With only the Gospel

in their hands as they run to the air raid shelters, Chiara and her six companions discovered the testament of Jesus "That All men Be One" (John 17:21) in a new light. This then became the Magna Carta of a Movement³ that was



born. She narrates:

It was during the war. A few girls and I were in a dark room, perhaps a cellar, I don't remember. We were reading the testament of Jesus by the light of a candle - Jesus' last will. This is the founding document of unity, Jesus' testament. We didn't read anything else, only the Testament of Jesus. One by one, those difficult words seemed to become clear. We felt that we could understand them. What particularly remained with us was the conviction that the Testament of Jesus was the Magna Carta of our new way of life and of all that would soon come to life around us. This experience alone would suffice to show how unity is the specific characteristic of the Focolare Movement.

We know it: unity is what God wants from us. We live in order to be one with Him and with one another. This splendid vocation binds us to heaven and immerses us in a universal brotherhood. Nothing could be greater. For us, no Ideal could be greater... it is logical.⁴

But then young as they are, they realized they are incapable of such a very demanding task for unity. So they went to Jesus and asked for the grace to teach them how to live this reality. Kneeling around an altar, they offered their lives so that if He wished, He could use them to accomplish unity.

If we remember correctly, it was on the feast of Christ the King. We were impressed by the liturgy that day: "Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession." (Psalms 2:8). We believed it.⁵

Those days were so full of light; they knew the Gospel by heart but everything appeared new. Lubich kept on writing notes and sharing with her friends whatever she understood from God. There was only one topic, the most important for the newly-founded Movement: Unity. "While all the Gospel attracted us, to the point of considering it to be the rule of the newly-born Movement, that light (today we can say, that charisma) led us to underline and to make our own especially the words which, interlinked with one another, would constitute the foundation stones of a new spirituality: the spirituality of unity."⁶

They believed in God's love which is the first imperative of this new spirituality. They believed that they are personally and immensely loved by God, because He knows each one intimately and He cares for

them in every way. The Gospel says that he even counts the hairs of your head (cf Luke 12:7). The Qur'an repeats this, "He is closer to us than our jugular vein." (50:16)

This spirituality of unity is based on the understanding that God is a God of Love, a Father. Lubich envisions the whole humanity as one family with the same Father who loves them personally and collectively.

Ibn Arabi⁷ echoes the same reality that we are one family as he points out that we are "many by variety and personality, yet there is no doubt that we are according to one Reality and that (that single Reality) collects together. That there are differences which distinguishes people is evident otherwise, there couldn't be a plurality in the One."⁸

For Lubich, it was discovering God so close to them and therefore will not leave the renewal of society to human efforts alone, but will take an active role. Thus, she exhorts us to believe in the love of God and from the thousands of choices that life has to offers us, to look to God as the ideal of our lives. In her 1946 notes, she proposes:

"Above all, each of us must keep our gaze fixed on the one Father of so many children, and then consider all persons as children of that one Father. Our thoughts and affections (because, of course, we loved in a merely 'human' way) must go beyond every human limit and acquire the habit (I would say, the virtue) of turning constantly towards this universal brotherhood in our one Father: God."⁹

And every time they would read those notes of 1946 they would ask themselves: are we attuned to this? Are we imbued with this attitude? Do we consider everyone we meet, everyone, as candidates for unity? We must see

each person in this way.

Ibn Arabi's vision shows a parallelism:

"Therefore, it is necessary in every moment of wakefulness [or vision], one must be facing Him, until in one's heart, there is the quietude of one's awareness...that whatever one does, consciously or not, all will be directed to Him..."¹⁰

He sums up our relationship with Him when he describes the Perfect Man, God's Vicegerent, who he is "for God in the same place as the eye of the eye is for the man, with which seeing happens, and that is what is meant by vision." He continues:

"Man is the sight of God over His creation and God's mercification of it. He is the connective and collective word. And the universe is complete by his existence and he is for the universe like the bezel of the seal, and he is the place of the engraving by which signature all the possessions of His treasures are sealed. And he is called the Vicegerent because of this, that he is the preserver of His creation like the seal is the safeguard of the treasures, and as long as the seal of the King is upon it, no-one dares to open it without His permission."¹¹

Unity through Dialogue

"But how is unity created?" Lubich herself asks. With no hesitation, she responds: "It's [by means of] dialogue." Unity comes about through dialogue. Jesus' prayer for unity can be fulfilled through dialogue. Incidentally, "the deepest aspiration of humanity is [also] the desire for unity, for love."¹² In effect, dialogue is the call of our times in all areas of human relations. Yes, dialogue is the call of our times. Dialogue means "loving, giving what is in us out of love for the other, and also receiving and being enriched."¹³ In short, dialogue is "a mutual enrichment, a love for one another, a feeling that we are already brothers and sisters, the creation of universal brotherhood here on earth."¹⁴

But how to do dialogue? Lubich explains a technique she calls an “art.” This, like in any other profession requires time and continuous exercise due to demands of love, as to make it alive and operative.¹⁵ This “art of loving” is affirmed by Eric Fromm, noted psychologist (1900-1980) whom Lubich cites, “our civilization very rarely seeks to learn the art of loving; despite the desperate search for love, everything else is considered to be more important: success, prestige, money, power.”¹⁶ Lubich claims that in this art of loving “lies the secret of a dialogue that can build unity.”¹⁷

First of all, it is a universal love; it loves everyone. For this kind of love there is no such thing as the person who is pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly, big or small, fellow countryman or foreigner, white, black, or yellow, European or American, African or Asian, Christian or Jew, Muslim or Hindu. Everyone must be loved as God loves, without distinction. This means that we have to do away with all our preconceived judgments of others in order to be sure that our love includes everyone, setting aside no one.¹⁸

We found this same faith in God’s love for His creation in many brothers and sisters of other religions, beginning with those that trace their roots back to Abraham, religions which affirm the unity of humankind.¹⁹

That such love is universal because it is rooted in God is evident for Ibn Arabi’:

It is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, gazed upon by every eye, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the unseen and the visible.

Not a single one of His creatures can fail to find Him in its primordial and original nature.²⁰

To love everyone is also enshrined in Buddhism:

Oh Monks, you should work for the well being of many, for the happiness of many, moved by compassion for the world, for the well being of men and women.²¹

Secondly, it loves the other as oneself. In the late fifties, she wrote:

Your neighbour is another you and you should love him as such. If he cries, you should cry with him; if he laughs, you should laugh with him. If he is ignorant, you should make yourself ignorant with him. And if he has lost his father, you should identify with him in his suffering.²²

Such love is echoed in the great world religion of Islam:

None of you is a believer until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself. (The 42 Traditions of An-Nawawi)²³

In Hinduism, for example, there is this passage from the Mahabharata:

Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done unto you.²⁴ In effect, it is the Golden Rule, present in all religions.

Thirdly, it is the first to love. It doesn’t wait to be loved in order to love. That is, it doesn’t wait to be loved in order to love, but it always takes the initiative. This way of loving exposes us to risks, but if we want to love in the image of God, and to develop this capacity to love, which God has put in our hearts, we must do as He did. He did not wait for us to love Him in return. Rather, He always shows us and in thousands of ways that He loves us first, whatever our response might be. We have been created as a gift for one another and we fulfill ourselves by striving to love our brothers and sisters with a love that takes the initiative before any gesture of love on their part. This is what all the great founders of religions teach us with their lives.²⁵

Lastly, its concrete expression enables a person to make oneself one with the other. True love must also know how to make one with the other. She says “to be one means to feel

within them the others feelings, to resolve his or her problem as one’s own, doing this for love. It means to empty ourselves in order to understand our neighbour and to put ourselves in his or her situation. If we are “love” always, in the present moment, then without realizing it, we are living the nothing of ourselves.²⁶

This “living the other” embraces all aspects of life and it is the greatest expression of love because by living in this way we are dead to ourselves, to our ego and to all attachments. We can achieve that “self-nothingness” to which the great spiritualities aspire and that emptiness of love which is accomplished in the act of welcoming the other.²⁷

Selfnothingness highlights Abd al-Qadir al-jilani concept of the divine spark. In his *Islamic Mysticism and the Sufis*,²⁸ he says, this divine spark shines when the self becomes nothing. In the book *The Secret of Secrets: Revelation of Islamic Sufism and Mysticism*, he says that nothingness is the state experienced by the *Sufi*, from the Arabic word *saf* i.e. pure. They are called by this name because “their inner world is purified and enlightened with the light of wisdom, unity and oneness.” For the *Sufi*, sanctity is journeying along a path which comes in various stages of *tasawwuf* for Islamic Mysticism. The fourth stage is *fana*, self-annihilation. This is the last stage - annihilation of self, the state of nothingness where the false self melts and evaporates. The divine attributes then enter his being. In contrast, the multiplicity of the worldly attributes and personalities disappear and is replaced by the single attribute of unity. All disappear except the One who is pleased and the one with whom He is pleased. Al-jilani explains this last stage.

“In reality, the truth is always present. It neither disappears nor declines. What happens is that, the believer realizes and becomes one with that which has created him. In being with Him, the believer receives His pleasure: the temporal being finds its true existence by realizing the eternal secret.” (p.43)

Ibn Arabi explains self – annihilation²⁹ as the stripping of what is not real in the form of action, attribute or essence at the same time implying perfect control of oneself in words, deeds and thoughts. “It is at this price that one attains an interior spiritual state where one be-

comes the pure and clear mirror in which the lights of Truth are reflected in all their splendor.”³⁰

Making ourselves one applies first of all to inter-religious dialogue. It has been written that: “To know the other’s religion implies putting yourself in the shoes of the other, seeing the world as he or she sees it, grasping what it means for the other to be Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, etc.”³¹

Ibn Arabi who is considered one of the greatest luminaries of the firmament of Sufism, personifies this reality when he mentioned the Religion of Love. His *Tawheed* couched in various universal symbolisms like the heart, light and veil and particular symbolisms of mirror, patterns of life, fragrances and colors³² reinforces the art of loving as he exhorts people to be “receptive to other tenets so as to have the true knowledge of what reality is.”³³ He is the forerunner of dialogue in the 13th century characterized by intolerance and injustices where religion was the rallying point for war by both Muslims and Christians.

Pope John Paul II in Madras encourages all towards dialogue. He says, “when we (belonging to different religions) enter into dialogue among ourselves, that is, when we are open to the other in a dialogue made of human kindness, reciprocal esteem, respect and mercy, we are also opening ourselves to God, we let God be present in our midst.”³⁴

Lubich clarified that this art of loving in its process, if lived out by more than one person, becomes reciprocal. Mutual love, then, is what is needed to bring about peace and unity in the world, and makes all humanity one family.

This dynamism of love demands daily training and sacrifice. Since to be committed to live and bring unity means accepting suffering, out of love. She stressed that the suffering required by love is the most powerful instrument for giving humanity its highest dignity, that of feeling that we are not so much a togetherness of peoples, one beside the other, often in conflict with one another, but that we are one single people.³⁵ Lubich has always revealed to all who had embraced this spirituality that the secret

for unity is contained in that cry, when Jesus after hours of agony cries “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46)

Lubich recounts:

“After decades of intense spiritual life, in line with this new spirituality, we realized that there is a moment in the life of Jesus which is charged with answers to all our questions. It is the moment of that great, very great ‘why’ which Jesus addressed to God before dying, in his mysterious cry: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”³⁶

For Lubich, unity is not a concept, but a person: Jesus in his abandonment.³⁷ Thus, through all these years, this spirituality of unity, by God’s grace, saw the flourishing of the Movement, encompassing and bringing people together, in a deeply felt fraternity, coming from numerous Churches, various religions and people with no formal faith but who share with others great human values such as justice, solidarity, peace, human rights, etc. The spirituality entails and its impact which went beyond their initial group, passing frontiers and making itself heard on the international scene, with passwords like the culture of giving and sharing, the civilization of love and from this evolved the Economy of Communion³⁸ for the poor and the Movement for Unity³⁹ among politicians.

What then does the spirituality of unity have to do with the Da’wah Islamiyah in the Contemporary World?

Lubich’s thrusts towards dialogue with other cultures and faiths sees echoes of what Abd al-Qadir al-jilani and Ibn Arabi refers in the cleansing of the heart when she explains how we have to put aside our ego, our attachments as to achieve “nothingness of self” to which great spiritualities aspire. “In this way, we become empty of self out of love by welcoming the other; we give space to the other, who will always find room in our heart; and because we will relate to others always, we are open to learning from them.”⁴⁰

Lubich’s spirituality of unity has broken frontiers in the socio-economic and political fields. Her same thrust to dialogue is contained in her concern for the structural injustices present in society, a major factor for the emer-

gence of terrorism in a global landscape. She admonishes for the urgency of more solidarity, above all, a fairer sharing of goods. She believes people’s hearts must be touched so the sharing must come from our hearts.

Lubich is convinced that to achieve this, the idea and practice of fraternity must spread to many people- a universal fraternity would be the answer. Then, one can look forward to brothers and sisters who will know how to look after one another, how to help one another, how to share what they have. Muzzafar, a contemporary sociologist claims that people who have already a universal, spiritual vision of unity and are prepared to act could achieve their ideal. These individuals with faith in God and committed to social action can do much to remove the injustices that are obstacles to unity. He encouraged these individuals or groups with such vision to communicate with one another and together face the challenges that confront humanity in their own societies or in the world at large (Muzafar, 1990: 12).⁴¹

Lubich anchors on the contribution of religions to bring about universal fraternity. She says, “Where else, if not in the great religious traditions, could a strategy of fraternity begin, a strategy that could bring about real change even in international relations?”⁴² The great spiritual and moral resources of religions, with their ideals, aspirations to justice, commitment to alleviation of poverty, when mobilized to become sources of change could certainly be translated into actions that could positively influence the international order.

The various dialogues in the Focolare Movement that evolved from the technique called the “art of loving,” are anchored on the reality of Mary as its model. Mary is revered by people of various cultures and faiths. In fact, Mary has an important place in Islam. Mary’s name and references appeared about 45 times in the Qur’an. In Surah 21, 91; “Mary is the Virgin par excellence who guarded her womb; God breathed into her and cast into her His word.” In Surah 23, 50 it states: “Mary is a sign to the world.”

Sufi Al-Baqli (d.1209), in his Tafsir II, 7

sees Mary is a model for dialogue in her nothingness because of her fullness of the divine. His comment on Sura 19:16 reveals this. He says that the substance of Mary is the very substance of original sanctity. She describes her as one drawn towards the source of the divine lights. Having the loftiest aspirations, she withdrew from all created things and penetrated with the light of divine mystery. He explains, “When she had contemplated the manifestation of the orient bursting forth from the eternal, its lights invaded her and its secrets reached the inmost depths of her soul. Her soul conceived by the breath of the hidden mystery, she became the bearer of the Word most High and of the light of the Spirit most lofty. When her state became grandiose by the reflection in it of the beauty manifesting the eternal, she hid herself far from creatures, putting her joy in the nuptials of the Reality.”⁴³

In this third millennium, the author believes that dialogue is the pathway for harmonious living in this global landscape, beset by onslaughts of uncertainties – brought about by diverse ethnic and religious affirmations. The willingness to explore the various avenues that would lead to new pathways and to enter as deeply as possible into other cultures and religions through dialogue will hopefully bring one to the rediscovery of the life-giving and life-generating component of our diverse religious convictions and commitments. At this point let us take the invitation for universal brotherhood as instrument for revival and challenges in the reality posed by Ibn Arabi in his Religion

of Love:

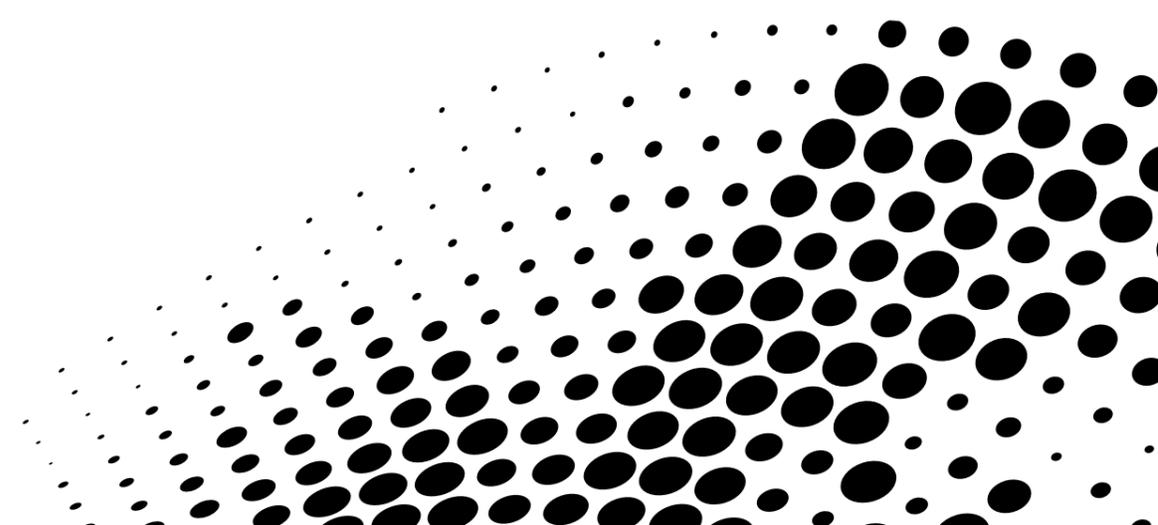
*“My heart has become capable of every form:
it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka’ba
and the tables of the Tora
and the book of the Koran
I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take,
that is my religion and my faith.”
Were it not for the excess of your talking and the turmoil in your hearts, you would see what I see
and hear what I hear!
When my Beloved appears, With what eye do I see Him?
With His eye, not with mine,
For none sees Him except Himself.”*

- Ibn al-’Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* in *The Mystics of Islam*, translated by Reynold A Nicholson).

ENDNOTES

¹ Chiara Lubich was born in Trent, Italy on January 22, 1920. In the same stature of Pope John Paul II and Mother Theresa of Calcutta, Lubich stands as a leading spiritual figure in the modern times. She founded the Focolare Movement in 1943, and remained its president until her death on March 14, 2008. Her biographies include Jim Gallagher, *A Woman’s Work: A Biography of the Focolare Movement and its Founder* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), Franca Zambonini, *Chiara Lubich: A Life for Unity* (London: New City Press, 1992) and Michel Pochet, *Stars and Tears: A Conversation with Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 1985) Edwin Robertson, *Chiara* (Manila: New City Press, 1979) Her spiritual insights could be gleaned in Chiara Lubich, *Stirrings of Unity* (Manila: New City Press, 1987) Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2007).

² Chiara Lubich, “Spirituality for Harmonious Living.” Acceptance Speech delivered at La Salle University, Mexico upon conferral of the honorary doctorate degree in Phi-



losophy, Honoris Causa. 1997. In conferring to her the award of Honoris Causa in Philosophy, Vice-Rector Rafael Martinez Cervantes acknowledges the “gift of Wisdom which God has granted to Chiara, a gift which she shares with all people of good will: the wisdom of the Gospel.” With this gift, Chiara has reminded the world on how to reach this unity: love. He explains that this logic is precisely what sustains the experiences and intuitions of Chiara Lubich, “The logic of love, wisdom, which is much more than what we generally understand as ‘philosophy.’” Such philosophy gave birth to a new reality, a small community, a seed that grew very quickly and became a tree in which many birds can find their “home”. Indeed, this is the meaning of “focolare”: “Home”, “fire”, “warmth”.

³ After the Second World War, Chiara Lubich and her first companions lived together in a house which people called “Focolare” meaning hearth or fireplace. In 1947, Bishop Carlo de Ferrari of Trent recognized the emerging group as a Movement in its own right which was given the name the Movement of Unity. Later it was called the Focolare Movement. The Focolare Movement is present in 182 countries. The Focolare’s engagement in inter-religious dialogue extends to the Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and several others. People who profess no religious conviction have also been embraced by the Focolare. Then in the last decades, the Focolare has engaged in dialogue with various areas of culture Other movements which have come to life from the Focolare include: Gen Movement, New Families Movement, New Humanity Movement, etc.

⁴ Chiara Lubich, “Unity, Part I” Unpublished speech delivered to the international Members. Rocca di Papa, Italy, October 5, 1981.

⁵ Chiara Lubich, “Towards a Spirituality of Unity.” Unpublished speech delivered at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Celigny (Switzerland), October 26, 2002.

⁶ _____. *A Spirituality for Harmonious Living.* La Salle University, Mexico. 1997.

⁷ Shaykh Ibn Arabi al-Shaykh al-Akbar (1165-1240) a Spanish Sufi in the Sunni Order, was born Murcia, in Andalusia, Spain. He started traveling in his adolescent years meeting spiritual teachers and “Friends of God” throughout Spain and North Africa. During his pilgrimage in Mecca at the age fifteen, he had an extraordinary mystical “unveiling” (*kashf*) or “opening” (*fotuh*) where he wrote his *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations) where diverse topics of *Tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) are illuminated in the light of the Qur’an and Hadith. He is also known for *al-Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) which dwells on the aspects of self-knowledge, interior understanding and saintliness and a collection of poems, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* written during his encounter with Persian Islam. It contained his famous *Lady Nizam*. His innumerable works disseminated by his followers became the cornerstone for Islamic revelation. History confirmed his destined – role of being the “Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood”, as his voluminous writings containing the “the underlying spiritual “Reality” meant to reveal and convey – was specially intended to open up the inner spiritual meanings at the heart of all preceding prophetic revelations (and especially the Qur’an and hadith. Taken from

Introduction to the Meccan Revelations. Michel Chodkiewicz William Chittick and James Morris. (Pir Publications Inc. West Broadway, New York, 2002).

⁸ Ibn Arabi. Extract from the *Fusus – al-Hikam*.

⁹ Chiara Lubich. Notes 1946.

¹⁰ Ibn Arabi. Quoted in Cecilia Twinch. *The Beauty of Oneness* witnessed in the emptiness of the heart. Speech delivered at the MIAS Symposium on Retreat, Berkeley, October 1997.

¹¹ _____. Extract from the *Fusus – al-Hikam*. The calling by revelation of the Brides of Absoluteness in the places of absoluteness of the Wisdoms of the bezels.

¹² Chiara Lubich. Quoted in *The Breadth and Depth of Chiara Lubich’s Instrument of Dialogue* by Alexis Deodato S. Itao, New City Magazine, March 2011.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Crescencia C. Gabihan, *The Spiritual Vision of Chiara Lubich: Pathways of Inter religious Dialogue.* Unpublished Thesis for a Doctorate in Theology, UST 2007.

¹⁶ Cf. Eric Fromm, “L’arte di amare” in: *Il Saggiatore* (Milan, 1971), 18. Quotation cited in: Lubich, “Brotherhood and Peace in the Various Religions.” Unpublished speech delivered to a group of Islamic theologians and Imams from different mosques in Spain and North Africa. Mariapolis Center “Luminosa,” Madrid, December 7, 2002.

¹⁷ Chiara Lubich. “Initiatives of Change” (Moral Re-armament) Can Religions be Partners in Peace Building? Caux, Switzerland, July 29, 2003.

¹⁸ Chiara Lubich. “Love of Neighbour in the Spirituality of Unity.” Unpublished speech given on November 1, 2002 at the Fifth Congress for Muslim Friends of the Focolare Movement in Castelgandolfo (Rome).

¹⁹ _____. “Initiatives of Change” (Moral Re-armament) Can Religions be Partners in Peace Building? Caux, Switzerland, July 29, 2003.

²⁰ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*.

²¹ *Mahagga*, 19.

²² Chiara Lubich, “Brotherhood and Peace in the Various Religions.” Unpublished speech delivered to a group of Islamic theologians and Imams from different mosques in Spain and North Africa. Mariapolis Center “Luminosa,” Madrid, December 7, 2002.

²³ _____. Quoted in “Love of Neighbour in the Spirituality of Unity.” Unpublished speech given on November 1, 2002 at the Fifth Congress for Muslim Friends of the Focolare Movement in Castelgandolfo (Rome). Archives of the Focolare Movement. Rocca di Papa, Rome (Italy).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ _____. *When did we see You, Lord?* (New York: New City Press, 1979) 113.

²⁷ _____. “Initiatives of Change” (Moral Re-armament) Can Religions be Partners in Peace Building? Caux, Switzerland, July 29, 2003.

²⁸ Hadrat ‘Abdul-Qadir al-Jilani. *The Secret of Secrets: Revelation of Islamic Sufism and Mysticism.* Interpreted by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti (Malaysia: S.

Abdul Majeed & Co., 1995).

²⁹ Ibn Arabi. *Kitāb al-fāna’ fi-l mushāhadah.*

³⁰ Osman Yahya. *Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi.* Vol 10 Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, 1991, pp.35-44.

³¹ See E. Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions: A Global Approach*, London 1986, pp. 130-131.

³² Concepcion Abaya. Unpublished research on *Ibn Arabi’s Tawbeed in its Symbolisms*, 2011.

³³ Ibn Arabi. *Fusus* I. 113

³⁴ John Paul II, in Madras, Il dialogo interreligioso nel magistero pontificio, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 385.

³⁵ Taken from Chiara Lubich. *A Spirituality for Harmonious Living.* Acceptance Speech. Delivered at La Salle University, Mexico. 1997. For further reading see Chiara Lubich. *Unity and Jesus Forsaken* (Manila: New City Press, 1985); Chiara Lubich. *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken in the History and Life of the Focolare Movement from its Birth in 943 until the Dawn of the Third Millennium* (New York: New City Press, 2001).

³⁶ Ibid. For further reading see “Acceptance Speech.” Unpublished talk delivered on the conferral of the honorary doctorate degree in Theology. University of Santo Tomas Manila, January 14, 1997. “This was how we called Jesus in this mystery that summarizes and is central to his redemptive mission. In a climax of love and suffering, He cries out from the cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34; Mt 7:46). It is in this moment in which He experiences separation from His Father with whom He is and remains one” Cf. Focolare Interdisciplinary Study Center. *An Introduction to the Abba School* (New York: New City Press, 2002), 26.

³⁷ Lolita Castillo. Unpublished Thesis “The Vision and Praxis of Nothingness and Unity in the Spirituality of Chiara Lubich.” Doctoral Thesis. De La Salle University, 2005.

³⁸ In the field economics, Lubich has initiated the Economy of Communion wherein business enterprises share their profits into three parts so that a third goes to the poor, another third goes for the formation of people in the culture of giving, while the remaining third is allotted to the company for the growth and improvement of the business. This project was launched during her trip in Sao Paulo Brazil (1991) after viewing the mocambos (squatters) amidst the affluent section of skyscrapers. Cardinal Evaristo Ams defined the area as the crown of thorns. The business enterprises engaged competent persons who will voluntarily operate their enterprises according to this scheme. They are people linked by a Gospel-based relationship of mutual love. Currently, there are about 800 big and small business enterprises worldwide committed to the objectives of the Economy of Communion. An initiative to establish business parks near the Movement’s “little towns” that are witnesses to reciprocal love was later organized. These business parks aim to offer shares at rates affordable for the masses to make them active business partners. The Economy of Communion launched in 1991 has become the topic of researches by economic experts as alternative to the current market system as well as in varied theses/dissertations from different parts of the world.

This project ushered for Lubich a doctoral degree “honoris causa” in social sciences from the University of Lublin, Poland in 1996 and another in Economics by the University of the Sacred Heart (Piacenza, Italy) in 1999. She also received the “Cruzeiro do Sul” from the President of Brazil for promoting the Economy of Communion. In 1999, she presented the Economy of Communion at a global conference on “Market Society, Democracy and Solidarity” that was held in Strasbourg, France organized by the 50th anniversary of the European Council. Cf. Fondi-Zanzucchi. *Un Popolo Nato dal Vangelo* 504-522.

³⁹ The “Movement for Unity in Politics” was founded by Lubich on May 2, 1996 in Naples at a meeting with 40 politicians adhering to the spirituality of unity from diverse political parties. Based on a mutual agreement to love the party of the other as one’s own, the individual politician strives to bring ahead his party’s platform. The adherents of this Movement regard politics as a possibility to love the neighbor in a crescendo of charity that goes from the interpersonal level up to the “polis.” It is not a new political party; rather it is a “locus” where persons differing in cultural and social backgrounds and with diverse functions and political parties, accept the challenge to search and increase the common good. In December 2001, Lubich proposed a “pact of fraternity” to a group of Italian parliamentarians in Rome. Since then a regular meeting is held among them for a spiritual and practical deepening focused on fraternity. Similar groups meet in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia, Brazil, Austria and Argentina. In 2001, a conference was held in Innsbruck (Austria) entitled “Thousand Cities for Europe” organized by the “Movement for Unity in Politics” in collaboration with the mayor of Innsbruck, who was then president of the League of Mayors of the European Council. The main speakers for the occasion were Chiara Lubich and Prof. Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission. Fraternity was highlighted as the basis for the political vision that has guided, and must still guide, the path towards the unity of Europe: unity in diversity. Cf. Fondi-Zanzucchi, *Un Popolo Nato dal Vangelo*, 523-539.

⁴⁰ Chiara Lubich. “Imagine a World Enriched by Diversity: What future for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith society?” Speech delivered at Central Hall, Westminster, London, June 2004.

⁴¹ Muzafar, Chandra, “What is Unity?” *Aliran Monthly*. Vol. 10 No. 2, 1990.

⁴² _____. “Imagine a World Enriched by Diversity: What future for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith society?” Speech delivered at Central Hall, Westminster, London, June 2004.

⁴³ Christopher L. Jaban, Rodrigo F. Ponce, Crescencia C. Gabihan. “Showing the Asian Faces of Mary.” Unpublished Monograph submitted to the Faculty of Sacred Theology, UST, 2002.

Muslims and Christians Interfaith Initiative for Peace Building: A Case Study on Indonesia

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Introduction

The adherents of the Abrahamic faiths have lived as neighbors since the day their spiritual great grandfather lived. Among approximately five billion religious people in the world today, i.e., almost 85 percent of the world population,¹ it is forecasted that there will be three billion Christians and 2.2 billion Muslims by 2050.² Their relationship plays a significant role in global peace and human flourishing. The first part of this paper gives an overview on the role of faith in today's multi-religious communities in order to support its argument on the importance of interfaith engagement between Muslims and Christians for the sake of world peace. This writing uses Indonesia as its case study to illustrate a country's progressive transformation from a *religiocentric* to a *religiorelative* community and how this newly developed landscape impacts its nation. The last part of this paper suggests approaches that can be implemented in order to achieve sustainable solutions for peace.

Unity in Diversity and the Unleashing of Social Value of Faith Tradition

What will the world be like if Christians and Muslims live beyond tolerance and engage one other for the betterment of mankind? What will happen if fear and war is transformed into love, cooperation and trust? After all, Muslims and Christians do share many common values and their faith is rooted in a common historical tradition.

Many social scientist, including Peter Berger who in the 1970s advocated the secularization theory, which says religion will dissolve with modernization, now recognize the resurgence of religion in the 21st century. Certainly, this is good news only if faith adherents live in peace and if the emergence in spirituality promotes beneficent and benevolent mutual behavior. Some scholars say that hospitality in hermeneutics and human rights hermeneutics is emerging among modern religions.³ Unfortunately, such in vogue hermeneutics on religious ethics will not bring

peace to the world unless these values are assimilated by the community at large. The question is if it is realistic to presume that such assimilation is possible knowing that many of these 55 percent of the world's citizens live in rather unreachable areas? This is not an easy task. However, an attempt to overcome such difficulties may begin by doing good works together.

This proposal may sound very theoretical to some. Perhaps, the result from the Jubilee USA Network will awaken us from underestimating the power of interfaith unity in working towards the common good. An alliance of over 75 religious denominations, faith communities and NGOs, the Jubilee members persevere to work for the cancellation of international debt owed by developing countries. As a result, more than 23 of the poorest countries in the world received over \$88 billion debt cancellation in 2010.⁴ However stunning this outcome may be – and there

are more – so much more remain to be done, with seemingly insurmountable obstacles ahead. However, as the adherents of Abrahamic faiths tradition, Christians and Muslims are to recall and claim the covenant of God of Abraham that God will bless Abraham's descendants and turn them into great nations.⁵

Interfaith Diplomacy, Collaboration and Engagement

The mainstream Muslims and Christians agree that the core of their faith promotes human rights and dignity, tolerance, solidarity and equality founded on the basic principle of loving God and our neighbors. Numerous passages from the Qur'an and sayings of Prophet Muhammad testify to this. And similarly, many passages in the Bible and sayings of Lord Jesus Christ speak on these values. The two most relevant texts are:

'So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion'- Quran: Al-Muzzammil, 73:8

'None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself' by Prophet Muhammad

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.' Jesus Christ sayings -Mark 12:29-31

Faith values such as loving God and neighbors can be shared in many ways and often, its

primary mean is through a mutually respecting discourse. As love is the essence of each faith, communicating with love and wisdom or diplomacy is scriptural. It is diplomacy that elevates a relationship from the level of tolerance to engagement. Diplomacy facilitates forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation and restoration. It transforms the relationship between two strangers to acquaintances, casual friendship and then to love relationship.

Communication as an act of God's love is inherent in Abrahamic faiths. According to Islam, the Quran conveys Allah's command for mankind which can be further understood through the life and the relationship of Prophet Muhammad with others. In Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, communicates the will of the Father, converses and lives among the people to show them the way of life. After his ascension, the Holy Spirit manifests in the lives of the adherents and interacts with them. Indeed, conversing with love including correcting, rebuking or condemning human behavior is an essence of both faiths. Only through the conviction that diplomacy is the will of God can both adherents embrace God's beautiful plan for our coexistence. And the fundamental concept of fruitful diplomacy must first begin with cognitive dialogue based on correct information in order for peace to be established.

As globalization intensifies the diversification of faith traditions in a community, faith related leaders needs to be proactive in keeping-up

with these rapid changes, persuading and cultivating a religiorelative attitude within their community. There have been many optimistic scholarly voices affirming that the process of religious engagement of human rights is now underway in Christian, Islam, Judaic, Buddhist, Hindu and traditional communities alike.⁶ Some reports also on the growing momentum of transformation from a religiocentric to a religiorelative perspective.⁷ They define the two saying the former causes many deaths and the latter brings hope and peace. Thus, the perspective on religiosity in this century should shift towards preemptive collaboration where compassionate and fruitful interfaith engagement is not initiated during the actual crisis but simply because living ethically is a core essence to every faith tradition.

One of the most remarkable religiorelative efforts is encapsulated by '*A Common Word*' collaboration on loving God and neighbors among Muslim and Christian leaders.⁸ This effort was initiated corporately by 138 Muslim leaders led by HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan, dozens of grand muftis, an ayatollah and leaders of many Islamic countries and Muslims scholars and 102 Christians including His holiness Pope Benedict, patriarchs, clergies and academia. This important breakthrough gives evidence that it is possible for Muslims and Christians to work together towards reconciliation and peace building while acknowledging the differences persisting between both faiths.

There have been also many voices critiquing interfaith diplomacy as the mask of hypocrisy in acknowledging the tension between Muslims and Christians. It is true that xenophobia, distrust, bigotry exists and wars are waged between

some Muslim and Christian groups. However, a peaceful relationship between both faith adherents cannot be achieved unless their respective leaders set an example in extending their hands towards each other for forgiveness and reconciliation prior to working on tangible matters. In spite the aforementioned pessimistic response, *A Common Word* initiative resonates in the hearts of some international and national faith related leaders though they were not involved with the initial founding of the collaboration. Among these leaders are non-Muslims and non-Christians.

One of the most significant offshoots from *A Common Word* initiative is the launching of 'World Interfaith Harmony Week,' a UN resolution for worldwide interfaith harmony that falls annually on the first week of February. It aims to promote harmony among all peoples regardless of their religions. This initiative was led by King of Jordan, HM King Abdullah II and HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan as a follow-up of Prince Ghazi's initiative on *A Common Word*.⁹

The initiative *A Common Word* could be gleaned also in the Philippines through the *Magbassa Kita Foundation Incorporated (MKFI)* and the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID). *Magbassa Kita Foundation Incorporated* is a humanitarian work established by former-Senator Santanina Tillah Rasul, way back in the 1960s in response to the need to alleviate the very low level of literacy in the Southern Philippines. Its adult education programs were subsequently adapted by the Philippine government and recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Both organizations aim to culti-

vate harmonious and peaceful coexistence in the southern part of Mindanao where tensions exist among the Muslims, Christians and Lumads (a minority race with no specific faith tradition). Many of their projects focus on improving education among the marginalized Muslim youths. The mayor of Zamboanga City, Mr. Lobregat, a Catholic, strongly supports the program which addresses the needs of Muslim communities in this district. Such endeavors reaffirm the positive growth and awareness of religio-relative perspective in the area.

Interfaith engagement or dialogue should not necessarily be initiated to counter-react to a crisis. Rather communities can set up programs to prevent and derail such crisis. An example of a proactive approach is apparent in the interfaith work of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) which executed many interfaith projects decades before September-11 incident. Two of the interfaith projects organized or participated by ISNA are: ISNA and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) collaboration in areas of poverty, education and anti-bigotry; and ISNA support to Interfaith Health Fair in Detroit where numerous Muslim and Jewish doctors, nurses and social workers were on hand to provide medical check ups and meals for participants who are homeless.

Interfaith Initiative for Conflict Resolution in Indonesian

An understanding of the dynamism of re-

ligiocentric and religio-relative perspectives can best be studied by analyzing transformational faith-related experiences of a nation. This paper selects Indonesia as its case study. To facilitate a deeper understanding of the conflict, its contributing factors and the impact of the crisis on the citizens, the paper gives a brief background and some facts on Indonesia. Later, an analytical discussion will be presented on the way interfaith engagement was implemented prior to and after the conflict. This segment will also outline some of the policies that may have developed as a result of the crisis.

General background on Indonesia and the crisis in 1999 - 2000

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim-majority nation in the world. The religious population consists of 88.2% Muslim mainly Sunni with slightly over one million Shi'a, 5.9% Protestant, 3.1% Catholic, 1.8% Hindu and 0.8% Buddhist and 0.2% belong to other religions.¹⁰The Indonesians came in contact with Arab traders engaged in commerce with Indonesia in the fourth century CE. However, Islam began to be assimilated only in the beginning of the eleventh century through intermarriages and the movement of Sufism. In the earlier days, Islam in Indonesian retained much of the previous blend of Hinduism, Buddhism and Animatism.

Christianity arrived in Indonesia during the sixteenth century through two means: Catho-

lic missionaries brought by the Portuguese, and Protestant missionaries brought by the Dutch. The latter colonized Indonesia from the 17th century to 19th century. From the 20th century onwards, an increase in missionary efforts and the growth of both Roman Catholicism and various Protestant denominations took place. The Dutch sustained good diplomatic relationship by supporting pre-existing Islamic governance structures so it could continue its trading business in this region. Their non-intervention on Islamic religious matter strengthened the authority of rural Islamic boarding schools and mystical leaders. Towards the twentieth century, these leaders later became the founders of independence movements, which merged around either Muslim or popular nationalist parties.

Since Indonesia's independence, there has been an increased observance in the less culturally-influenced towards the more universal form of Islam. This country is not an Islamic state even though its inhabitants are predominantly Muslims. Today, the largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia are the "traditionalists" (Nahdlatul Ulama) and "modernists" (Muhammadiyah). In post-colonial Indonesia, several presidential regimes - most notably that of President Sukarno (1945-1967) and President Suharto (1967-1998) - created public policies that favored some religious groups. President Sukarno established the *Pancasila* or Five Principles as the foundation of its new constitution, "Belief in the One and Only God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; deliberation for consensus; and social justice for all of Indonesia's people." Later, under President Suharto, the government officially recognized five religions: Islam, Protes-

tantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Pancasila, the influence of shari'ah in national policy and the position of official national religions are still debated in contemporary Indonesia. Some Islamic groups demand for more compliance between official law and shari'ah and advocate for a completely Islamic state. However, Muslim proponents of pluralism and liberal Islam, as well as members of other religions, favor the freedom of religion and the secular state. The largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah (1912) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (1926), coming from the modernist and neo-traditionalist movements respectively, are committed to upholding *Pancasila*. They do not advocate instituting a Muslim state and instead promote a pluralistic, democratic state. Organizations such as the Liberal Islam Network (1999) are dedicated to advancing liberal Islam. They aim to defend civil liberties such as freedom of expression, minority rights, women's rights and freedom of religion. Although there are several political parties that have been founded on religious grounds, elections routinely demonstrate the general population's support for *Pancasila* and for continuing a history of tolerance and diversity for the many religions co-existing in Indonesia.

Indonesia guarantees religious freedom to six officially recognized religions, frequent conflict happens; the largest scale of religious violence happened in 1999-2000. Some of the riots were between Muslims and Christians. In Sulawesi, more than 1000 people are believed to be killed. In 2006, the government executed three Christian ministers who incited the religious violence in Poso, the place where violence was triggered

by a brawl between Christian and Muslim gangs in December 1998, which sparked the religious violence in 1999. Many protested the execution of the three Christians and criticized the government for not punishing Muslim instigators in the same fashion.

After the 1999-2000 event, a peace agreement was signed between two parties in 2002, but some sporadic incidents still happened after that. Between March 1996 and August 2005, about 180 churches were destroyed, burned or closed by force. Other incidents that can be cited are: the closure by force of more than two dozen churches in West Java by the Islamic Defender Front (FPI) in 2003; the imprisonment of believers from the "Sang Timur" Catholic School; the conflict between Muslim residents and members of a Christian Batak Church; and violent attack against followers of the Muslim Ahmadiyah sect.

The Christians were not the only people who were attacked. In Ambon city, the provincial capital of Maluku, both Christian churches and mosques were burnt down along with hundreds of houses, banks, shops, stalls, vehicles and government buildings. Around 20,000 people were forced to flee their homes and take refuge in military headquarters, houses of worship and other facilities.¹¹ The unrest saw a number of people being injured, properties being burned down, people seeking refuge at worship places, schools being destroyed and people tortured to death. In short, all suffered the same fate. In this fight, the Muslims and the Christians look at each as 'you

versus me' and not as 'us - Indonesians,' the Abrahamic faiths adherents who share many common values. This version of religiosity is articulated by scholars as religiocentric.

While some media coverage tried to portray the core reason of the unrest to violence between the Muslims and the Christians, religion was not the main contributing factor to it. Religion became a scapegoat to Indonesia's economic crisis which was an aftermath of the financial crisis that hit Asian economics beginning July 1997. Before this crisis, the exchange rate between the rupiah and the dollar was roughly 2,600 rupiah to 1 USD. The rate plunged to over 11,000 rupiah to 1 USD in January 1998. The currency devaluation contributed to a sharp decline in the purchasing power as the increase in the price for basic goods outpaced wage increment. The impact of lower real wages pushed many poor people below the poverty line. The sharp recession caused the contraction of GDP by 13.1 % and only 0.8% growth in 1999¹². The situation got worse when the agricultural output, the economic sector composing the bulk of the employed Indonesians, was affected by poor weather, natural disasters, and civil unrest. The tension which ushered rioting and nationwide unrests pressured the public and forced President Suharto to step down after 30 years in power. Consequently, political turmoil was at its peak.

Rising prices, food shortages, devaluation of rupiah and massive unemployment widened the gap between the rich and the poor and this led

to greater tension. Many of the privately owned commerce and economic entities were controlled by Chinese-Indonesians. Even though Chinese Indonesians comprised only 3 to 4 percent of the population, they have much influence and disproportionate control of the Indonesian economy. The Chinese came to Indonesia during the period of Dutch colonization and have taken up business and professional employment. Historically, they went through great discriminatory practices, bear up with prejudices and even violence and were once purged during the anti-communist movement that took place under the Suharto governance in 1965. Many of them are Christians, Mahayana Buddhists and Confucians. Their high financial status provoked resentment causing the outbreaks of the anti-Chinese violence. Soeharto's son-in-law, Gen. Prabowo Subiyanto, helped fuel anti-Chinese sentiment by labeling them "traitors" who fled with their money abroad. After the riots in the cities of Jakarta, Solo, and Surabaya, the situation worsened especially for ethnic Chinese women who were submitted to mass rapes and other forms of sexual assault in a systematic, organized fashion.

Interfaith Initiative Before and After the Conflict

The convergence of various factors in the field of politics, socio-economics and religion may have been contributing factors to the turmoil in 1999-2000. Even though faith seems to have the least influence in these, the unrest had its significant impact on religious communities. Given that Indonesian culture is rich in hospitality, it is difficult to imagine the absence of en-

agement between the faith traditions. The pressure from the economic crisis has wiped away their harmonious community life. Furthermore, interfaith initiative is not new in Indonesia. The first formal inter-religious conference took place way back in November 1967. It was sponsored by the government to develop some strategies for resolution towards religious related social problems. In this conference, the participants proposed a concept of inter-religious harmony which can foster engagement so that every religious community can live together peacefully and respectfully.¹³

In 1969, the government issued a joint decree with the minister of religious and internal affairs in preserving harmony among the members of religious communities. This decree was renewed in 2005. The decree mandates government leaders in each provinces and districts to take part in sustaining harmony among religious communities and to support the communities to establish a forum called *Inter-Religious Harmony Forum* (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama - FKUB). Its aim is to build dialogue among religious leaders, accommodate aspirations from religious organizations and communities, and to give recommendations to the government on the feasibility of erecting places of worship. Members of this forum are religious leaders from the various traditions.

The unrest in 1999-2000 and the sporadic religious problems that continuously take place in Indonesia to date indicate that the country needs to institute certain mechanisms to help strengthen the systems concerned. This can be improved first by studying the available reports but unfortunately, many reports are not prop-

erly documented, making it difficult to evaluate. Many cases, especially violence towards the ethnic Chinese women have not been thoroughly investigated because in-depth information is not available for certain reasons.

One possibility could be the inadequate infrastructure to support the execution of tasks mandated to the government leaders of each province and district. This infrastructure needs to include training for the religious leaders to run the *Inter-Religious Harmony Forum* and systematic documentation and reporting to the central governance. The fact that the country comprises 17,000 islands with about 243 million population makes any management overarching in a widely disperse geographical area and diverse population extremely difficult. Under these circumstances, a decentralized system as such can function well with the empowerment and competency of the leaders in si-tu which can only be made possible through proper training. It is understandable that this task was unmanageable during turmoil. However, as Indonesia's economy recovers and the political environment becomes stable, the renewed decree may have greater potential of success with good management.

Today, the number of local NGOs dedicated to interfaith and pluralistic concerns has increased. This could be an indication of a positive outcome of the initiatives that were launched in 1967 and 1969 by the Indonesian government. This attests that the common vision to cultivate a harmonious pluralistic society does resonate

among the public. Perhaps in the next decade, especially, with President Obama's speeches on Indonesia as a model for religious tolerance in November 2010¹⁴ plus the improvement in media technology and the inclusion of the studies on pluralism in learning institutions, the interfaith initiative in Indonesia will grow exponentially.

One of the leading interfaith organizations is Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) and the organization lists another 51 organizations throughout the country that are considered interfaith organizations. All have similar activities: organizing interfaith forums, dialogues, and events, and promoting pluralism and cooperation among the different faith adherents. Some of the interfaith organizations are; *Indonesian Peace Building Directory*, which supports interfaith and religious minority organizations; *Institute of Human Assistance of Interfaith Community*, founded by leaders of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism; *Liberal Islam Network* which focuses on gender equality and interfaith dialogue; and *Society for Interreligious Dialogue*, the second oldest Indonesian organization involved in inter-religious dialogue that was established in 1996 which focuses on Indonesian religious leaders and youth.

The Pluralism Project of Harvard University did a study on 'Religious Pluralism in Indonesia' through its 'International Portrait' chapter and a report by Agus Hadi Nahrowi described in great length the activities that are organized

by each interfaith organization. Interestingly, none of the description of the activities covered by the NGOs include restoration of the dignity, forgiveness and healing. The report from Oslo written in 2002 also had no record on these events as taking place in the interfaith initiatives. Scholars however suggested that the primary distinction between an interfaith diplomacy (IFD) and other identity-based dialogues is that the IFD becomes a religious experience itself.¹⁵ The book, *Unity in Diversity* writes that a successful IFD is transformative; it transform strangers into an interdependent relation with one another as a member of the community. For both faiths groups to be interdependent with one another, forgiveness and healing must first take place. The collective memory from the past cannot be erased simply through this exercise. However, this is the stepping-stone prior to addressing the commonalities on justice and human rights and partnership in building better communities. Between the Muslims and the Christians, the painful history from the 'crusade' or 'jihad' still lingers in the heart of the adherents and this pre-existing tension may emerge during discourse. Only forgiveness helps. Some scholars also suggest that discourse may begin with a prayer in a way that is most comfortable to the participants.

The scale of the death figures from its religious conflict is relatively low compared to many countries with much smaller population. Sudan, which has about 40 million people today, had 2.5 million deaths in its last 20 years of conflict. For such a big country with huge diversity of races and religion, Indonesia has been able to maintain a very high religious tolerance. President Obama during his visit to Indonesia affirmed this in his

speech on the 10th November 2010. Every country has its imperfections, but acknowledgement should be given to its national scholars, some of them paid a high price to voice their insights on religious pluralism and interfaith engagement. Among the leading scholars in this area are; H.A.Mukti Ali, a modern Islamic thinker, who pioneered the idea of inter-religious harmony in 1960 when he was the minister of religious affairs (1971-1978). Mr. Ali developed a model of inter-religious harmony that was based on Islamic principles of justice, absolute freedom of conscience, the perfect equality among humans, and the powerful solidarity in social interaction, which serves as reference when dealing with inter-religious issues.

In studying the progress of interfaith engagement in a country, an analysis should also be made by reading reports from external parties such as the reports written by US International Religious Freedom Report (2006) and External report from The Oslo Coalition (2002). The latter wrote that the general impression brought home by the delegation was that of a strong and confident co-operation between the leaders of the mainstream churches and the dominant Muslim networks of NU and Muhammadiyah.¹⁶ During the Oslo visit to the various Islamic Boarding Schools in the rural NU-context of Jombang, teachers who were asked about their opinion on the current shari'ah-debate responded saying they were against the inclusion of shari'a in the constitution, since "Indonesia is pluralistic". They also reported that many Muslims volunteered to protect churches during Christmas and Easter celebrations from being burnt.

The Oslo report and the various writings

voiced the same tone that the development of the interfaith initiative in Indonesia looks very promising. The interfaith activists, scholars and religious leaders have reached another milestone since 1999. However, a few writings singled out that while the government generally respects religious rights, at some occasions, there are still religious discrimination and restrictions for unrecognized religions. Another weakness mentioned is that the government also sometimes tolerated abuse of religious groups by individuals, or failed to punish the perpetrators. For example, some of the inter-religious violence has been instigated by factions in the military and allowed to spread due to the lack of police and law enforcement.

Interfaith Engagement towards Sustainable and Lasting Peace

Based on the studies done on various reports and discussions on Indonesia and the research on the interfaith initiatives that take place in areas where there are Christians and Muslims, the recommendations for a long engagement initiative between Muslims and Christians may consist of the following:

- a. Educating the youths – this requires a systematic development of educational materials and pedagogy that allows conversation in a secured environment.
- b. Training interfaith initiative religious leaders on how to run an interfaith discourse that allows the sharing of spiritual experience in

addition to finding solutions to conflict resolution and building the trust for interdependency towards one another. This initiative can be done by local governments or NGOs.

- c. Developing partnership between religious leaders and all key parties to the conflict resolution, locally and internationally. This may include the non-mainstream groups too, in addition to the partnership with the media which tend to create sensational reports for the general public.
- d. Educating religious teachers and clergies on Islam and Christianity, especially on the ‘hospitality in hermeneutics’¹⁷ of the Bible and Quran and contextualized research work. Facilitate their personal relationship development with adherents of other faiths.
- e. Teaching and coaching the community members, perhaps through a centralized community center, on appreciation of others’ culture and religion. Such initiative can be edified by inviting the communities to organize an event together, for example, by celebrating the national day or other festivities.
- f. Supporting the provision of the basic needs of both community members, such as having shelter, food, basic health care and education, including hygiene and home economics and management.
- g. Developing interfaith related policies and competent team to implement the policies.
- h. As Abrahamic faiths adherents believe in God, advocating honor and respect towards

each other’s spirituality and religious practice is key to interfaith reconciliation.

Conclusion

The core of the Abrahamic faith projects a spirituality that characterizes the benevolent and beneficent way of religiosity. These values are the treasure of Christians and Muslims. Sharing these commonalities in all disciplines of life, politics, and economics will fuse members in a pluralistic community from being tolerant to being engage with one another. This relationship is to be cultivated in our daily life, with or without crisis. At times of conflict, the efforts of coming together in resolving conflicts by adhering to the common values and applying tactful wisdom, knowledge, efficient strategies, patient and love, and developing partnership with the right key parties, including the rightist and leftist, will be the best approach to crisis management. Long term solutions should be the motivational factors to interfaith initiatives in every conflict resolution. At the same time, the approach and engagement should always give room for each other to celebrate one’s own spiritual experience while walking through one’s life journey.

ENDNOTES

¹ World Christian Trend, http://www.gordonconwell.edu/lifelong_learners/worldchristiantrends (accessed October 2010).

² Ibid.

³ See, e.g. An-Naim, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 77.

⁴ Jubilee Debt Campaign (2010), see <http://www.jubileeusa.org/> (accessed Dec 2010).

⁵ See Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, Genesis Chapter 15-17.

⁶ John Witte, *God’s Joust God’s Justice – Law and Religion in the Western Tradition*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 77.

⁷ Pippa Norris, Rogel Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular – Religion and Politics Worldwide*, (New York: Cambridge Press, 2004), 4.

⁸ A Common Word is an initiative is a groundbreaking step towards reconciliation between Islam and Christianity led by Muslim and Christian leaders as a result of Muslim leaders’ invitation to peace in 2007.

⁹ Ref: <http://acommonword.com/en/a-common-word/11-new-fruits-of-a-common-word/442-un-com-mends-a-common-word-a-common-word-leads-to-the-world-interfaith-harmony-week.html> (accessed 4th December 2010).

¹⁰ Harvard University see <http://pluralism.org/reports/view/32> (accessed 3rd December 2010).

¹¹ See <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jan1999/indo-j30.shtml> (accessed December 2010).

¹² Asian Development Outlook 2001 : II. Economic Trends and Prospects in Developing Asia : Southeast Asia for Indonesia, see <http://www.adb.org/documents/books/ado/2001/ino.asp> (accessed 3rd December 2010).

¹³ “Kerukunan Umat Beragama: Pengantar” see <http://www.humasdepag.or.id/kerukunan.php>

¹⁴ “Obama Lauds Indonesia as a Religious Tolerance country,” see <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/11/09/indonesia.obama/> (accesses 5December 2010).

¹⁵ Mohamed Abu Nimer and others, *Unity in Diversity – Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁶ Report from The Oslo Coalition Report on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2002, see http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_indonesia/indonesia_project_report.html (accessed 5 December 2010).

¹⁷ See Miroslav Volf, “A Voice of One’s Own: Public Faith in a Pluralistic World” in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 280.

The Issue of the Createdness of Qur'an

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The nature and validity of attributes ascribed to God to make His being intelligible has long been a controversial issue among Muslim scholars and philosophers. The issue of *kalam* (speech of God) as an attribute of God—considered fundamentally problematic as an attribute of God—and whether the attribute bears an eternal meaning as other attributes do, and whether it has a correlation with His nature, have been questions that have been pondered on by many Muslim scholars. While discussions on the nature of His *kalam* attribute continue, the different camps on this discussion have inevitably led to a very closely related topic, the nature of the Qur'an that is considered to be His revelation. While some sects and scholars advocate the createdness of the Qur'an and its temporality on the basis of its *mubdas nature* (created afterwards) and eternalness, others argue for its precedence and its non-createdness (*ghayr-i makbluq*) on the grounds of similar justifications and discourse.

This study concentrates on the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an as it relates to the creation of the *kalam* attribute rather than the eternalness of *kalam*, the temporality of *kalam* or its relation to the nature of God. Before describing the emergence, the development and the historical course of the issue which caused deep debates among Islamic scholars throughout the historical period of Islamic philosophy, clarification needs to be made on the two fundamental perceptions regarded as the salient point of the topic under consideration. Behind the reasons for these explanations first lies the fact that the discussions on the createdness of the Qur'an did not reach a conclusion due to misinterpretation on the meanings of the same words as well as the way principles and concerns are being processed by the arguing schools, who built the doctrines upon concepts which were not thoroughly analyzed. Secondly, they identified the attribute of speech with speaking and did not see that the attribute of speech could be a reason or a means to speak. Therefore, it is necessary to determine which terminology or concepts were used from the 2nd century AH onwards, and to question the correctness of the notions and the meanings they carried, as these exercises determine the course of their debates and the conclusions they would lead into.

1. The two keywords: The *makbluq* (created) and *ghayr makbluq* (the un-created)

When the discussions on the Qur'an that took place between AH 124 and the 4th century AH are examined, it is obvious that the reason for not reaching a consensus or conclusion is insufficiently analyzed notions, as well as the issues arising from different meanings ascribed to the same concepts. Each and every part of the discussions tried to solve the issue in the light of its own knowledge,

cultural structure and adopted principles. During these more or less two centuries, the common denominator of verbal and written debates was centralization of the terms created (*makbluq*) particularly by the Mu'tazilah and the uncreated (*ghayr makbluq*) as two presuppositions. Since the beginning of the 2nd century AH, the discussions that were made through the 'risalat' or between the experts on the science of hadith and the Muslim jurisprudence that represented the Salafi, as well as the Mu'tazilah, were focusing on

whether Qur'an as being "created" is appropriate terminology.

As far as the interpretations of the phrases the *makhlūq* and the *ghayr makhlūq* are concerned, there seems to be a difference in the interpretation between the Salafi and the Mu'tazillah. This difference is closely related with the meanings that each word attributed to the revelation, the way they commented on it and the nature of the revelation per se.

The Salafi, one of the schools, interprets the Qur'an or the *kalamullah* as having no connection with God's attribute *al-Khaliq* (The Creator), that is, it bears no similarity to anything to do with "createdness". On the other hand, the term "created" has different meanings for the Mu'tazilah, and some of the meanings used can be translated as "to make", "to create", or "to set up". Through these meanings, they concluded that the term "makhlūq" meant that God created and set up his own *kalam*, hence, He is the speaker. And in contrast with the Salafi and the ahl al-Sunnah, the Mu'tazillah regarded the phrase "it is created" in a certain time period as the creation of the Qur'an, i.e. a form of sound was for the purpose of communication with mankind. Therefore Mu'tazilah supported the view that *kalam* was created thereafter.¹ Yet the Salafi and the ahl al-Sunnah, in contrast with Mu'tazilah, claimed that God's *kalam* attribute meant that He is the al-Mutakallim with his own voice of which its nature is incomprehensible. Based on this standpoint, God did not create Qur'an the way He created the rest of the beings, and the Quran is a *kalamullah* revealed by God through its incomprehensible nature.

In this context, it is possible to say that there are three different standpoints adopted

by the *kalam* schools on the issue of the createdness of Qur'an. First of them is presented by the Mu'tazilah who takes the words literally as their basis: *kalam* as a particular structure, a system consisting of letters which are arranged in a way that brings meaning.² The second one proposed by the Asha'irah who takes the meaning as their basis and states that the meaning of *kalam* is indicated by signs and phrases identified by the *muwadaa* (grammar and that it exists with its subject).³ And the third and the last standpoint is by the Salafi who defended both, the word and the meaning, i.e. the Qur'an as letters, verses, words and meaning. It is *kalamullah* and therefore is uncreated".⁴

While the Mu'tazilah try to overcome the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an by separating the attribute of *kalam* and the act of speaking itself and by building a relationship of process and action (creation), the Asha'irah, the Maturidiyyah and the Salafiyyah try to reach a resolution by dissolving the *kalam* and the act of speaking into each other, i.e. by identifying one with the other. If these approaches are selected, the first approach leads to the view that the *kalamullah* is assumed to be a verbal communication established by God with His messengers in different moments of history. The second approach is a complete paradox. When it is viewed through its contextual meaning, *kalam* can ascribe different forms yet it is essentially "unique". On the other hand, as far as the "word" is literally approached, *kalam* and its internal and simple unity (*kalam-al nafsi*) may express multiplicity in meaning depending on the difference in the language of the revelation. Within this context, *kalam*, according to the Asha'irah approach, is accepted as the meaning and the attribute which exist in and within a person (self, subject or mind); and according to the Mu'tazilah's approach, it is a reference system with its own rules of construction and phonetics and is indepen-

dent from the subject.⁵ Lastly, for the Salafi, it is regarded as a transcendent *kalam* that is based on the unity of the word and the meaning of which authority descends directly from His nature. Within this definitional framework, the *kalam* discussion by the Mu'tazilah is built upon a perception that it is an act of speech whereas, according to the Asha'irah and Salafi, it is based on an attribute that exists with the nature of God. This definitional difference between the Mu'tazilah, the Asha'irah, the Maturidiyyah and the Salafiah results from the distinction and the relation between the attribute of speech and what is spoken of.

The Mu'tazilah describes the connection between *kalam* attribute and the act of speaking as an internal action of human. However, it has no internal connection with God and is an external action and an indication of words that are laden with meanings. For the Mu'tazilah, the act of speaking and the attribute of speech are completely separated from each other and *kalam* is defined as not only something that was created, but as a symptom as well. Thus, the Mu'tazilah has tackled God's *kalam* within a linguistic domain.⁶ According to this point of view, since relating *kalam* to somebody depends on its occurrence through this person's intention, will or motive, it is only possible to describe God as *mutakallim* when a *kalam* is attached to Him.⁷ On the other hand, the Asha'irah and the Salafiah describe *kalam* as an "internal" relation and consider the relation between the *kalam* attribute and the act of speaking as the same deeds, both for human and for God. Within this framework, *kalam* of God is similar to the relation between the thought and *kalam*, a construction integrated with each other in one's self (mind), because the Qur'an cannot exist outside God. Otherwise, it is not God but the locus where words are created becomes the *mutakallim*.⁸ According to the Mu'tazilah, God Himself and the *ka-*

lamullah which is *muhdec* cannot be imagined in conjunction with each other. Because what is hadith cannot be transformed into *qadim*. This also shows that God spoke through a *kalam* which He created within an entity and that God is *al-mutakallim*.⁹ Hence, according to the Mu'tazilah, God speaks by creating His words, and the words came into being, but that does not mean that it requires any organ for its creation. This is because all things that come into existence through God exist directly or without a means.¹⁰ Thus, while the Mu'tazilah deal with a negative theology on the relation between the speech attribute and the act of speaking per se based on negative theology, the Asha'irah and Salafis share an approach of syllogism and they explain the relation between God's *kalam* and human speech on the same level. Furthermore, while the Asha'irah defines *kalam* as the "meaning" signified by letters, the Salafis try to justify *kalam* as an attribute within the relation of word and meaning.¹¹ The Asha'irah theologians are in agreement that the word is named *kalam* in terms of the "meaning" indicated by it. For example, the Asha'irah scholar Abu al Ma'ali al-Juwayni defines the *kalam* as a meaning which indicates and signs an expression that exists with its subject.¹²

While Mu'tazilah tackles *kalam* based on literal speech, the ahl al-Sunnah mainly claims that *kalam* is an attribute or meaning which exists through the speaker. In fact, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi remarks that he agrees on the contention that God does not communicate through sounds and letters; His *kalam*, on the contrary, is through *kalam al-nafsi*, which happens to be a *sifah* present with His being.

2. The beginning and historical development of the createdness of Qur'an issue

The issue of the createdness of the Qur'an as it relates to God's *kalam* attribute

reached a high point in the history of Islamic theology to a point of unprecedented arguments, torture and declaring each other unbelievers. Worst of all, and particularly when the right for free speech was taken away, the issue turned out to be a deadlock by “Mihne Event”¹³ which was caused and supported by the caliph. In other words, the events became even more problematic and atrocious because of the Caliphate governance’s bias who was supposed to be neutral, thus causing theological arguments to turn into a political debate. This conflict continued until Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil released a decree on AH 234/CE 848 forbidding any discussion on the nature of the Qur’an.¹⁴ Thereafter, the peaceful discussion between Abu ‘Ali al-Jubba’i (d. on AH 303/CE 916), Abu ‘Ali Muhammad al-Jubba’i (d. on AH 321/CE 933) from the Mu’tazilah and the Ash’ariah theologians Qadi Abd al-Jabbar (d. on AH 414/AD 1025) and al-Juwayni (d. AH 478/CE 1085) turned into a vicious circle of linguistic and theological argumentation.¹⁵

The argument of the createdness of the Qur’an was first brought systematically into question by Ja’d ibn Dirham (AH 124/CE 741) who was known for his refusal of God’s attributes. By the order of the Caliph, he was beheaded after being put to exile due to his discourse. Al-Ja’d ibn Dirham was the educator of Marwan ibn Hakam who was the last Caliph of Ummayyads. Al-Ja’d ibn Dirham introduced his opinions about the attributes and the createdness of the Qur’an during Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik’s period (AH 105/124 CE 125/743), who captured him and sent him to Khalid al-Qasri, the governor who exiled him. Later on, by Hisham’s order, he was beheaded on the first morning of ‘Eid, the festival of sacrifice.¹⁶

The following is Ibn Taymiyyah’s views on the account mentioned:

Ja’d ibn Dirham was the first to come up with the opinion about Qur’an’s createdness

at around year 120.

He was then followed Jahm ibn Safwan.

Ja’d was killed by Halid ibn Abdullah al-Kaysari.

And Jahm was killed during the reign of Merv on Hisham ibn ‘Abdulmalik.¹⁷

Shahrastani, similarly, accounts as follows:

Ja’d ibn Dirham is the first to come up with the view about Qur’an’s createdness.¹⁸

So far, the resources that dated to this first century demonstrate that al-Ja’d ibn Dirham is the chief architect of the issue of the createdness of the Qur’an.¹⁹ However, questions can still be raised on the possibility that al-Ja’d ibn Dirham could have taken up this view from another person or from the internal discussions of another religion and whether or not he came up with this thesis all by himself.

Ahmad Amin claims with regard to his opinion the origin of createdness of the Qur’an is outsourced. According to him, al-Ja’d ibn Dirham was under the influence of Jewish and Christian theology and he took this issue from them. As a proof, he quoted the Caliphate of Ma’mun, who had a high interest in theology and philosophy, as saying:

Those suggesting that Qur’an is uncreated are similar to those saying Jesus is God’s son, which means as Jesus being God’s word, he is uncreated too.²⁰

This statement may seem reasonable; for during the reign of Ma’mun many studies from different languages and cultures were being translated into Arabic. Besides, it is also possible that Muslim scholars are influenced by the increased conquests of the Caliph Omer, which caused an exchange of ideas as a result of encountering and adopting different cultures and views of different religions and communities, whereas some of those cultures and communities also accepted Islam.

After Ja’d ibn Dirham’s initial effort to develop this doctrine, Jahm ibn Safwan systematized the contention of the non-createdness of Qur’an and found supporters in the course of time. Regarding some narratives, after Jahm ibn Safwan was killed by Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik in Merv, the doctrine was defended by Bishr al-Marisi. Even though, in the course of developing and spreading of the doctrine, Bishr al-Marisi could not meet Jahm ibn Safwan and he did not take the standpoint (of the doctrine) from him literally, yet he did it with the help of the citizens of Jahm and the supporters of Jamiyyah. Bishr had in a philosophical sense systematically discussed the subject in all aspects with his opponents and tried to spread as well as justify his reasoning. Sometimes, he was assisted by the statesmen. As it was historically recorded, Bishr (d. on AH 218/CE 833) was of Jewish origin and during the reign of Harun Rashid or Ma’mun (according to some other resources) he defended and developed this doctrine for about 20 years.

Based on this historical study, it is reasonable to suggest that he thought and the scholarly work on the createdness of Qur’an issue was first developed by Ja’d ibn Dirham, followed by Jahm ibn Safwan, Bishr al-Marisi and when this thought reached the Mu’tazilah, the school adopted this idea as one of their basic doctrines. This doctrine was first learnt from their affiliation with the Jahmiyyah, and then it was systematized and taught throughout the history of the philosophy by the Mu’tazilah. It is believed that Abu Musa al-Murdai who subscribed to the Baghdad way of Mu’tazilah said:

He who says Qur’an is uncreated, accepts existence of two deities.²¹

We have already mentioned earlier that some Islam theologians believed that the createdness of the Qur’an issue infiltrated into the Islamic community from outside and was supported by some external communities.

The doctrine was assimilated into the Islamic community through Ja’d ibn Dirham whose thinking was influenced by the Jewish and Christians’ doctrines such as the Greeks believe that Fates and Babylonians the tablets of fate, Jews believed that the Law had been created before the world and Christians also believed that the Logos existed eternally in God. On the other hand, Ibn Qutayba thinks that Bayan ibn Siman was the first person who effected by external discussions said that the Qur’an was created.²²

The issue of the createdness of Qur’an that emerged in the early period of the Umayyads reached the period of Ma’mun via the continuous discussions and various writings related to this topic. The issue, which had been taken up and debated by many, and continued to be observed and dialogued until this very period, developed into a political debate from the later part of the Umayyad when the Umayyad caliphate manipulated the authority of Ma’mun and others and turned the issue into an official discourse employed in political spheres. Consequently, the issue became a formidable question, a deadlock intermingled by too many factors.

Ma’mun, who was well-known for his interest in theological and philosophical subjects, sympathized with the Mu’tazilah who were supporting their views with philosophical and logical methods. Naturally, the Mu’tazilah defending createdness of Qur’an thesis convinced Ma’mun to accept the createdness of Qur’an and used him to adopt the contention and to manipulate the authority of the state.

The unforgettable products of this conflicting situation were the “events” that rose from it, the “Mihna Event”, which took place to oppress the opponents by torture in order to force them to give up the idea against official political contention of the state; the createdness of Qur’an. After Ahmed ibn Abu Duad was appointed with the head kadhi

position by Ma'mun, the createdness of the Qur'an issue turned completely into a political discourse. The scholars of Mu'tazilah began to increase their political influence on the state in AH 218/ AD. The scholars of Mu'tazilah took over the control in order to create official discourse of the state. They made Ma'mun publish a circular and started to torture, put in dungeons and even kill the opponents of the createdness of Qur'an, which was the official stance of the state. This tyranny in the mind and in the speech continued for 16 years, including the al-Mu'tasim and the Wasil periods. All sources indicate that the scholars were put under pressure and forced to accept this ideology.

Ma'mun was not satisfied with all that he did. He issued four decrees in different times to Ishaq ibn Ibrahim, the region of Baghdad, ordering him to declare, that muhadiths, kadhīs, lawyers and Sufis shall be interrogated in order to find out if they accept the createdness of Qur'an or not, and if they don't, they shall be punished with imprisonment. Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ahmad ibn Darwaki were first to be sentenced, prisoned and tortured.²³

The struggle of the supporters of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, represented by the Muhaddiths and the followers of Salafi school, against the Mu'tazilah continued within the framework of the letters, *kalam* and words of Qur'an. While the Mu'tazilah insisted that all those mentioned were created, some Hanbalis and Salafis on the contrary, claimed that they were uncreated. On the other hand, the Sufis were quite reluctant to give their opinions. According to this group, declaring opinion on this subject is *bid'a* (heresy) and if there is something to say on this subject, their stance is that Qur'an is speech of God (*Kalamullah*).²⁴

The arguments on the createdness of the Qur'an started to follow a different course with the Abu Musa al-Asha'ri (AH 330/CE 935). This difference related closely with the

definition of the attribute of *kalam* which described God, the al-mutakallim. Asha'ari, so to speak, divided the elements of the issue and made a classification to tackle the issue in a more fruitful way. His work led to the formulation of: *kalam al-lafzhi* and *kalam al-nafsi* which later were often highlighted in the discussions of the issue of *kalamullah*. This classification or dichotomy was in fact extremely helpful in facilitating the comparison work in the ability of the human beings to speak and the usage of this classification enabled them to engage in the discourse more effectively. Asha'ari clarified this subject clearly by saying that there are two kinds of *kalam*. The first one is speech with sound and the other one is speech without sound and letter. *Kalam al-nafsi* is a meaning which finds a voice by letters and signs. On the other hand, *kalam al-lafzhi* is signs and letters that signify *kalam al-nafsi* and in that respect *kalam al-lafzhi* is external to the essence of God. Hence it is makhluq (created). Asha'ari, in this respect interprets *kalam al-lafzhi* as the words of *kalam al-nafsi*, and *kalamullah* as *ghayr makhluq* (uncreated).²⁵ Here the meaning of the signified word was turned into an act of the speaking attribute (*kalam*) and was foregrounded as unique and present with God. Therefore *kalam al-nafsi* is essentially the word of God. *Kalam al-lafzhi* on the other hand, being the signifier and carrier of meaning, is also the word of God, but in a metaphorical sense.²⁶ Sha'ari in this sense confirmed the Mu'tazilah's claim through this classification by confirming that Qur'an is something that can be written, heard and recited, and hence it is created. Because each word is readable and writable Qur'an is also characterized with a kind of consequentiality, a combination formed of different parts; as for the meaning which existed with the person (God), it is pre-eternal and existent. For as much meaning is not subject to change depending on the phrases or words. For Ash'ariah, the *kalamullah* which

indicate by literal words is *qadim* (pre-eternal) and the meaning exists with God. It is fair to conclude that Asha'ari tried to reconcile the different stances of the Mu'tazilah and ahl al-Sunnah, and followed the middle path by dividing *kalamullah* that was embraced as *kalam al-lafzhi* by the Mu'tazilah and as *kalam al-nafsi* by the ahl al-Sunnah.

Many scholars of Islam discussed the issue with assumptions that the Qur'an and its relationship to God is an attribute, that the *kalamullah* is identified with knowledge of (ilm) God, that it is sent down and is not that of human speech, that the use of derivatives of call in the dialogues between God and the prophet Jesus; and interpreted the verses within this framework and the stance that it is uncreated is supported by the methods based on verses.

However the Mu'tazilah regarded Qur'an as a text consisting of suras, verses and letters with unity among them, a text that can be written, read, heard and is a miracle of the Prophet; and for this reason, they believe that it is impossible to consider it as an attribute of God or to render it as something that exists with God (pre-eternal). Furthermore, there were efforts to prove the createdness of Qur'an through inferences from the verses and its temporality, consecutive verses, its assumed send down by God or its proclaimed *naskh* (some verses nullify by other verses) character.

The ahl al-Sunnah, who basically opposed the Mu'tazilah's standpoints, represent the school with the strongest debates on this issue. The *kalam* is defined in Abu al Ma'ali al-Juwayni in his book *al-Irshad* as follows:

Speech, which exists with the owner of it, is what the convenient referents and references signify.

According to ahl al-Sunnah, *kalamullah*—in other words, *al-kalam al-nafsi*—exists with God's nature and has a meaning which can be expressed with a verse exempt *munaz-*

zal from all deficiencies. This means that its eternal relation can be separated into different parts including prohibition (*nahy*), command (*amr*), message (*khobar*), call *nida*, and the like. The ahl al-Sunnah does not find it obstructive or oppose that *al-kalam al-lafzhi*, bearing the ordinary qualifications, i.e. those indicating its makhluq, meaning exists with God. For, the evidence or the indicators that refer to the createdness of Qur'an in fact belong to *lafz* (word) not to the meaning that exists and pre-eternal with God. Besides, the plurality of *al-kalam al-lafzhi* (Qur'an, Old Testament, Bible, etc.) does not at all indicate that the multiplicity of *al-kalam al-nafsi* existing with God himself. The plurality of the *lafz* disclosing only the distinguishable part of *kalam* does not imply the plurality of meaning, the spiritual world of *kalam*. Therefore, the *kalamullah*, which is written in the Qur'an, memorized by hearts and uttered by tongues, is *ghayr makhluq*. Because *kalamullah* is read, heard and read through *lafz* or verses signifying a *qadim* meaning.

That *kalamullah* bears this such characteristics does not denote a createdness, in other words its *muhdes* quality. Just as writing, hearing or pronouncing a sentence like "Fire has a burning effect" does not require its realness as sound, letter and system, *kalam al-nafsi* reflecting the *kalam* meaning by ahl al-Sunnah cannot be fully understood by linguistic terms.

Imam al-Nasafi, in his *Tabsirat*, describes the *kalam* definition of ahl al-Sunnah in different words to the effect of the same conclusion:

Kalamullah is an eternal attribute which bears no relation to the system of phonetic or letter codes. The *kalam* attribute exists with God and bears opposite meanings to silence; speechlessness or inability as in naivety of a child, or muteness. With this attribute, God commands, prohibits and calls; this attribute is evidenced by the expressions. Designating the expression as *kalamullah* is only because

they are indicated by *kalam* (speech). When God speaks in Arabic, they call it Qur'an; when He speaks in Syriac they call it Bible and in Hebrew, they call it Old Testament. The difference is in the expressions, not in the attribute per se.²⁷

The Salafi, as opposed to Mu'tazilah and ahl al-Sunnah, believe that it would be great illusion to abstract word from meaning when considering the realness of *kalam* and that it is absolutely necessary to conceive it holistically in order to understand *kalam*.²⁸ On the contrary, the Salafis based *kalam* as an attribute within the unity of word and meaning.²⁹ Therefore they did not consider *kalam* as it is seen by Mu'tazillah who take the issue on the basis of lafzh, and think God is exempt from all attributes or like ahl al-Sunnah who divide the *kalam* as *al-kalam al-nafsi* and *al-kalam al-lafzi*. In other words, the Salafis take *kalam* without any interpretation or ta'wil (explanation), i.e. without any deviation. From the standpoint of unitedness³⁰ of lafzh and meaning in *kalamullah*, the Salafis define *kalamullah* as one single conception or attribute³¹ within God's eternal knowledge, take an agnostic attitude towards the way divine *kalam* is spoken and its nature; and claim that the speech of God can no way be figurative or metaphoric.³² According to them, Qur'an is *kalamullah* both in word and meaning and is a divine attribute of God. Within this context, the Salafis distinctively from Mutazilah and Asharites, contend that while considering *kalam*, word and meaning must be preserved and must not be interpreted.³³ For example, the Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah remarks that the Qur'an is God's *kalam*—a whole—with all its verse, words, meaning and letters and he criticizes the stance of Asharites that who attempt to separate word and meaning. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, Gabriel heard the *kalamullah*—consisting of word and meaning—directly from God and delivered it to the Prophet Muhammad who in turn communicated it to

man.³⁴

In addition to all these, Ibn Taymiyyah relates the arguments of Salafiyya and eminent great imams of four schools and he states his opinion as the following:

The description of *kalam* has been a matter of dispute among men and some interpreted it as "a word signifying a meaning", while others read it as "the meaning signified by a word". For different camps, on the other hand, *kalam* is a conception that covers both word and meaning, whereas still others argue that *kalam*, although it may correspond with meaning or word depending on the situation, is in fact an all-encompassing concept covering both.³⁵

As it can be seen, all four schools regard *kalam* as consisting of word and meaning, yet they are in disagreement on the primacy of one over another and on the relationship between the two.

According to Salafis, *kalam* is an attribute that belongs to the speaker. Accordingly, *kalamullah* cannot be separated from its owner (speaker). In fact, God made Gabriel hear His *kalam* attribute. To the understanding of the adherents of this school, it is not appropriate to say "*kalamullah* has been separated from God's nature and been transfused to prophets". However, the statement that should be made: "He, as *kalamullah*, is *ghayr makhluq*" (Originated in Him and returns back to Him). The statement "originated in Him" means He Himself is the one who speaks; and the statement "returns to Him" means *kalamullah* cannot be devoted to mushaf (the Divine Books) or by the mind that memorizes it, i.e. the prophets.³⁶ God has spoken using the letters and meanings of Qur'an. The speech there belongs neither to Gabriel to Mohammad. Besides, the Salafi school confirms and insists on the view that Qur'an— as word and meaning—is God's *kalam* and that God has revealed the Qur'an through His speech. According to Salafiyya, *kalamullah* is pre-eternal in its genus or nature. Salafis

(the earlier religious scholars) do not say, "the word per se is pre-eternal" or "Qur'an is pre-eternal". On the contrary, Salafis asserts various accounts like "it is *kalamullah*, revealed (munazzal) or *ghayr makhluq*."³⁷

Abu Hanifa, who brought forward the opinion of ahl al-Sunnah in its original form, regarded *kalam* as essential attribute among His other attributes is qadim and that God is *mutakallim* with His essential *kalam* and the attribute is eternal itself.³⁸ It is claimed that Abu Hanifa, in the context of the issue of the createdness of Qur'an, advocates Qur'an is *makhluq*. However, the historian, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi defended Abu Hanifa and clarified him as the following:

As far as the issue of createdness of Qur'an is concerned, Abu Hanafi is said to contend that Qur'an is un-created (*ghayr-makhluq*).³⁹

Nevertheless, when Abu Yusuf (Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ibrahim Ansari) was asked about the createdness of Qur'an, he asked not to call the Qur'an with the term "created". When the same question is directed to Abu Hanifa, he replied "Qur'an is *makhluq*. Because whoever says that 'I swear on the Qur'an that I am not going to do it' swears in fact on something else than God and everything except God is *makhluq*." As stated by Abu Hilal

al-Askar, Abu Hanifa uses an analogy ("*swear on the Qur'an*") related to fiqh and makes a deduction. In other words, in Abu Hanifa's logic, everything except God is *makhluq*; and since Qur'an is something other than God, it is a *makhluq*, too.⁴⁰

Despite all of the explanations above, we see such statements in *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* which is believed to be written by Abu Hanifah:

Qur'an is revealed to the prophets as God's *kalam* which is written in the holy books, memorized in hearts and uttered by tongues. Qur'an is in the form of a *makhluq* so that we can read and pronounce it. However the Qur'an itself is *ghayr makhluq*.⁴¹

In order to resolve the paradox between his own expressions above and the statements here, we may have to disregard the claim that *Fiqh-i Akbar* is written by Abu Hanifa or what he means is the written words in Qur'an as in the analogy of "swear" above.

Imam Shafi, on the other hand, tries to be unbiased and follows the midcourse between Salafiyya and ahl al-Sunnah yet he takes a stance when it comes down to the issue of Qur'an's createdness. Imam Shafi like fuqaha and the muhaddithun, he says "Qur'an is God's *kalam* and is not a *makhluq*." As evidence, he underlines the verse stating "God

spoke to Moses.”⁴²

At this point, one can speculate that there is another reason why Imam Shafi accepts the statement “God spoke to Moses behind a veil”. Imam Shafi was objecting to the claim that “Qur’an is makhluq” as stated by Ibrahim ibn Ismail Ulayya who was a follower of Jahm ibn Safwan. The later founded and developed Jamiyyah (upon the doctrine of Ja’d ibn Dirham who first coined the phrase “createdness of Qur’an in history”).⁴³

Imam Shafi’i, who confirms the attributes ascribed to God, resorts to nass and Sunnah as the evidence and tries to prove that Qur’an is not makhluq. However, he does not attempt to make dichotomy or division as ahl-al Sunnah or other scholars did. According to him, all verses and meanings Qur’an is God’s *kalam* and to deny or reject it is infidelity (takfir); and to attempt to interpret it through various tawils is *bid’at*.

During the end of Umayyad reign, Ahmad ibn Hanbal was one of the people who was harshly oppressed and tortured in the event called Minha Event (the Inquisition of the Abassid Caliph al-Ma’mun - known as the one who issued circulars as a result of the pressure of scholars of Mu’tazillah of the time who were forced to admit that the Qur’an was created rather than uncreated). Ahmad ibn Hanbal was one of the few scholars to refuse it and advocated that all attributes of God that are stated in the Qur’an and hadiths are in the fact His attributes designating His uncreatedness.⁴⁴ Also, he regards that all of the attributes including His *kalam* attribute as pre-eternal. Since *kalam* attribute is *qadim*, and result of this idea the Qur’an is *qadim* and uncreated too.⁴⁵

It is also rumored that Ahmad ibn Hanbal was in fact silent about the issue and was reluctant to take a stance. The same rumours went on with his claim that he regarded such discussions as *bid’at* and preferred to be duly silent and said that he’d rather keep quiet

than follow those *bid’at* makers. However, Ibn Qutaybah opposes this stance based on the presumption that it is difficult for him to remain silent during a period of intense debates. It is particularly clear that this was the reason lying behind the pressures and tortures he went through during Mihna Event at Umayyah reign. Those who advocate that he was reluctant to say anything at the time, attempt to prove it by the letters he sent to Mu’tasim. The letter portrays an imam trying to be reserved about the issue. Another evidence is the following account which Ahmad ibn Hanbal brought forward:

He who says the Qur’an is makhluq, he is a Jahmi (from the Jahmiyyah). If he is Jahmi, he is kafir. And he who says the Qur’an is not makhluq, he makes *bid’at*.⁴⁶

Ibn Qutaybah rejects this account and objects this opinion. Another group, however, claims that Ahmad ibn Hanbal means that Qur’an is not a makhluq all together with the letters, expressions and meanings in it. To substantiate this, they point at his letters and other accounts delivered by Ibn Hanbal. One of the documents mentioned is the letter he sent to the Mutawakkil (the one who relies on God and therefore trustingly bears those hardships that come his way) who asks him to state his actual opinion and write a text to relieve the pain and stress arising from the issue of createdness of Qur’an.⁴⁷ He latter appears to indicate two points:

Firstly, for Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who takesides with the Salafi as his predecessors, believes that Qur’an is not created. According to him, “Qur’an is God’s *kalam* and God’s *kalam* does not indicate a createdness. Rather, it declares His command (amr). Command and createdness are thoroughly different from each other.” His inferences take their sources from the nasses⁴⁸ in Qur’an, speeches of hadiths and remarks of the companions, sahaba and tabi’un.

Secondly, the letter shows that Ibn Han-

bal disapproves in analyzing or immersing in such debates and does not want to permit them to be discussed. While he speaks on this matter, he appears extremely reluctant. His actual objective seems to prevent them from any misleading that can be caused by the debaters and to protect people against confusion.⁴⁹

It can be concluded that both sides have good arguments. When an overview is presented on Amad ibn Hanbal by putting together all of his views and sentiments, an insight can be drawn that he advocates the standpoint that highlights the Qur’an as not being created. However, he opted to remain silent due to the chaotic atmosphere and the anxiety present during that period.

Nevertheless, Amad ibn Hanbal made efforts to support his views with Qur’an verses. Takes the verse “*We have made it a Qur’an in Arabic*”⁵⁰ as example and states that it would be a great mistake to take the word/verb “made/ja’ale” in the verse as an indicator of Qur’an’s createdness. Or another verse “And they made Qur’an in parts”⁵¹, “*They made the angels female who are subjects of God the most Compassionate.*”⁵² The word “*ja’ala*” in these verses means in fact “*samma*”. However, the word “*ja’ala*” close to the “*fa’ala*” in meaning (as it should be here) can be best exemplified in the verse “*they seal ears with their fingers*”⁵³ *Yaj’aluna* means here “*fa’ala*”.⁵⁴

Amad ibn Hanbal, points out that the word *ja’ala* in the very well-known verse “*We have made it a Qur’an in Arabic*” is used in the meaning of *fa’ala* (rendered), not “create/made” as it was supposed. The word *ja’ala* in the following verses also used in the meaning of “*fa’ala*”⁵⁵ “*We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an so you people may understand*”⁵⁶ and again in “*Verily, We have made Qur’an easy, in your tongue, onto your heart in order that they may give heed,*”⁵⁷ and “*We have made Qur’an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand.*”⁵⁸

As it can be shown his way of interpreta-

tion of the verses, Amad ibn Hanbal can be said to advocate that Qur’an is not created, that, on the contrary, Qur’an is *qadim*. Yet, it should be kept in mind that, the accounts have strong arguments according to others rumors. Because Amad ibn Hanbal may actually have kept silent due to his political worries at the time and may have felt it necessary to stay away from such discussion in order not to mislead common people.

Conclusion

When we analyze the discussions focusing on *kalamullah* from the second half of 124 AH until the end of the fourth century (AH), the most substantial contentment one can reach seems to be that many of these debates had been built on fallacious propositions and grounds. One of the reasons why all these debates did not reach a conclusion is that the concepts had not been sufficiently analyzed and the attribution of false or different meanings to the same concepts under discussion. Each group or community attempted to resolve the issue within the framework of their own background, cultural structure and most importantly, their own principles. During the period of about two centuries, the common denominator of the disputes – whether verbal or written— had been the phrase of makhluq which was accepted as a presumption (by the Mu’tazillah). Therefore, the issue of the createdness of the Qur’an which disrupted the communities at the time is simply the attempts of affirmation or negation of the pseudo conclusion reached, rather than examples of an accurate sample. Almost all the discussions within this period had occurred as arguments depicting a speculative approach to support some a priori presumptions.

Although the issue of createdness of the Qur’an —as a multifaceted issue— is originated in the enigmatic nature of its relationship with revelation, it in fact demonstrates a

number of erroneous methods which in turn became the source of its insolubility. Misconfigured methods appear to be the most influential factor in the course the issue takes in time. By erroneous methods, we mean the handling the *kalamullah* issue in terms of a dichotomy of ‘makhlūq and ghayr makhlūq’, which arises from the search of meaning and assuming that each notion has ontologically severe distinctions. The defective reasoning in resolving the issue went even further and it was presumed that word (speech) is an attribute to God.

The emergences of evaluations that are seriously fallacious have a considerable effect on the deadlock of the issue under consideration. While the Qur’an issue must be handled as “what has been delivered to the Prophet Mohammad” who was the addressee of the revelation, it was considered to be an attribute to God’s and within the context of God.

Such considerations made it inevitable that *lafz* is to be separated from meaning and led to the discussion focusing on whether the *lafz* (the Qur’an we hold in our hands) is created and the believer’s contention that the Qur’an exists with God’s nature is uncreated. As a result of this differentiation the Qur’an, we actually hold in our hands has been accepted as the figurative Qur’an according to ahl al-Sunnah, especially the Asha’irah and meaning, as the attribute of God, is the actual Qur’an.

It can be concluded that the speculative analyses mentioned above have become an obstacle that prevents the truth to emerge rather than shedding light on it. Such representations which result in a problem entangled by itself are based on the notion of *mutakallim* shaped in the human mind. In this respect it can be said that set *kalam* aside from *mutakallim*, it makes meaningless the meaning of *mutakallim*. When ahl al-Sunnah and Salafis, supporters of such views, accept the Qur’an

as *kalamullah* pre-eternal with His nature, they agree that the concept of *mutakallim* has its roots in the human mind. Mu’tazilah on the other hand, believes that *kalamullah* must be thought separately from it, since the *kalamullah* is only the object of revelation. However, while ahl al-Sunnah regards *kalamullah* within the context of the meaning and the *lafz* together, the Mu’tazilah took it only on the grounds of *lafz* and makes an erroneous inference on this attribute and its product (the Qur’an) within the relationship of the nature of God and the principles of Tawhid. Attempting to justify their approach, the Mu’tazilah focus on the belief that the *kalam* (described as the source of the true path (*hidayah*) of God, creator of everything) was revealed to the prophet. That the world is taken as an attribute negates the revelation.

Within the framework of linguistic explanations employing the *kalam-al lafzi* and *kalam-al nafsi*—the key concepts of the issue of uncreatedness of Qur’an—demonstrating the two facets of the same concept, we can make the following conclusions:

The *kalam-al nafsi* that is perceived by ahl al-Sunnah and Imam al Ghazali as the way of mind allowing speech to be delivered to human beings is as defective as Mu’tazilah’s description of the problem thoroughly on lexical (*lafz*) terms, totally ignoring the meaning. As a matter of fact, it is therefore impossible to solve the issue of createdness of the Qur’an unless the issue is analyzed on the basis of the unity of speech and meaning. Furthermore, ahl al-Sunnah is committing a logical fallacy, if not thoroughly inconsistent, when they take the issue on the grounds of thinking the ability on human beings just as the Mu’tazilah considers the issue as lexical-oriented only to deny the truth. On the other hand, Ghazali’s explanation that the words mean *nahy*, *Khobar* and the alike, are *qadim* with God. Yet later this is also problematic. Now that we are not able to comprehend the

opinion of ahl-al Sunnah only expresses an instant speculation in human minds. In this design, words are accompanied with meanings. And speech exists after this act. To define God’s *kalam* on the basis of mind and human thoughts is both logically and ontologically fallacious.

*“The Qur’an is kalamullah, revealed and not created, good and bad both come from Him...” (Mosul, 200/815)*⁵⁹

ENDNOTES

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- ² *Ibid.*, p. 6, 7.
- ³ Juwayni, *al-Irshad*, tah. M.Y. Musa, Cairo, 1959, p. 104.
- ⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *ar-Rasail*, 1349, III, p. 60.
- ⁵ Abd Al-Jabbar ibn Amad, *ibid.*, p. 48, 58.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* p. 48.
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- ⁹ Abd Al-Jabbar ibn Amad, *Sharh al-Usul-i Khamsa*, Abdulkarim Osman, Cairo: Maktaba Vahba, 1996, p. 539.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 541-42.
- ¹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *ibid.*, III, p. 22, 24.
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- ¹⁴ Qasimi, Jamaladdin, *Tariq al-Jamiyya wa al-Mutazila*, Egypt, n.d., p. 52; Subqi, Tajuddin Abu Nasr Abd al-Wahhab, *Tabaqat-Shafi’iyya*, Egypt, 1324, p. 215; Amed Emin, *Dua al-islam*, Bairut, 1933, p. 198.
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- ¹⁶ Mubarak ibn al-Athir, *Jami al-Usul* 5 in *Kitab al-Qadr*, 1903, p. 196.
- ¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *ibid.*, v. III, p. 120-132.
- ¹⁸ Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, p. 86.
- ¹⁹ Mubarak ibn al-Athir, *ibid.*, p. 329.
- ²⁰ Ahmed Emin, *ibid.*, p. 163.
- ²¹ Ahmed Emin, *ibid.*, p. 147.
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- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ²⁴ Ahmed Emin, *ibid.*, p. 163.
- ²⁵ Al-Jazari, Abdurahman *Tawzihu al-akaid fi Ilmi al-*

tawid, Matba’a al-hadara’tu al-Sharkiyya, 1932, p. 119-120.

- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119-120.
- ²⁷ Nasafi, Abu al-Muin, p. 349-50.
- ²⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *ar-Rasail*, v.III, p.76.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.76.
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- ³³ Abd Al-Jabbar ibn Amad, *al-Muit bi al-Taklif*, tah.Omar al-Sayyid Azmi, ed. Amad Fuad al-vani, Egypt Egypt, n.d., p. 308.
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- ³⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Ilahi Hitabn Tabiati*, trans. By: Mehmet Maşal, Kitabiyat Yay., Ank., 2001, p. 333.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.
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- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132-36.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138-39; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Radd ala al-Zanadiqah wa al-Jahmiyyah*, p. 26.
- ⁴⁹ Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Amed ibn Hanbal*, p. 133.
- ⁵⁰ 15/91.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
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- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 362.
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SHIFTING DISCOURSES: AMERICAN EVANGELICALS ON ISLAM BEFORE AND AFTER 9/11

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In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, several American evangelical leaders publically expressed disparaging remarks against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Pat Robertson of the 700 Club identified Islam as “a Christian heresy” “motivated by demonic power,” and described the Prophet Muhammad as “an absolute wild-eyed fanatic ... a robber and a brigand.”¹ Franklin Graham, son of and successor to prominent evangelist Billy Graham, referred to Islam as a “very evil and wicked religion.” The late Jerry Falwell said that “Muhammad was a terrorist.” And former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Jerry Vines, called Muhammad “a demon-possessed pedophile.”² These statements, while they are particularly notable because of their inflammatory character, are connected to a wider base of negative views of Islam among American evangelical leaders. A 2003 poll sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Beliefnet and the Pew Charitable Trusts indicated that 77 percent of evangelical leaders had an unfavorable view of Islam and 70 percent agreed to the statement “Islam is a religion of violence.”³



Throughout the decade since 9/11, evangelical concerns with Islam have grown substantially and the dominant discourse has become one of confrontation and suspicion. A more recent 2011 Pew report found that 60% of white American evangelicals surveyed believe that Islam is more likely to encourage violence than other religions.⁴ Considering the many facets of this discourse of confrontation reveals a conflation of theological and political identity markers among evangelical Christians.⁵ These opinions of Islam were not simply formed on the spot after the attacks of 9/11: they come out of preexisting evangelical views on Islam—views that have deep roots in the long history of interaction between Christians and Muslims across the globe and which developed significantly among evangelicals in decades before 9/11. Thus, in treating dominant American evangelical views on Islam, I aim to consider the types of evangelical discourse on Islam before 9/11, the changes in discourse post-9/11, and the correspondence of these more recent phenomena to the earliest encounters of Christians with Muslims.⁶ I will begin with a particular example of this broader shift within the evangelical discourse on Islam that serves as a pertinent launching point into the broader phenomenon I aim to address. I will then go on to outline four typical views of Islam among

evangelicals in the later half of the twentieth century and leading up to 9/11 before finally drawing comparisons with early encounters between Christians and Muslims.

Don Richardson's *Secrets of the Koran*⁷

In 2003, Don Richardson wrote a book on Islam called *Secrets of the Koran: Revealing Insights into Islam's Holy Book*. Richardson is best known, however, not as a commentator on Islam but as an evangelical missionary. Through his missionary work with the Sawi people of West Papua Indonesia, Richardson developed a principle he calls “redemptive analogy.” He describes the principle as “the application to local custom of spiritual truth,” explaining that God had already provided for the evangelization of [the Sawi] people by means of redemptive analogies in their own culture. These analogies were our stepping stones, the secret entryway by which the gospel came to the Sawi culture and started both a spiritual and social revolution from within.⁸

Richardson became a best-selling author telling the story of the Sawi concept of a “Peace Child” in a book of the same name. In it, he describes how that concept resonates with the Christian concept of God offering his own son for the salvation of humanity. Elsewhere, Rich-

ardson applies the redemptive analogy principle to other peoples using their own cultural resources. These include Christian interpretations of Chinese pictographs and the Indian Vedas.⁹

In explaining his work in *Secrets of the Koran*, Richardson describes turning his attention toward Islam as he began to encounter more and more Muslims in Indonesia:

I approached the Koran after 9/11, and I began to study it intensively to see if the redemptive analogy approach could work for Christians to approach Muslims winsomely. But I found that everything that a Christian would use of redemptive analogy to lead a person to God was already redefined in the Koran by Muhammad in a way that made the redemptive analogy approach not work.¹⁰

The result of his textual study is his finding that Islam is “the great exception”¹¹ to his redemptive analogy thesis because “Islam is unique among non-Christian religions. It stands alone as the only belief system that, due to its very design, *frustrates* anyone who seeks to use the redemptive analogy approach.”¹² Thus we see in Richardson’s most recent work a distinct change in tactics from bridge building to criticism. This shift is evidenced in what he says about his approach to Islam: “Feeling somewhat like an attorney quizzing an uncooperative witness, I have opted to approach this inquiry through the lens of interrogation.”¹³

The overall message of Richardson’s work is to emphasize the violent nature of the Qur’anic text, then to draw a straight line between his forensic textual interpretation and contemporary Islam. In doing so, Richardson exemplifies a trend away from a contextualized encounter with Islam toward a discourse of investigative criticism and attack—a trend that I will now explore in more detail.

Contemporary Evangelicals and Islam Before 9/11

The Contextualized Missions Approach

Most of the literature that evangelicals produced on Islam in the decades before 9/11 is of what might be called a “missions genre.” This mode of engaging with Islam was part of a much larger global imperative to spread the Christian gospel and seek converts through missionary activity around the world. On this type of literature, Richard Cimino notes:

By the closing decades of the 20th century, most of the evangelical literature on the relationship between Muslims and evangelicals took place within the context of missions and world evangelization. There was little written on the encounter between American evangelicals and Muslims outside of the need to develop strategies and other resources to bring the Christian message to Muslims on the mission field.¹⁴

Within this context, those whose focus was on reaching Muslim areas tended to favor culturally contextual approaches to communicating Christianity to Muslims that deemphasized the cultural particulars of the missionaries' western contexts and attempted to avoid the perception of evangelization as a part of long-standing political and cultural imperialism. Historian Thomas Kidd describes this context-focused phenomenon noting, "Among evangelical missionaries, all signs pointed to efforts to abandon cultural baggage that missionaries might have formerly imposed on converts."¹⁵ This method resonates with Don Richardson's early work in searching for and working with "redemptive analogies" as described above. To these missionaries and the organizations that sent them abroad, Muslim countries (particularly in the Middle East) were "unreached" places where the presence of other Christian churches made little difference to the need to evangelize local populations. In fact, evangelistic efforts often extended to trying to "convert" Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians along with Muslims.

In this effort to distance Christian evangelistic mission from imperial conquest, experts disagreed on the specifics of which cultural practices converts could maintain and which needed to be abandoned. There were, for example, debates over the necessity of public baptism and the appropriateness of continued participation in Muslim prayer and congregational mosque gatherings. In spite of these debates, the overarching focus of the contextualized missions approach was on spiritual conversion rather than cultural conversion, and on making Christian discipleship as accessible and acceptable to Muslims as possible.

The Spiritual Warfare Approach

Out of these earlier foundations of the Protestant global missions movement came a more refined approach focused on a part of the world called the "10/40 window," and with it a change in how many evangelicals understood Islam. The 10/40 window marks the geographic area of the globe between 10 degrees and 40

degrees of latitude north of the equator—an area identified as being the least reached by the Christian gospel. Areas within this window include North Africa, the Middle East as well as South and South East Asia—all areas in which Muslims are a majority or a significant minority.¹⁶

Along with this particular geographic focus came a new explanation for why this area presented such a significant challenge to Christian missions. The greatest obstacle was not the human cultural factor but opposition within the spiritual realm. This view of the Muslim world became particularly popular among some charismatic evangelicals and Pentecostals who embrace the idea that evangelism is largely about "spiritual warfare" by which Christians can confront obstacles to the spread of Christianity within the spiritual realm through prayer and other forms of spiritual warfare.¹⁷ In this view Islam, as a religion, is literally "demonized" because proponents identify demonic and satanic forces as what reinforces Islam. This interpretation extends into the past, as Muhammad is understood as having been under the influence of demonic powers that oppose God. It also relates to the present political landscape within the 10/40 window as evidenced by the views of spiritual warfare advocate George Otis Jr., who contended that "two powerful demonic forces, with great biblical significance, stand at the epicenter of the unreached world—the prince of Persia (Iran) and the spirit of Babylon (Iraq)."¹⁸ Since spiritual warfare proponents understand both religious and political institutions as subject to demonic possession, this approach to understanding Islam has theological as well as political implications.

The Eschatological Approach

The eschatological approach to understanding Islam takes the above-described political implications of demonizing Islam further to implicate Muslims as enemies of God within predictions and warning about the imminent "last days" of the earth. Dispensationalist premillennialist biblical prophecy movements, which anticipate the impending rapture, re-

turn of Christ and the end of the world, typically look to current events and contemporary political realities and interpret them in light of apocalyptic literature in the Bible. Central to this approach is the importance of Israel.¹⁹ Since the nation of Israel is central to a dispensationalist understanding of history, as an ostensible enemy of Israel, Islam becomes an enemy of God aligned with Satan in the cataclysmic struggle of the earth's last days. Beginning with the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the later decline and eventual break up of the Soviet Union, dispensationalists began to turn their attention away from communist world powers and towards Islam as a central player in end-times biblical prophecy. As Kidd puts it, "Soviet hostility to Israel remained a key feature of [the end-times] scenario, but Muslim anger and oil power were becoming ever-more essential to the prophesied attack on Israel."²⁰

Within this eschatological understanding of Islam, the focus shifts from spreading the gospel in the Muslim world to presenting Islam as an enemy of God. Dispensational theology "tended to paint Muslims, especially Arab Muslims, as being on the wrong side of the global eschatological conflict."²¹ With the enmity between God and Islam seen as irreconcilable and a clash between Islam and Israel inevitable, the mode of interaction within this approach shifts from conversion to confrontation. While there is some potential for individual Muslims to join God's side in the final struggle by becoming Christians, Islam as a whole is on an unavoidable collision course with God and Israel.²²

The Apologetic Approach

The fourth typical approach to Islam among evangelical Christians prior to 9/11 is the apologetic approach. The apologetic movement within evangelical Christianity produces works defending Christian beliefs against critics and competing worldviews—both religious and secular. In considering the appearance of Islam as one of these competing worldviews against which Christian apologists argue, Cimino points to an increase of Islam's visibility to American Christians: "Since apologetic

books are usually aimed at the ordinary layperson in their everyday encounters with those of other faiths, the need for this literature was not especially pressing prior to Islam's greater visibility and growth in the 1990s."²³ The focus of popular defenses of Christianity tends to be on particularly relevant challengers to the faith. Before Islam became a concern in the 1980s and 90s, the attention of evangelical apologists was largely on the sorts of challenges presented by new religious movements like Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses and New Age spirituality, but also on liberal Christianity, secularism, humanism and atheism.

An example of a Christian apologetic work on Islam that appeared before 9/11 is the book *Answering Islam* by Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb. For its authors, such a book is necessary because, "Since both orthodox Islam and Christianity claim to be the true religion, it is incumbent upon thinking persons to examine carefully the evidence offered by both and to make their own decision in view of the evidence."²⁴ Originally published in 1993, this book exemplifies the genre leading up to 9/11 in several ways. First, much of the book is dedicated to educating about Islam (from a Christian perspective). This was necessary because, at that time, most evangelicals knew very little about Islam. Second, *Answering Islam* offers a "view from within" as one of its authors is a former Muslim who converted to Christianity.²⁵ By presenting Islam from the point of view of a convert, such Christian apologies aim to equip Christians to use their arguments and strategies for evangelizing Muslims they know personally. Finally, this book affirms Muslims as fellow monotheists sharing a certain theological foundation with Christians and Jews. This affirmation is not the case with all evangelical Christian apologies aimed at Islam prior to 9/11. Some such works are more confrontational, focusing on Islam's violent and evil nature, in many ways prefiguring the general move in that direction with post-9/11 literature on Islam.²⁶

American Evangelicalism Post-9/11

The categories described above are not

necessarily neat divisions separating distinct schools of thought. They represent typical responses to Islam before 9/11 and, it is worth noting, significant overlap existed between these types of discourse. But after 9/11, with the dramatic increase in evangelical attention to Islam, the boundaries between these types of discourse became significantly blurred. Elements of several and all of these tendencies are visible in many works post-9/11. At the same time, certain themes became central to the new discourse while others were largely excluded.

The tension that existed between the contextualized approach to Islam advocated by Christian missionaries to Muslim countries and the general attack on Islam by those who saw it as either a spiritual stronghold of Satan and/or an enemy of God and Israel in last-days scenarios all but disappeared post-9/11. Some missionaries working in Muslims countries voiced concern over the public attacks on Islam by evangelical leaders and some evangelical books treating Christian relations with Islam have continued to affirm shared beliefs aimed at dialogue. But these voices, which were once much more prominent parts of the overall discourse on Islam, have been drastically outnumbered by a more confrontational mode of discourse. 9/11 marks the emergence of an attacking approach as the hallmark of evangelical encounter with Islam. Kidd notes:

Given the historical background of American Christian views of Islam, it comes as no surprise that the horrifying events of September 11 generated fresh speculations among Americans about the “real” nature of the Muslim faith, the prospects for Muslim conversions, the ancient roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the place of Muslims in last-days scenarios.²⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush, himself an evangelical Christian, made a distinction between Islam, which he called “a religion of peace,” and the terrorists who had attacked America. The general tone within the torrent of evangelical voices commenting on Islam was much less willing to accept this distinction. The prevailing opinion among evangelicals with respect to Islam was that—far from being a radical perversion of the religion—violence and terror were at its very core. Thus, books in this new wave of attack on Islam, like Richardson’s *Secrets of the Koran*, seek to prove conclusively that the natural and logical outworking of the Muslim faith is violence and oppression. They see the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad as not only potentially allowing for violence but as requiring it. Elements of earlier discourses attributing satanic influence to the origins of Islam became prominent themes as is evidenced in the public comments made by Robertson, Graham and others described above.

No longer necessarily connected to spiritual warfare, global missions or eschatological themes, the characterization of Islam as inherently violent and demonic became a theme unto itself, so much so that this theme has directly eclipsed earlier, less slanderous discourse on Islam. For example, sales of Geisler and Saleeb’s *Answering Islam* soared in the months following 9/11, which led to the release of a second edition. This second edition contained much of the same content as the first edition, but added a section called “Islam and Violence” that concludes:

Violence in Islam, whether in the form of terrorism, or the persecution of Christians and other minorities in the Muslim world, or capital punishment for an individual who turns away from Islam, or death threats on Salman Rushdie for allegedly insulting the prophet Muhammad, are not simply some isolated incidents or aberrations from the true and peaceful religion of Islam. Such violence in fact goes to the very roots of Islam as found in the Qur’an and the actions and teachings of the prophet of Islam himself.²⁸

This edition also reframes its introduction to the material it treats. Where the first edition called for the reader to “examine carefully the evidence...and to make their own decision,” the introduction to the second edition states: “[in light of 9/11] non-Muslims suddenly real-

ize that the religion of Islam, as embraced by millions of radical Muslims, has become a real threat, not only to Christianity but to freedom of religion in general and to our very way of life as Americans.”²⁹

In closing the section on Islam and violence, the authors also state: “We are not engaging in old Christian-Muslim polemics when we point out the prevalence of violence throughout the foundations and thus subsequent history of Islam.”³⁰ The implication is that a totalizing description of Islam as inherently and necessarily violent is not controversial—rather it is a plain fact. From the noteworthy denial that this type of discourse is not in line with “old polemics,” I will turn to considering some of the earliest Christian encounters with and positions on Islam in order to draw comparisons with the recent evangelical discourse. And, contrary to Geisler and Saleeb’s qualification, I consider the recent mode of evangelical discourse on Islam to have clearly discernible roots in these earliest encounters.

Parallels with Early Christian Encounters

While Islam and the Qur’an in many ways incorporate previous knowledge of and familiarity with Christian scriptures, Christians outside of Arabia had very little experience with Islam before it began spreading through the

Middle East and North Africa in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Even then, knowledge of Islam and the beliefs and practices of Muslims came slowly to Christendom, beginning with the Christian communities in areas encompassed by the expansion of Islam. Hugh Goddard, in his work *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, points out that the Christian world at the time of the rise of Islam was already deeply divided both theologically and politically.³¹ Divisions within the church between Western Roman and Eastern Byzantine authorities were complicated by splits resulting from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE with Eastern bishops taking sides either in support of or opposition to the Pope's position and the decisions of the council. Christians who rejected Chalcedon were persecuted by those who upheld it, thus creating political divisions out of theological divisions.

It was into this divided Christian world that Islam emerged and it was in this context that various Christian understandings of Islam were formulated and proliferated. Goddard identifies three major views on Islam during that early period of encounter. First is the early notion that the success and the spread of Islam could be attributed to God blessing the descendents of Abraham through Ishmael. Proponents of this view were sympathetic to Mus-

lims as fellow monotheists and commended the Prophet Muhammad for introducing the Arabs to the God of Abraham. This view resonates with certain evangelical positions (more accepted before 9/11) that sought common ground with Islam as a monotheistic faith with several points of contact with Christian and Jewish scriptures. Goddard notes, however, that this early interpretation of Islam "was fairly quickly subjected to a number of challenges, as it began to become clear that the Islamic community was not only convinced that its coming was part of God's will, but also saw itself as having a mission to be a kind of corrective to or even fulfillment of, the message of the Christian community."³² This realization came as Islam spread further into Christian territory. With this we see, much like with post-9/11 evangelical views on Islam, a move toward a confrontational approach as Islam is increasingly perceived as both a political and theological threat.

A second early view of Islam came from non-Chalcedonian Christians who interpreted the spread of Islam as God's judgment on their erring theological opponents within the Christian world. Here one is reminded of comments after 9/11 made by many of the same evangelical leaders quoted above. While criticizing Islam, Falwell and others also blamed the attacks of 9/11 on what they saw as America turning



away from its moral foundations as an idealized Christian nation. Aside from theological notions of divine retribution against Christian society, there is a political element to this view of Islam as Christians blame their leaders for their lack of faithfulness and prescribe a return to a more Godly political system. Non-Chalcedonians, having experienced persecution from Chalcedon affirming Christians, saw the presence of Islam as liberating them from oppressive church authorities much as some contemporary evangelicals understand 9/11 as a judgment from God for America's iniquities.

Finally, Goddard describes a third view of Islam that originated with John of Damascus. Raised in Christian family in Muslim Damascus in the seventh century, John acquired a significant first-hand knowledge of Islam through his education and his work for the Caliph as a high-ranking official. John alleged that the Prophet Muhammad came across the Old and New Testaments and, with the help of an Arian monk, created his own heresy. He described Islam as "a deceptive superstition of the Ishmaelites" and "the fore-runner of the Antichrist."³³ This position is similar to Pat Robertson's com-

ments about Islam being a heresy. It also resonates with Don Richardson's conclusion that bridge building with Islam is impossible because the Prophet Muhammad directly challenged so many essential Christian doctrines.

Based on his life-long experience with Islam and his understanding of Muslims as Christian heretics, John of Damascus wrote a work entitled *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* (*The Disputation of a Muslim and a Christian*). Goddard suggests that this work was "intended no so much as a theological evaluation of Islam but rather as a kind of manual of guidance for Christians who find themselves entering into theological discussion with Muslims."³⁴ This genre of discourse that came out John's experiences remains an important part of contemporary evangelical opposition Islam. As noted above, contemporary evangelical apologies tend to be popular works intended to equip believers with material with which to confront challenges to orthodox Christian faith. Evangelical apologists frequently use debates as contexts in which to articulate a Christian worldview and defend it against challengers. John's hypothetical debate between a Christian and a Muslim

has contemporary counterparts in the field of evangelical Christian defenses against Islam. In 2006, evangelical apologist Michael Licona authored a fictional debate between the Apostle Paul and the Prophet Muhammad called *Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection*.³⁵ Like John's debate, Licona bases his work on his experiences and interactions with Muslims and his reading and interpretation of Islam's textual sources. And also like John of Damascus, the words of the Muslim participant are actually those of the Christian author, and the target audience of the debate is Christian.³⁶

Conclusion

I have shown how the internal dialogue within American evangelical Christianity began to shift toward a mode of attack and confrontation even before 9/11. In the wake of 9/11, evangelicals of previously distinguishable positions on Islam began using common tropes and themes in what appears to be a unified assault on Islam. These themes include broad generalizations about Islam, as a unified whole, being rooted in violence. Explicitly and implicitly denying the possibility that God could have revealed the Qur'an, challenges are largely aimed at the character of the Prophet Muhammad. Charges of pedophilia, demonic possession and an obsession with violent rule are pervasive in

the evangelical literature on Islam after 9/11.

I have also shown that we find in the earliest Christian encounters with Islam, patterns that resonate with the contemporary evangelical reactions against Islam. This is not to insist that there are direct or deliberate connections between contemporary evangelical treatments of Islam and earlier encounters. It is, however, significant to note that the patterns that exist in evangelical discourse find precedent in these earliest Christian views of Islam. Perhaps the most important point to take from this comparison is not the commonalities in content, rather the extent to which particular political circumstances tend to combine with theological concerns to give very specific and discernible contexts for the encounter of Christians and Muslims.

In his account of American Christian interactions with Islam, Kidd suggests that "American Christians' views on Islam divulge more about American Christians than about any actual Muslims."³⁷ The fact that many of the loudest evangelical voices that have spoken out against Islam are not at all experts on Islam lends support to this suggestion. Studying the evangelical discourse on Islam since 9/11 does not provide either an adequately comprehensive or contextualized view of Islam. It does, however, provide us with insights into the theological and political contexts of evangelicals—particularly in the United States. While

it is beyond the scope of this essay, the extent to which theology and politics are mixed in evangelical treatments of Islam demands further consideration.

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said suggests that we must ask questions about what advantage is being sought in taking on the topic of Islam—what motivations are at work?³⁸ When we look closely at the history of evangelical discourse on Islam and see themes common to other Christian encounters with Muslims dating back to the earliest meetings of these two faiths, we should be motivated to dig deeper into these complex relationships. The American evangelical context for discourse on Islam, not being simply a theological endeavor, involves cultural and political factors that merit further consideration. As American evangelicals continue to formulate theological and politically informed conclusions about Islam and as these conclusions are manifest in the public sphere—ranging from Qur'an burnings to opposing mosque constructions—this issue will be increasingly important to Muslim-Christian relations in the United States and around the world. This essay represents a first step in acknowledging the interconnected roles that theology and politics play in evangelical discourses on Islam and the apparent fact that there exists among evangelicals a conflation of Christian identity with American (or perhaps “Western”) identity to the exclusion of Islam.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See: <http://mediamatters.org/research/200603140008>; <http://mediamatters.org/clips/200605240010>; and <http://www.counterpunch.org/wazwaz1010.html>.
- ² Quoted in: Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 145, 147.
- ³ Cited in Richard Cimino, “No God in Common: American Evangelical Discourse on Islam After 9/11,” *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 2 (2005): 163.
- ⁴ “Continuing Divide in Views on Islam and Violence,” Pew Research Center, accessed 20 July 2011; Available from <http://people-press.org/2011/03/09/continuing-divide-in-views-of-islam-and-violence/>.
- ⁵ The previously cited poll also found that 66% of Conservative Republicans and 67% of those who “agree with the Tea Party movement” see Islam as more likely to encourage violence. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to consider in depth the extent to which evangelical theology intersects with political identity and ideology for those who hold a negative and confrontational view of Islam, it should be understood from the outset that the complexity of this intersection of factors is noteworthy.
- ⁶ While the focus of this essay is on the growing tendency among American evangelicals to view Islam with suspicion, it should of course be noted that within the global evangelical Christian context, alternative approaches to Islam exist that emphasize mutual understanding, peacebuilding, cooperation, etc. The diversity of opinion on Islam among evangelicals worldwide is of interest but, again, beyond the scope of this treatment of the dominant American evangelical discourse.
- ⁷ A note on spelling of Arabic words: Several works that I reference throughout this essay use less common transliterations of Arabic words—for example, *Koran* for Qur'an and *Mohammad* for Muhammad. I will leave intact whatever form authors use in their own writings, but

for my own usage I will employ the most widely accepted transliterations.

- ⁸ Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2003), 9.
- ⁹ See: Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984).
- ¹⁰ Don Richardson, interviewed by Dick Staub, *Christianity Today*, (February 2003); Available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/februaryweb-only/2-10-22.0.html>.
- ¹¹ Don Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 17.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 18.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ¹⁴ Richard Cimino, “New Boundaries – Evangelicals and Islam After 9/11,” *Religion Watch* (January 2006): 5. Accessed 6 May 2009; Available from <http://www.religion-watch.com/doc/2005-Cimino-Evangelicals-Islam.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 123.
- ¹⁶ See: Luis Bush and Beverly Pegues, *The Move of the Holy Spirit in the 10/40 Window* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1999).
- ¹⁷ See: C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996).
- ¹⁸ George Otis Jr., *Strongholds of the 10/40 Window* (Seattle, 1995), 109, Quoted in: Kidd, 128.
- ¹⁹ See: Richard Cimino, “No God in Common: American Evangelical Discourse on Islam After 9/11,” *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 2 (2005): 167.
- ²⁰ Kidd, 137.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²² While it is beyond the scope of this essay, it is interesting to note the connection here to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis.

- ²³ Cimino, *No God In Common*, 165.
- ²⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 12.
- ²⁵ Abdul Saleeb is a pseudonym used by the book's second author in order to protect his identity.
- ²⁶ Cimino, *No God in Common*, 165.
- ²⁷ Kidd, 143.
- ²⁸ Geisler and Saleeb, 323.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 329.
- ³¹ Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Chicago: New Amsterdam, 2000), 14.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 36.
- ³³ John of Damascus. Quoted in: Goddard, 39.
- ³⁴ Goddard, 41.
- ³⁵ See: Michael R. Licona, *Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).
- ³⁶ Evangelical apologist Ravi Zacharias wrote another similarly themed fictional debate, titled *The Prince and the Prophet: Jesus Talks with Mohammad*, in 2004. Though it is completed and widely listed among the author's works, the book was not published and is only scheduled to be released posthumously.
- ³⁷ Kidd, xii.
- ³⁸ See: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 5.

ISLAM AND SOCIAL ACTION:

A REVIEW ON FARID ESACK'S ON BEING A MUSLIM

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Introduction

Farid Esack, a South African Muslim of Pakistani heritage, presents a modern version of the Muslim faith throughout his book titled *On Being a Muslim*. As it becomes evident during the course of the text, the author's life experiences have contributed significantly to the interpretation set forth. Specifically, Esack recalls on numerous occasions his time spent living under the racist South African regime, as well as his international travels. Interweaving personal anecdotes with general discussions of theology, the text seeks to offer a progressive representation of Islam that embraces tradition yet makes it relevant to modern issues. Over the span of seven chapters Esack outlines, in a relatively concise manner, the most pressing of these problems confronting modern Muslims around the world. What is interesting about the book's arrangement is that each of chapter builds upon the concepts analyzed previously, working from inward to external renewal. I would argue that the organization of the text in such a manner contributes to the author's central focus.

Throughout his writing, Esack repeatedly addresses the concept of *tawhid*, or monotheism, in Islam. More precisely,

Belief in the existence and unity of Allah, the Transcendent, is central to the life of a Muslim and the Qur'an places much emphasis on cultivating a relationship with Allah as a living and caring God to whom all humankind will return and to whom we all accountable.¹

Therefore, according to the author, this tenet should be interpreted in a broader sense than is traditionally acknowledged by the Muslim *umma*, or community. In the book's preface Esack contextualizes his attempts to introduce an alternative to what he refers to as "dehumanizing fundamentalism and fossilized tradition-

alism," which serves as a middle path.² In order to facilitate its development among Muslims, it is necessary to reinterpret all aspects of the religion, ranging from the Qur'an to cultural practices. With that said, I will examine Farid Esack's argument for *tawhid* as being the central concept of Islam. Additionally, I will discuss the ways in which this tenet has facilitated the emergence of new Muslim identities and practices that encourage individuals to be socially engaged in modern societies.

The Comprehensiveness of Tawhid

Introduced briefly above, the centrality

of *tawhid* in Islam has and continues to be an important article of faith for individuals practicing the religion. Although the concept typically is translated as “monotheism” by scholars, Esack argues in favor of a more comprehensive definition. The author, by emphasizing the idea of unity as part of *tawhid*, establishes a theological foundation for his subsequent arguments. Much of Esack’s initial presentation of this idea derives from his first chapter titled “On Being with Allah,” which helps in showing its connection with other, worldlier topics. Attempting to convey to his audience the sense of bewilderment and anxiety that stems from contemplating *tawhid*, Esack relates an anecdote from *hajj*, or the pilgrimage to Mecca. He begins by stating plainly his feelings before leaving South Africa:

I approached Mecca with a mixture of feelings. Social conditioning; the many tales of experiences of ‘hearts overflowing’ told by returning pilgrims compelling me to just ‘feel the greatness of the moment;’ my secular disposition militating against this and beckoning me to be calm; the *nafs al-lawwamah* (berating self) mockingly chiding: ‘Are you not ashamed of defiling the sacred soil of Mecca with your footprints?’³

This quote provides not only an excellent summary of the inner turmoil Esack experiences because of this particular situation, but also addresses a more universal theme: the desire for a close relationship with God.

In particular, as the author continues his narration, he mentions on several occasions that he had come to view God as being indifferent to both personal and global suffering. For example, when visiting the Ka’bah in hopes of God presenting him with a clear consciousness, “the silence that greeted me was deafening in its loudness. There was no glimmer of the emergence of a new being consumed by the flame. I sat there, drained and frightened,” offers Esack.⁴ From this comment it becomes evident that the author seeks to expose a disconnect between individuals’ desires and what God presents to them. Although the benefits of the *hajj* did not manifest immediately and left Esack deeply shaken spiritually to the point of requiring friends to ensure physical survival, several remarkable incidents occurred eventually. The most significant of these events included the establishment of a social activist group named the Call of Islam, which provided individuals with a Muslim organization committed to ending South African racism and sexism.⁵

Progressing from this initial belief, the chapter also comments extensively on the inter-relatedness of God and His creation. To deviate from use of *On Being a Muslim*, I wish to present personal experiences from my time residing in Cairo, seeing as they pertain to the author’s sentiments. Prior to leaving the United States, my encounters with Islam had been meetings with pious individuals, who were predominately white converts to the religion. From these interactions I had crafted the mental image of Islam as a tranquil, moral, and welcoming faith, but quickly found the opposite while abroad. This is not to say that all Egyptian Muslims lacked in their piety or loyalty to Islam; I was afforded the opportunity to share an apartment with three Egyptian students who taught me a great deal. Rather, as Esack acknowledges in his writing, I observed what I consider “cultural Islam,” specifically the social rituals that have developed over the centuries and attached themselves to the religion. An example of this quality that I encountered repeatedly was the inclusion of specific Arabic phrases, like *ma’shallah* (God is pleased) or *al-hamduia’Allah* (if God wills), in everyday conversations without much thought. It appeared that my Egyptian and other Arab friends employed this language only because it was something that had been instilled as proper social custom during childhood.

Furthermore, outside of the university setting while navigating the clogged Cairene streets, I met a number of Muslims in the city’s bazaars and neighborhoods. Similar to the ideological fall-out documented by Esack during his *hajj* as a result of the apparent absence of God, my adventures in Cairo’s Khan al-Khalili drove me towards unsavory opinions of Islam. Situated near the city’s holiest Muslim sites, in-

cluding al-Azhar University and mosque, this open-air market served as Cairo’s economic center through the mid-twentieth century. In recent decades with the rise of global tourism, however, the area resembles an American mall more than a traditional Middle Eastern bazaar, with merchants beckoning individuals “to have a look, my friend.” Despite my high tolerance for haggling, thanks to obnoxious boardwalk merchants back home, I found myself growing sick each time I visited the Khan, which made my trips as quick as possible. I believe this response and others like it stem from the unrealistic conception of Muslims that I fabricated prior to living in Cairo. While these experiences debased my idealism, I, like Esack, sought out the consolation of pious friends who I owe much of my current perceptions of *al-din* (Arabic for “religion”).

Whereas other students investigating Islam in Egypt gradually became critical and at times, openly hostile, towards Muslims, my “spiritual consciousness” drifted in the other direction. Unfortunately, I cannot provide a single moment where this revelation occurred; rather it developed through a series of conversations and relationships. The first of these resulted from living with three Egyptian students, one of which I cite as embodying piety. This roommate, named Abd al-Hamid, and I frequently sat up for hours and discussed various questions concerning Islam, such as the nature of God, morality. Amidst the confusion that sometimes arose because of language differences, it was evident that each of us sought intimacy with God and recognized the inherent conflicts with peers that would arise periodically. Another relationship that contributed to a simultaneously inward and outward approach



to Islam, like the one advocated by the author, stems from talks with a female graduate student. The details of how we exactly met, I am unable to recall presently, but nonetheless, our exchanges encouraged me to meld my social activist impulses with Muslim theology. Ethar, a twenty-two year old Egyptian female, attended the university in hopes of obtaining a master's degree in journalism, specifically focusing upon the portrayal of Muslim females in the country's media. Over the course of the semester, Ethar and I would forgo class in order to engage in these discussions that ranged in a topics from the Five Pillars to marriage customs. Being a new convert with a limited mastery of the Qur'an and hadith, I was humbled by the insight provided by this woman, yet never felt belittled because of it. Each time we concluded talking I emerged desiring deeper understandings of the religion, specifically its relevance to modern social problems.

Where Do We Go From Here: Renewing Islam through Social Engagement

Through the provision of a thorough explanation of *tawhid* by employing relevant accounts from both the author's and my life, it is my attention to direct attention to the real-world application of a comprehensive definition of *tawhid* as prescribed by Farid Esack. Building upon this foundation, Esack first outlines a methodology to liberate individuals, and therefore, permitting them to positively affect the world around them. The author connects this path towards freedom to *tawhid* by asserting, "The first characteristic of truly liberating speech and behavior is that these emerge from firm roots...For me, this means I listen to the voice deep within myself; the voice which is

an echo of the Spirit of Allah blown into all humankind at the time of creation."⁶ Another component of achieving liberation requires the individual to aspire to goals that transcend passive existence.

Esack bluntly states that in order to accomplish this state, Muslims will encounter strife, but emphasizes the need to find inspiration from inherent beliefs and moral values. For instance, relating this topic to the racism officially endorsed by the apartheid South African government, the author argues that the basis for such actions are rooted in individual insecurities. To defend this assertion Esack cites a *sura* from the Qur'an that recounts the story of Adam, who became distinguished among all of creation by embodying the Spirit of Allah and free will.⁷ Consequently, our recognition of this fact and its applicability to humankind should motivate Muslims to fight for greater social equality, whether it is manifested in legislature or personal actions.

Contributing to the growing gap between God and His children is the *kufri*, or ingratitude shown by mankind towards God's many gifts. Although this is traditionally understood as ignorance of the individual's dependency upon God for survival, Esack asserts that also "we have to be aware of the many fine qualities that we have been imbued with."⁸ The inability to acknowledge God-given strengths and weaknesses, as a result, prevents humans from achieving their full potential in life. Just as man is dependent upon God for sustenance, he is also reliant upon other humans for a meaningful existence. More importantly, this ignorance inhibits the emergence of relationships between individuals that are mutually beneficial and free of pretense. For an example of this, one has to look no further than the causes for social injus-

tices, be it sexual, racial, or economic biases. Within each of these manifestations of hatred, ignorance of the *tawhid* of creation supplies a foundation.

Conclusion

As Esack has emphasized in this particular section and elsewhere in his book, Muslims, in an effort to cultivate greater social engagement, must begin by questioning what has been passed off as tradition or fact. The formulation of a personal relationship with God through analysis of holy texts and consciousness of one's behaviors, thus, is necessary if the individual is to contribute to humankind with any success. I have committed to myself to Esack's methodology and can attest to its benefits. In the broadest sense, the text encouraged a renewed connection with God that focused less upon praying for the fulfillment of momentary desires, such as getting an A on an assignment.

Lately, my prayers, or *du'ua*, have been devoted towards asking for forgiveness and strength in abstaining from acts that are considered *haram*, or forbidden under Islamic law. While these small changes in my behavior may appear insignificant, I believe they exemplify the steps outlined by Farid Esack in struggling towards social egalitarianism.

ENDNOTES

¹ Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (Oneworld Publications: Oxford, 1999), 9.

² Ibid, 2.

³ Ibid, 13.

⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵ Ibid, 17.

⁶ Ibid, 43.

⁷ Ibid, 55.

⁸ Ibid, 56.

Justification in Paul and James and a Muslim Perspective

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The concept of justification and the issues related to it have been a focal point in the history of Christian theology. This concept has been, at the same time, the subject of several controversies. A disagreement, for instance, arose as to the exact interpretation of the term “justification.” St. Augustine understood it to mean “making righteous;” an interpretation that remained undisputed until the end of the Middle Ages. In the Reformation era, however, this definition was challenged. The classical Protestant theology has maintained that “justification” means “declaring human beings to be righteous,” and should be differentiated from “sanctification,” which denotes “making human beings righteous.”

Another controversy emerged as to the means by which justification is achieved. Both Lutheranism and Calvinism proposed the formula *sola fide*, according to which justification is an act of God without any role for man’s works. This idea was condemned by the Council of Trent, which emphasized the role of man’s cooperation with God in the process of justification. Other differences, also, e.g., whether the formal cause of justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ or the inherent or imparted righteousness of Christ, have emerged.¹

These controversies on justification are, however, older than the times mentioned above; they date back to the apostolic age itself. The most famous of these early disputes is that between Paul and his Jewish-Christian adversaries on the role of faith and works in justification. This dispute is detailed in New Testament writings, especially in the Pauline epistles and the Letter of James.

In this paper, I will focus on the New Testament phase of this controversy without following the course it has taken throughout the history of Christianity. Starting with the Pauline epistles, I will analyze what exactly Paul means by the idea of justification “by faith apart from works” (Romans 3:28).² Then I will focus on the Letter of James to see what James has in mind by declaring that justification is “by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24) and whether he is contradicting Paul or not. Afterwards, I will discuss briefly the issue of faith and works from an Islamic point of view.

But before proceeding, it is crucial to look at the meaning of the word “justification” and its biblical background prior to the New Testament writings. The two word groups “justification, just, justify” and “righteous, righteousness” in English translations of both OT and NT stand for the same family of words in the original languages. Unfortunately, there is no single etymological root in English that can show the relation between the word groups of “justification” and “righteousness.” But it should be remembered that these two concepts in the Bible are inextricably linked and must be studied together.³

The roots of “justification” as a theological concept are to be found in legal vocabulary. When someone is “justified,” he/she is proved “not guilty” before a judge. In the world of the Israelites, the covenant with Yahweh was the framework for legal judgment. “Righteousness” in this context meant faithful loyalty to the requirements of the covenant. And, since, by definition, covenant has requirements for both parties – i.e. Yahweh and the Israelites – righteousness is required of both Yahweh and the Israelites. Thus, the righteousness of God means His determined loyalty to His covenant with Israel; it is an aspect of His character that reveals itself in defending and saving His covenant people.⁴

With the Exile episode, however, the Israelites’ conviction about God’s righteousness was challenged. How could God be righteous if He gives away Israel to her enemies? This challenge was met with the development of an eschatological hope: God will finally manifest His righteousness and validate Israel’s trust in Him. It is in this context and similar ones that the righteousness of God becomes closely connected to the ideas of deliverance and *vindication*.

With the Qumran literature, the idea that God’s righteousness would bring about forgiveness and removing of sins found a greater emphasis. Here again, justification is linked to the bilateral nature of covenant: the people of Qumran strived to be faithful to God’s covenant; in return, they expected to be vindicated

in the final judgment.⁵

The ancient Christians’ perception of justification was shaped by the context of Jewish tradition; it was a development of that tradition, not an innovation beyond it. It is noteworthy that in the Jesus’ teachings of the synoptic Gospels, “justification language” is seldom used. Even those infrequent occurrences do not bear any notably Christian sense. It can be argued, however, that a characteristically Christian usage emerged in those passages that introduced Jesus as “the Righteous One,” the messianic personage who was unjustly murdered (Acts 3:14, 7:52), and then vindicated by God (1 Tim 3:16). The Jewish hope for God’s vindication now saw realization through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, the idea of vicarious sacrificial death of Christ developed: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the Righteous one for the unrighteous.” (1 Peter 3:18)⁶

After these introductory points, we will now start our discussion of Paul, whose work made a major contribution to the Christian understanding of justification.

Paul and the Idea of “Justification by Faith apart from Works”

Paul represents a turning point in the Christian understanding of justification; but his thought also reflects the Jewish-Christian mindset on justification found in other New Testament writings. Thus, Paul sees justification as God’s act of deliverance through Jesus Christ, “the Righteous One,” whose sacrifice brings about salvation for the covenant people. This idea is clearly stated in Romans 4:25, where Christ is described as the one “who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.”

Even the idea of “justification by faith” is not distinctively Pauline. In Galatians, Paul himself says,

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by

faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (Galatians 2:15-16)

According to this passage, the belief that justification comes through “faith in⁷ Jesus Christ” was accepted even for the early Jewish Christians; the fundamentality of Christ’s death and resurrection for justification was nothing really new.⁸

Therefore, Paul’s original contribution to the idea of justification by faith was this: Jesus’ death and resurrection bring about justification *for Gentiles* without any need for them to undertake circumcision or observe Jewish dietary codes. This viewpoint, furthermore, led Paul to a new understanding of Church as a new “people of God” open to both Jews and Gentiles, joining together in table fellowship.⁹

Because of his conflict with the “Judaizers,” recorded in Galatians, Paul was led to use greatly dismissive language about the law. He zealously writes, “Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.” (Galatians 5:2) He decisively adds, “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (Galatians 5:4) His radical standpoint could be seen also in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4:21-31. His Romans text, however, takes a more moderate position: there, he refers to the law as a witness to the new manifestation of the righteousness of God (Romans 3:21) and does not downplay the righteousness that could have been acquired before Christ (Romans 3:24).¹⁰

These new perspectives frequently subject Paul to criticism. His opponents objected that Paul’s gospel promising justification apart from works would lead to immorality. In response, Paul emphatically condemned the accusations (Romans 3:8) and “by no means” (Romans 6:1) accepted that his gospel implied continuing in sin. In Romans 5:15-7:6, Paul emphasizes the ethical implications of justification. After being restored to right relationship with God based on His grace, the justified people must become “instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:13)

and also its “slaves.” (Romans 6:15-23) Chapters 12-15 also deal with this ethical obligation. The firm bond between justification and its moral implications also appears in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Paul insists that the believers are to “become the righteousness of God.”¹¹

Therefore, although Paul’s idea of “justification by faith apart from works” negates any role for human endeavors – especially “works of the law” -- and introduces justification solely as God’s gift, by no means does it rule out the necessity of living a morally upright life. Paul is clear about this distinction:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10)

Thus, it is true that from Paul’s viewpoint, justification is based on faith without any role for human works. But “true” faith, in which justification is integrated, should lead to a life with high morals. Immorality and decadence have no place in a “godly life in Christ.” (2 Timothy 3:12) Claiming to have faith without any change in character and conduct has no value.

Now we will look at the Letter of James which some regard as a contradiction to Paul’s teachings.

James and Insufficiency of Faith

In the New Testament, at least five men are mentioned with the name “James.” Only one of them, however, enjoyed the authority that the writer of the Letter of James seems to have enjoyed: James, the brother of Jesus, who became the head of Jerusalem’s church. Nevertheless, there is uncertainty as to whether the Letter was written by him.¹²

During the process of canonization, in which Christian churches of the second to fourth centuries selected certain writings from among a diverse array of early literature to organize the New Testament, the Letter of James was one of the latest writings added to the can-

on. Two factors, perhaps, contributed to this delay. First, the Letter of James was addressed to a Jewish Christian community, and hence irrelevant to the growing Gentile church of the time. Second, James seemed to oppose Paul on the issue of the role of faith and works in justification.

Eventually, however, the Letter of James was included in the canon. This must mean that the content of the Letter came to be viewed as not incompatible with Pauline teachings. Also, it might have been understood to have a general message, for the benefit of Jews and Gentiles alike.¹³

The apparent conflict between James and Paul is one of the main issues that New Testament scholars tackle when discussing the Letter of James. The central passage that reflects this conflict is 2:14-26, where James writes,

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?...So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.... Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?... You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

The passage is in sharp contrast to Paul's words about justification in Galatians and elsewhere. This has made some Christian figures, most importantly Martin Luther, conclude

that James does, indeed, contradict Paul; this viewpoint became dominant in much of the scholarly approach to James, and only recently lost its popularity.¹⁴ An important presupposition for this viewpoint is that Paul and James are addressing the same issue: the issue of sufficiency or insufficiency of faith for justification. Obviously they use a series of parallel vocabulary (faith/works/ justification/saving) and appeal to the same scriptural evidence (the case of Abraham). At the same time, their standpoints are paradoxical: one believes faith to be sufficient for justification; the other declares it to be insufficient. It is not, therefore, baseless to think that James is contradicting Paul.¹⁵

In contrast to the above-mentioned viewpoint, most of the readers of James throughout history have been convinced that James and Paul do not contradict each other because they are not dealing with the same issue. When proposing the idea of "justification by faith apart from works" in Galatians and elsewhere, Paul is dealing with soteriology. His main issue is whether anything else except faith plays any role in bringing about justification and hence salvation. But the issue for James seems to be different.

To explain how this reconciliatory viewpoint could be supported, we will use the explanation that *The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB)* gives us for 2:14-26. Afterwards, we will review the explanation to see how far we can agree

with it.

According to the *NIB*, James in 2:14 questions the "usefulness" of faith that does not lead to deeds. He dismisses the authenticity of faith that does not manifest itself in good works. Although he asks whether such faith "can save you" (2:14), his issue is not really soteriology. He has made it clear before that it is "the implanted word that has the power to save your souls." (1:21) James' main issue here is how to be a "doer" of that word.

Moreover, note that he does not speak of the "works of the law" but of the "works of faith." James' topic is the essential unity between attitude and action; he is by no means trying to replace action with attitude. James' position here is exactly what Paul states in Galatians 5:6: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love." James illustrates what he considers to be the "dead" faith very clearly:

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:15-17)

In 2:18-19, James insists further on the inseparability of faith and works: faith could be shown by works of faith, but what will remain of faith without works? It will be just a mere intellectual belief which, according to James,

even the demons, the forces that oppose God, possess. Such faith is obviously inadequate and insufficient.

In 2:20-26, James tries again to show the "senseless person" that faith apart from works is useless. For that purpose, he refers to the stories of Abraham and Rahab, both of whom had faith demonstrated by their works. James finds in their example faith that acted "along with," and "was brought to completion by," the works (2:22). Faith that lacks this cooperation and unity with works is like "the body without the spirit" and simply "dead" (2:26).¹⁶

This is how the *NIB* reconciles the apparent contradiction between Paul and James. It proposes that Paul and James do not have different theological perspectives; rather, the difference between them simply is due to the fact that they address different issues. Paul deals with soteriology. His topic is whether the base for justification is faith apart from works or faith accompanying works. In this topic, Paul concludes that the base of justification is faith apart from works. James, according to the *NIB* interpretation, has no disagreement with Paul's viewpoint. He is drawing a line between true faith and fake faith. James maintains that true faith is the basis of justification and salvation. It is this true faith that manifests itself in works. Mere intellectual understanding of God is useless. So both Paul and James agree that faith apart from works is the key to justification;

James is only giving clarification when he ties faith to works as a witness to faith.

Now I will comment on the *NIB*'s explanation and analyze the differences and similarities between James and Paul in the issue of faith and works from my own viewpoint.

An Analysis of Paul and James's Perspectives

To comment on the *NIB*'s interpretation, I agree that James and Paul have significant commonalities; their viewpoints are closer than they seem at first glance. Both emphasize that good works are necessary. Both of them think that believers must strive for high morals and refrain from any kind of immorality. Though they have different viewpoints regarding the extent to which Gentiles must observe the Jewish law,¹⁷ they do not disagree that Jews are to abide by the law. Therefore, their difference has no significant impact on how Christians live their lives.

However, it seems that Paul and James do have different perspectives. I cannot agree with the *NIB* which insists that, for James, works are merely manifestations of real faith, without any role for them, in themselves, in the process of justification. It is true that in 2:14-26 James' topic is not primarily soteriology, but this should not prevent us from paying due attention to what he says in passing about the role of works in justification. I think, from James' perspective, works are more than mere manifestations of real faith. In 2:21-22, he clearly says,

Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works.

Whatever he means here by faith, it is clear that from James' viewpoint, works are not merely signs of the true faith. Rather, they are active factors with which faith cooperates and is brought to completion. This is different from

Paul's viewpoint. For Paul, the sufficient cause for justification is faith. Even though Paul's "faith" certainly manifests itself in works, the manifestations themselves do not play a role in bringing justification; they are just signs that show the real faith. From Paul's viewpoint, once the real faith is there, it brings with it justification; it does not wait for manifestations to show up. For James, however, the faith that Abraham or Rahab already had was not enough; it did not result in justification until their faith's "manifestations" came about. Thus, works themselves have a role in justification from James' viewpoint. Paul would not agree with that degree of works' dominance.

Faiths and Works from an Islamic Viewpoint

A comprehensive study of the issue of faith and works from an Islamic perspective is not the purpose of this paper. What follows, then, is just a short survey of how the writer sees the similarities and differences between the Christian and Islamic faith traditions on these topics.

As we saw, Paul's idea of "justification by faith apart from works" introduced faith as the only element needed for justification.¹⁸ The Qur'an definitely looks anti-Pauline at first glance. For the readers of the Qur'an, the formula "those who believe and do good works" is familiar:

And give glad tidings (O Muhammad) unto those who believe and do good works. (2:25)¹⁹

Lo! Those who believe and do good works, the Beneficent will appoint for them love. (19:96)

And as for those who believe and do good works, we verily shall make them enter in among the righteous. (29:9)

Lo! As for those who believe and do good works, for them is a reward enduring. (41:8)

Then, as for those who believed and did good works, their Lord will bring them in unto His mercy. That is the evident triumph. (45:30)

(And) lo! Those who believe and do good works are the best of created beings. (98:7)

The above-mentioned verses are only a few among the fifty occurrences of the formula. The juxtaposition of faith and good works is expressed in other wordings as well.²⁰ This shows that the Qur'an does not consider faith to be sufficient for justification. The insufficiency of faith is explored more clearly in chapter 6 verse 158:

Wait they, indeed, for nothing less than that the angels should come unto them, or thy Lord should come, or there should come one of the portents from thy Lord? In the day when one of the portents from thy Lord cometh, its belief availed naught a soul which theretofore believed not, nor in its belief earned good (by works). Say: Wait ye! Lo! We (too) are waiting.

According to this verse, when certain signs of God appear, all will submit and believe. However, belief (or faith) at that time will not benefit two groups of people: those who did not have faith before and those who had faith, but did not "earn good." This passage is perhaps the clearest expression for the idea of insufficiency of faith in the Qur'an.

However, a more careful study shows that the issue is not as simple as it might look. In 24:21, we read, "Had it not been for the grace of Allah and His mercy unto you, not one of you would ever have grown pure." This verse teaches us that the base for "purification" is only God's grace and mercy, not what *we* do. The *hadith*²¹ sources, which constitute the second fundamental source of religious teachings in Islam, give us a deeper understanding of this idea. Even the combination of faith and works, according to the *hadiths*, is not sufficient. Although necessary conditions, faith and works are never enough to bring about justification or salvation. It is God's mercy that eventually justifies and saves those who have faith and do good works:

The Messenger of Allah said, "Allah the Most Blessed the Most High has said, 'The doers [of good] must not rely on their deeds that they do for my reward. Even if they strive and tire themselves out in worshipping me throughout their lives, they will be deficient in, and fall short of, worshipping me perfectly... They must

rely on my mercy, and hope for my generosity, and be confident by having good opinion about me. [If so,] then my mercy will reach them and my benevolence will take them to my contentment and my forgiveness will cover them with my pardon. Verily I am Allah the Beneficent the Merciful and Thus I have named myself."²²

This idea is also reflected elsewhere. For instance, in a prayer which is narrated from the fourth Shi'ite Imam, we read, "I do not rely – for being saved from your punishment – on our works, but on your grace toward us."²³

According to these passages, justification is based solely on God's mercy. Not only is our faith insufficient, but also our good works are incapable of bringing us justification. Faith and works provide only a requisite condition to receive God's mercy; they do not bring about or cause justification themselves. Seen in this light, the Islamic doctrine here turns out to be closer to the Pauline idea of "justification by faith," rather than James' idea of justification by faith and works. This is because Paul's perspective is more dependent on God's mercy. Thus, one can argue for an essential similarity between Islamic and Pauline understanding of justification on this issue.

Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed the topic of justification and the role of faith and works in it. As we saw, Paul introduced a new understanding of justification to Christianity. He believed that human endeavors and especially works of the law did not have any role in bringing about justification. For Paul, justification was by "faith apart from works." (Romans 3:28) Thus, in order to be included in the people of God, new Gentile believers no longer needed to be circumcised or observe Jewish dietary laws. They could now be united with Jews in table fellowship.

This viewpoint, however, was not acceptable to a group of Jewish Christians who still

maintained that Jewish laws were necessary for inclusion in God's people. James, the writer of the Letter of James, is viewed by some to be a member of this group because he uses a language that is seemingly contrary to Paul's words. While Paul maintains that one is "justified by faith apart from works," James believes that justification is "by works and not by faith alone." (James 2:24)

Others have tried to show that although James seems to contradict Paul at first glance, he is really speaking about a different topic. Paul is concerned with the issue of how justification is acquired. In that topic, he concludes that nothing except faith plays any role. James' concern, however, is clarifying that it is the real faith manifesting itself in good works that has such results, but "fake" faith (faith without works) is useless.

We commented on this reconciliation that, although there is much more in common between Paul and James than might seem at first glance, on a theoretical level, they do have different viewpoints. In contrast to Paul, James does not view good works as merely manifestations of real faith with no role in justification. For James, justification waits until good works show up; without them there will be no justification.

At the end, we shortly discussed the role of faith and works from an Islamic viewpoint. We saw that the Qur'an seems at first glance to be against Paul's teaching, but a closer look at the Islamic sources shows that in fact Islam teaches that although faith and good works are requisite conditions, they do not cause justification

or salvation themselves. It is totally God's grace and mercy that justifies and saves.

ENDNOTES

¹ E.A. Livingstone, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 914.

² All biblical quotations in this paper are from the NRSV.

³ Richard B. Hays, "Justification," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, eds. David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief; Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins, associate editors; Astrid B. Beck, managing editor (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1129.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 1129-30.

⁶ Although the sources that contain these formulations were written after Peter, arguably each case reflects general early Christian tradition. Ibid., 1130.

⁷ There has been disagreement as to the exact translation of this formula. The original Greek (*dialektisteos Iesou Christou*) could mean both "through the faith in Jesus Christ" and "through Jesus Christ's faith." Traditionally, the first translation has been preferred, but more recently the second rendering has gained favor. This difference, however, has little importance in our discussion: both emphasize the importance of Christ's death and resurrection as the divine act which is the base for justification, and both regard faith/trust as the required response on the human side. See: Ibid., 1131.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Calvin J. Roetzel, "Justification, Justify," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006-2009), 479.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A. E. Harvey, *A Companion to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press,

2004), 720.

¹³ Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 112-13; Luke T. Johnson, "The Letter of James," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 297.

¹⁴ Luke T. Johnson, "The Letter of James," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 297.

¹⁵ Some scholars disagree with the way this question is usually put. They believe that it was not James who was responding to Paul, but the reverse. Therefore, the question should be asked whether Paul is really contradicting James or not. Ibid., 300.

¹⁶ Luke T. Johnson, "The Letter of James: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol.12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 196-97.

¹⁷ PHEME PERKINS, *Reading the New Testament: an Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 162-63.

¹⁸ It is worth discussing to what extent the concept of justification in Christianity exactly fits into the Islamic worldview. For instance, the Christian understanding of justification presupposes the idea that hu-

manity is "under the power of sin." This idea is not in agreement with Qur'anic teachings.

¹⁹ All Qur'anic quotations in this paper are from Pikhall's translation.

²⁰ See, for example, 2:62; 6:48.

²¹ In Arabic, *hadith* means saying. Technically, it means a report of what the Prophet has said or done. In Twelver Shi'ite Islamic tradition, the reports of the sayings and works of the twelve Imams are also counted as *hadith*. *Hadith* literature takes the responsibility of interpreting and elaborating the Qur'anic teachings.

²² Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol.2 (Tehran: Da'r al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1997), 71.

²³ Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.95 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Wafa', 1983), 84.



Sodom's Sin:

A Combined Reading of the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah From The Christian and Islamic Traditions

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Light thrust itself upon the plain of Jordan as the Lord seized the five cities of Gomorrah, and the new day witnessed the wrath of its Lord as He rained down upon them both fire and brimstone. The people of Lot had persisted in an evil and grave sin and arrogantly mistreated the righteous among them including Lot; a close nephew to the patriarch and prophet Abraham, and one of the few to believe in him. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah has been documented in both the Bible and the Qur'an and read by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers as a consequence of disobedience to one's Lord. And while they all confirm that the actions of the people of Lot were criminal, there is disagreement as to the most egregious of their acts.

Much of what has been related in both the Bible and Qur'an is very similar, though subtle details give variant impressions to the lessons we should derive from their ill-fated doom. In some cases as well it seems that one, or the other, is unclear about an issue and can be further elaborated upon by peering into the others' text. In an effort to convey to the reader just why these variant lessons may exist, and as well portray the strong similarities within their readings, I have combined the Biblical narration of the tale with what has been documented of it within the Qur'an.

Prologue

Prior to Lot's move to the city of Sodom he had lived alongside his uncle Abraham in Ur, in what is now southern Iraq. After Abraham's sincere, yet unsuccessful, effort to call his people to the worship of the One God, he decided to migrate for the service of his Lord (Gen. 12:1-3; Q. 29:26); an effort his nephew joined him in. The journey first took them both through Egypt and then to Canaan. After they arrived in what would later be the "promised land" they discovered that it was insufficient to sustain both of their flocks and herds; which may have been the cause of disputes between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen (Gen. 13:6-7). To resolve this issue Abraham made a generous offer to his brother's son. He said to him, "Please let there be no strife be-

tween you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left" (Gen. 13:8-9). Lot saw all the plain of Jordan before him, which was at that time like "the garden of the LORD" (Gen. 13:10). He then chose this land for himself and pitched his tent in the city of Sodom; where the men were exceedingly wicked and sinful (Gen 13:12-13).

Speculation has been made within the Christian tradition as to why Lot chose to live in such a "wicked and sinful" city. Such suppositions were further influenced by the story of Lot and his two daughters mentioned in Genesis 19:30-38 and may have lead early Christian theologians, like Origen (d. 254ce), to believe

that Lot's later escape from Sodom was owed "more to Abraham's merits than his own".¹ For Muslims, Lot's character is without doubt a noble one. He was among those given favor by God (Q. 6:86), righteous (Q. 21:75), and a prophet. Muslim tradition firmly maintains that Lot's relocation to Sodom included a prophetic appointment; that is, to call them to the worship of the One God as his uncle Abraham had done in Ur.

The Qur'an also narrates the difficulty Lot had with the people of Sodom prior to the arrival of the three angels:

The people of Lot denied the messengers. When their brother Lot said to them, "Will you not fear Allah? Indeed, I am to you a trustworthy messenger. So fear Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you for it any payment. My payment is only from the Lord of the worlds. Do you approach males among the world's [inhabitants] and leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing (Q. 26:160-166).

Indeed, you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among [all] the [nations]. Indeed, you approach men and obstruct the road and commit in your meetings every evil." And the answer of his people was not but they said, "Bring us the punishment of Allah, if you should be of the truthful." He said, "My Lord, support me against the corrupting people" (Q. 29:28-30). They said, "If you do not desist, O Lot, you will surely be of those evicted." He said, "Indeed, I am, toward your deed, of those who detest it. My Lord, save me and my family from the consequence of what they do" (Q. 26:167-169).

The people of Lot did not believe in the messenger that had been sent to them. Though he sought to save them from their own transgressions, they mocked him and asked him for the wrath of their Lord. The admonishment of Lot to his people contains within it clear evidence for Muslim readers of Sodom's most prominent sins; that is, other than the denial of their messenger. These were the heinous actions for which God will later bring upon them

the wrath they so mockingly asked for. These sins were: approaching men instead of women (a sin never before committed), obstructing the road and robbing wayfarers, and committing in meetings and public areas every evil. No exact description is given of just what these evils are; rather, Muslim scholars have offered a diverse array of opinions.²

The Biblical narrative alone does not add any more clarity; leaving Christian scholars to rely more heavily upon the final events that lead to the people of Lot's demise. Genesis 18 speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah's sin as "very grave" and the people as "wicked," but as for which evil sin is being spoken of Christian scholars, like their Muslim counterparts, convey different interpretations. A possible solution to this will be presented below, however let us first begin with a combined reading of Genesis 18.

The Guests of Abraham

And inform them about the guests of Abraham (Q. 15:51), when the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, in as much as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said" (Gen. 18:1-5).

And certainly did Our messengers come to Abraham with good tidings; they said, "Peace." He said, "Peace," and did not delay in bringing them a roasted calf (Q. 11:69). Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took

butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate (Gen. 18:6-8). But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he distrusted them and felt from them apprehension. They said, "Fear not. We have been sent to the people of Lot" (Q. 11:70).

In both Biblical and Qur'anic narratives the story of Sodom and Gomorrah begins first with the "guests of Abraham"; three angels who have appeared at Abraham's door in the form of travelers. The famous Qur'anic exegete al-Tabari (d. 923ce) relates that these angels were Gabriel, Michael, and Israfil³ while some Christians believe that among them was the Son of God, the "Angel of the covenant".⁴

The Bible specifically mentions that the guests "appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre," which apparently had been a well-known meeting spot. The fact that Abraham pitched his tent here may have been to better welcome guests and wayfarers; a stark contrast to how the people of Sodom will wish to entertain the same visitors.⁵ The length of the passage may give further emphasis to this point, especially since it details that promptness in which Abraham acted to host his guests. When he beheld the men he *ran* from the tent door to meet them, and so as not to delay in bringing them a roasted calf he *hurried* into the tent to Sarah, advising her to quickly make ready some food, and then *ran* to his herd to find a tender calf which he gave to a young man to hasten in preparing.

It certainly seems that Abraham was ready and pleased to entertain any weary wayfarer, as was the custom of the time.⁶ There were no inns, nor hotels, that a traveler may rest or find comfort in while upon a long journey, so travelers sought the hospitality of local inhabitants along their way. However, these were not normal travelers and, as the Qur'an relates, after Abraham promptly set before them the meal he saw their hands not reaching for it, and so he dis-

trusted them and felt from them apprehension. According to Bedouin custom it is considered a grievous crime to act treacherously against one you have shared a meal with, so when Abraham saw them not reaching for the food he began to fear that these men had already intended for him some great harm.⁷

Islamic tradition maintains that angels do not eat food, so this is really why they did not reach for the meal. Interestingly, it was only after the angels perceived from their host his growing suspicion of them, and after he had shown them the fullness of his hospitality, that they then revealed who they were.

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And [then the angels] said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son" (Gen. 18:9-10). [Standing nearby, Sarah had already overheard the news (either of the destruction of the people of Lot, or a son) and smiled], then We gave her good tidings of Isaac and after Isaac, Jacob. [To this she] said, "Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is an amazing thing!" (Q. 11:71-72). Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have [the] pleasure [of bearing a child], my lord [Abraham] being old also?" (Gen. 18:11-12). [And then Abraham asked of his guests], "Have you given me good tidings although old age has come upon me? Then of what wonder do you inform?" They said, "We have given you good tidings in truth, so do not be of the despairing." [And Abraham responded], "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord except for those astray?" (Q. 15:54-56).

And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied [that she laughed], for she was afraid [but Abraham] said, "No, but you did laugh!" (Gen. 18:13-15). [Then the angels added], "Are you amazed at the

decree of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, [O] people of [this] house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy an Honorable" (Q. 11:73).

Now having received Abraham and Sarah's hospitality, and revealing themselves as angels, they conveyed the good news that Sarah was to bear a son, Isaac, who later will father for them a grandchild, Jacob. The news undoubtedly came as a great shock to Sarah who had already accepted that she could not bear Abraham any children, and had grown too old for conception. However God wished to bless and multiply his descendents, but had other plans for the people of Sodom.

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

[Then Abraham asked], "What is your business here, O messengers?" They said, "Indeed, we have been sent to a people of criminals, (Q. 15:57-58) we will destroy the people of Lot's city, and indeed, its people have been wrongdoers." [Abraham] said, "Within it is Lot." They said, "We are more knowing of who is within it. We will surely save him and his family; except his wife (Q. 29:31-32), Allah decreed that she is of those who remain behind" (Q. 15:60). Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know" (Gen. 18:16-21). When the fright had left Abraham and the good tidings had reached him, he began to argue with Us concerning the people of Lot. Indeed, Abraham was forbearing, grieving and frequently returning to Allah. [The angels said], "O Abra-

ham, give up this plea. Indeed, the command of your Lord has come, and indeed, there will reach them a punishment that cannot be repelled" (Q. 11:74-76).

After hearing the awe-inspiring news of both a child and a grandson, God then conveyed to Abraham his plan for Sodom and Gomorrah causing Abraham to worry for his nephew Lot and his family. The Biblical passage then presented a beautiful reminder of Abraham's station with his Lord, and God's plan for Abraham's descendents. This reminder also reveals what may be a lesson to derive from the visit of the three angels; that Abraham should take warning from this visit so as to command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, and to act in accordance with righteousness and justice.

Abraham's compassion and kindheartedness moved him to remind the angels that his nephew Lot still lived in Sodom, to which they reassured him that Lot would not be harmed. However, Lot's wife, who was inclined towards the ill-customs of her people and approved of their crimes and perversions, would not be spared from the destruction.⁸

Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." Then he said,

"Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place (Gen. 18:22-33).

After two of the angels take leave of Abraham's tent and begin their journey to Sodom, a third remains behind to speak alone with Abraham. Here Abraham pleads for the safety of the whole city. Some Christian scholars consider this to be the first solemn prayer upon record in the Bible; and it is one for the sparing of all of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁹ In this instance

Abraham did not seek to excuse the customs of the people of Lot, nor did he ask for respite. Rather, he asked of his Lord that they all might be spared for the sake of a few righteous living among them.

Sodom's Depravity

A famous tradition, though not mentioned in the Qur'an, has become widely accepted by Muslims to convey a unique vision of the arrival of the angels to Sodom. It has been related that after the angels left Abraham they traveled until they arrived at the river of Sodom where they met one of the daughters of Lot drawing water for her family. They said to her: "O maiden, is there a dwelling nearby?" She said: "Yes, but stand your ground and do not enter until I come back." Fearing for their



safety she informed her father of the men she had left at the city's gate saying, "I have not seen faces of people as handsome as theirs. Do not let your people take them and rape them." Lot's people had forbidden him from hosting any guests, telling him, "Leave them to us, and we will host the men." This did not dissuade Lot from quickly attending to the men, though he was anguished for them and felt for them great discomfort, saying, "This is a trying day (Q. 11:77); indeed, you are people unknown" (Q. 15:62). Out of fear for their safety Lot tried to persuade them to continue on until they came to another town, though he desired to offer them the hospitality that is due to guests. When they showed no intention of staying anywhere else Lot asked them to wait just outside the city until nightfall when they all should meet again at the city's gate. He would then provide them hospitality at his home.¹⁰

The meeting of the angels first with the daughters of Lot may be the only example we have of their righteousness, and their deserving to be saved along with their father. Their carefulness in tending to the travelers, by asking them to remain beyond the city's gate while they sought for them their fathers' aid, was the best hospitality they could have offered. Lot's asking the angels to remain outside until nightfall also blends well into Genesis 19:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the open square." But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate (Gen. 19:1-3).

When the angels entered the city Lot invited them to be his guests and treated them much the same as his uncle Abraham had done before him. Having learned such generosity

from the patriarch of the monotheistic faiths may have inspired the writer of Proverbs 13:20 to put to verse "He who walks with wise men will be wise".¹¹The situation for guests was of course far different in Sodom then it was near the terebinth trees of Mamre where Abraham lived; here Lot's hospitality was not just a delightful comfort for wayfarers, but also a refuge from the evils committed throughout the city.

While the Islamic tradition seems to present a clear explanation as to why Lot was sitting by the city's gate after sunset, the Bible appears to be silent. It is possible, however, that it was the only way left for Lot to greet guests and wayfarers. Lot had already been harassed by the Sodomites for hosting travelers, which they forbade him from doing (Q. 15:70) and even threatened him with exile (Q. 26:167). Sitting at the gate in the darkness of night may have been the only opportunity Lot had to not only host travelers, but also save them from the "grave sin" of his city. Lot's people were the most reprehensible and immoral of any of the generations to follow Adam,¹²and Lot had the daunting task, as the Qur'an relates, of calling them to the worship of God. He also forbade them from their evil acts which they even committed publicly in their meeting places; like their "public square". When the guests suggested that they would spend the night there Lot strongly insisted they return home with him.

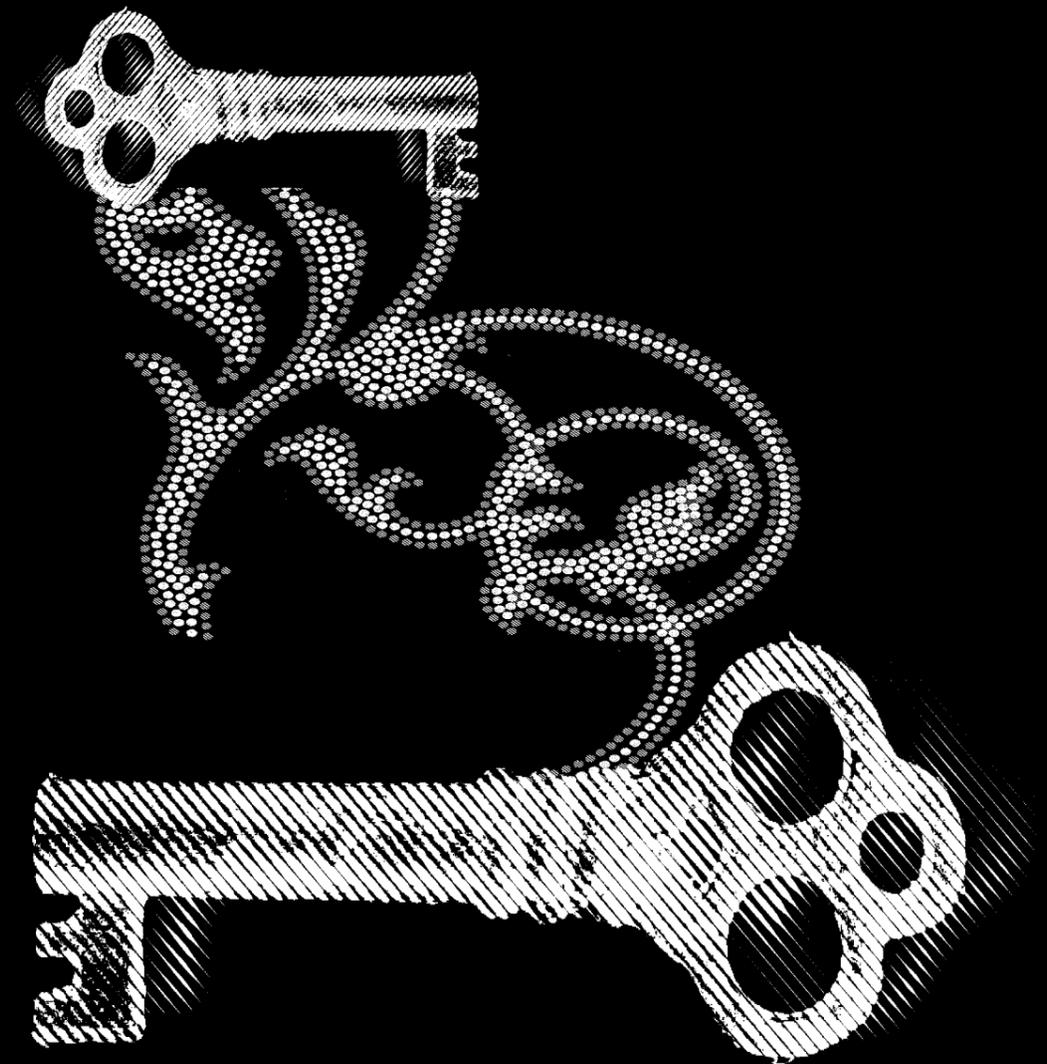
Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house (Gen. 19:2-4) and the people of the city came rejoicing. [Lot] said, "Indeed, these are my guests, so do not shame me. Fear Allah and do not disgrace me" (Q. 15:67-69). [But] they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally (Gen. 19:5). Have we not forbidden you from protecting people?"(Q. 15:70). So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me

bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish (Gen. 19:6-8) if you would be doers of lawful marriage (Q. 15:71); only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof."

And his people came hastening to him, and before this they had been doing evil deeds. He said, "O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason? (Q. 11:78). Do you commit immorality while you are seeing? Do you indeed approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a people behaving ignorantly." But the answer of his people was not except that they said, "Expel the family of Lot from your city. Indeed, they are people who keep themselves pure" (Q. 27:54-56). You have already known that we have not concern-

ing your daughters any claim, and indeed, you know what we want (Q. 11:79), [so] stand back!" (Gen. 19:9).

In distress to save his guests, Lot offers to the mob his two virgin daughters. The act itself is almost, if not more striking, to the reader than the raging mob declaring their intention to sexually assault Lot's guests. While the Bible makes it seem as if he is offering them over to satisfy their desire to rape, the Qur'an adds a condition upon them that they must be *failin* (doers); which has been understood by some Muslim commentators, as translated above, to mean "doers of lawful marriage." As to how exactly a lawful marriage to a mob, or a member therein, was to be performed I have not come





across any discussion. However, the subsequent rejection to this proposal, as related in the Qur'an, that they had "no claim to them" has been used to further advance an interpretation that the mob was too overwhelmed with homoerotic desires to seek satisfaction from Lot's virgin daughters; but there is another way to view this.

George R. Edwards, a Professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, defines the Sodomites activity rather as phallic aggression perpetuated by xenophobic arrogance.¹³ The purpose in which he sees it this way is that phallic aggressions, or male rapes, have been documented in other ancient cultures as a way of disgracing one's enemy or subjugating another group or person. In these instances orientation of the assailant is not as much of an issue as feminizing the assaulted in a patriarchal society. Rape, whether it is homosexual or heterosexual, is ultimately about dominating the subjugated.

To the contemporary reader the "greatest sin of Sodom" is none other than that act which has been notoriously named after the destroyed city; that is, sodomy. Ancient texts however, in both the Biblical canon and apocrypha, seem to give greater emphasis to their

excessive arrogance, xenophobia, and contempt of hospitality; which figures well with Edwards' theory. A quote in the book of Ezekiel seems to support the idea that Sodom's greatest sin maybe its own hubris and the mistreatment of the poor (Ezek. 16:49). This and the lengthy emphasis in good hospitality performed first by Abraham, then later his nephew Lot, certainly gives greater evidence to this claim.¹⁴ One can even say that Lot's care for his guests peaked when he offered his virgin daughters over to the mob so as to protect them. It is also this final act of reasoning with the mob, followed by a final admonition, which immediately preceded their doom.

[Lot responded], "Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the world's [inhabitants]? Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people." But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Evict them from your city! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure" (Q. 7:80-82). Then they said, "This one [that is, Lot] came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them." So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. But [his guests] reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they

struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door (Gen. 19:9-11) and they were, in their intoxication, wandering blindly (Q. 15:72).

It is interesting to note how the Sodomites refer to Lot and his family as those who keep themselves pure as if it is something derogatory. In most, if not all cultures, purity is actually an honorable state for one's mind, body, and soul. It is unclear what sense of purity the Sodomites criticized them for having, though it may be any one of those; if not all of them. One of the early commentators of the Qur'an and successor (*tabai*) to the companions of the Prophet, Qatadah (d. 735ce), used to say of this verse: "They shamed them with what is not shameful at all".¹⁵ Whatever the case may be the Sodomites' hearts had become blind due to their evil and defiant disobedience, and they turned away from the sound wisdom and knowledge that God had granted to Lot (Q. 21:74-75).

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

[Lot then] said [to his people], "If only I had against you some power or could take refuge in a strong support." [The guests then revealed themselves as angels of the Lord saying], "O Lot, indeed we are messengers of your Lord; therefore, they will never reach you (Q. 11:80-81). We have come to you with that about which they were disputing. And we have come to you with truth, and indeed, we are truthful (Q. 15:63-64). Have you anyone else here? [Be they] sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whom-ever you have in the city—take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it (Gen. 19:12-13). So set out with your family during a portion of the night and follow behind them and let not anyone among you look back and continue on to where you are commanded." And We conveyed to him the decree of that matter: that the sinners will be eliminated by early morning (Q. 15:65-66). "So set out with your family during a portion of the

night and let not any among you look back - except your wife; indeed, she will be struck by that which strikes them. Indeed, their appointment is for the morning; and is not the morning near?" (Q. 11:81).

So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!" But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking. When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed." Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords! Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there and my soul shall live." And [the LORD or an angel] said to him, "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar (Gen. 19:14-22).

It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad once said of Lot, "May Allah's mercy be upon Lot, for verily, he betook himself to a powerful support".¹⁶ Indeed it was a powerful support for Islamic tradition then narrates that God commanded the angel Gabriel to lift with his wings all the cities of Lot; which housed over 100,000 people in each. Each city was then raised to the sky so high that even the people of the heavens could hear their roosters cawing at the rise of morn. Then, as the sun rose, the cities were turned upside down and brought crashing down upon the earth.¹⁷ Islamic tradi-

tion also states that there were four other cities that were destroyed along with Sodom; they were Zeboiyim, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zoar; though the Bible states that Zoar is where Lot attempted to relocate.¹⁸

The shriek seized them at sunrise (Q. 15:73). When Lot entered Zoar the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens (Gen. 19:23-24). And We made the highest part of the city its lowest and rained upon them stones of hard clay (Q. 15:74) and evil was the rain of those who were warned. Indeed in that is a sign, but most of them were not to be believers. And indeed, your Lord - He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful (Q. 26:173-175). He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But [Lot's] wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:25-26); she was of those who remained [with the evildoers] (Q. 7:83). We destined her to be of those who remained behind (Q. 27:57).

Biblical scholars have debated over what exact evil deed Lot's wife had committed to earn her the punishment of her Lord, while the Qur'an and Islamic tradition has managed to answer this with some greater clarity. Lot's wife was a disbeliever and, like the wife of Noah, had betrayed her righteous husband (Q. 66:10). It has also been reported in the Islamic tradition that when the angels arrived it was Lot's wife who informed the city of their arrival, saying, "In the house of Lot are men. I have not seen faces as handsome as theirs ever before."¹⁹ The Christian tradition has laid greater focus upon her looking back at the destruction of the city suggesting that she turned around in a flagrant disregard of the command to not do so, or out of a great attachment to her family and way of

life she was leaving behind.²⁰ Interestingly, the Gospel of Luke records Jesus as saying, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:32-33). This may have inspired the Christian theologian Augustine (d. 430ce) to describe the example of Lot's wife as serving "a solemn and sacred warning that no one who starts out on the path of salvation should ever yearn for the things that he has left behind".²¹

Aftermath

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt (Gen. 19:27-29). The people of Lot denied the warning. Indeed, We sent upon them a storm of stones, except the family of Lot - We saved them before dawn as favor from us. Thus do We reward him who is grateful. And he had already warned them of Our assault, but they disputed the warning. And they had demanded from him his guests, but We obliterated their eyes, saying, "Taste My punishment and warning." And there came upon them by morning an abiding punishment (Q. 54: 33-38). Indeed in that are signs for those who discern. And indeed, those cities are situated on an established road. Indeed in that is a sign for the believers (Q. 15:75-77). And indeed, you pass by them in the morning and at night. Then will you not use reason? (Q. 37:137-138). Then see how was the end of the criminals (Q. 7:84).

In both the Bible and the Qur'an the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is undoubtedly one brimming with lessons in social and religious ethics. Though scholars may disagree about some of these lessons, they accept that a wasteland remains of what was once called a "garden like that of the LORD's" (Gen. 13:10), to forever testify to the sins of the Sodomites and their surrounding cities. "Though they prevented themselves from recognizing the good," as the book of Wisdom says, "they have been left for mankind as a reminder of their folly, so that their faults would not be passed by unseen" (Wisd. 10:6-8).²² The Gospel of Matthew also records from Jesus what may be an overarching lesson from the story of Lot, and with his words I will agree and conclude.

While instructing his disciples to travel into the cities of the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel, Jesus commands them to journey without any provision that they may trust solely in God and the hospitality of those who receive the message. He said, "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!" (Matt.10:5-15). Jesus' words seem not only to instruct believers to receive guests with hospitality, but also to treat well those who provide religious instruction. In this instance he means his disciples; however his analogy alludes to Sodom's mistreatment of Lot, believed by Muslims to have been a prophet and trustworthy messenger (Q.26:162). We see by his words that it is not merely Sodom's lack of hospitality that was their doom, nor was it their homosexual acts (for he did not even mention it). Rather it is a culmination of all of these which included the mistreatment of the righteous, who sought to help them from within their own community.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Kugel, James L. *The Bible As It Was* (London: Belknap Press, 1997), 184.
- ² Ibn Kathir, Isma'il. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. 24 January 2010 <<http://www.qtafsir.com>>.
- ³ Wheeler, Brannon W. *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 122.
- ⁴ Henry, Matthew. *Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*. BibleGateway. 20 January 2010.<<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getBookSections&cid=18&source=2>>.
- ⁵ Kugel, James L. *The Bible As It Was*. London: Belknap Press, 1997. Pages 189-190.
- ⁶ Henry, Matthew. *Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*. BibleGateway. 20 January 2010.<<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getBookSections&cid=18&source=2>>.
- ⁷ Qutb, Sayyid. *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Leicester-shire: The Islamic Foundation, 1999. Page 277.
- ⁸ Qutb, Sayyid. *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Leicester-shire: The Islamic Foundation, 1999. Pages 319-320. More about Lot's wife and the sin she may have been punished for, particularly in the Christian tradition, is related below.
- ⁹ Henry, Matthew. *Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*. BibleGateway. 20 January 2010.<<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getBookSections&cid=18&source=2>>.
- ¹⁰ Ibn Kathir, Isma'il. *Stories of the Prophets*. Kalamullah. 25 January 2010 <<http://www.kalamullah.com/Books/Stories%20Of%20The%20Prophets%20By%20Ibn%20Kathir.pdf>>.
- ¹¹ Kugel, James L. *The Bible As It Was*. London: Belknap Press, 1997. Page 191.
- ¹² Wheeler, Brannon W. *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*. New York: Continuum, 2002. Page 121.
- ¹³ Nissinen, Martti. *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. Page 48.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibn Kathir, Isma'il. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. 24 January 2010 <<http://www.qtafsir.com>>.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Wheeler, Brannon W. *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*. New York: Continuum, 2002. Page 125.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. Page 126.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. Page 124.
- ²⁰ Kugel, James L. *The Bible As It Was*. London: Belknap Press, 1997. Page 191.
- ²¹ Ibid. Page 192.
- ²² Ibid. Page 182.



Departed But Not Dead: The Rituals of Contact with the Deceased in the Islamic Tradition

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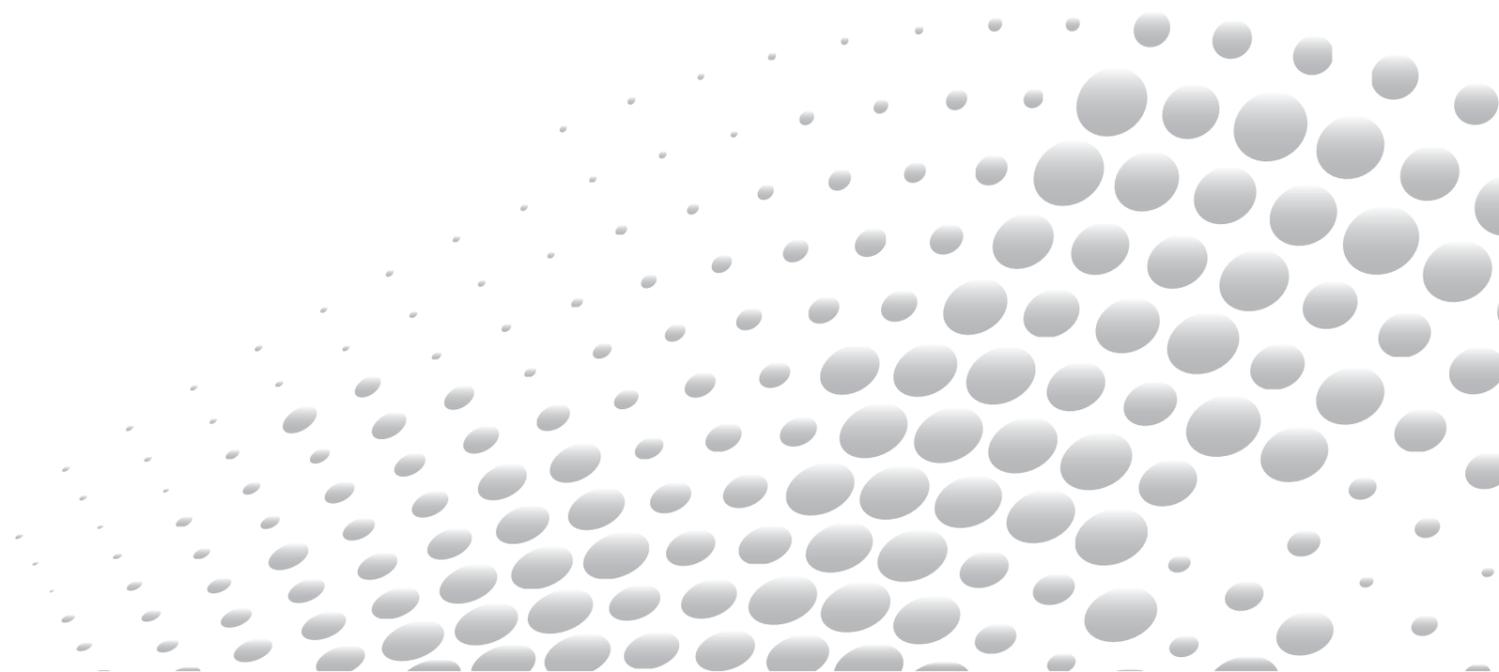
Introduction

The manuals of Islamic jurisprudence, a considerable body of prophetic traditions, and the references to death and afterlife in the Qur'an itself, depict death not as the end of life or a point of no return, but as the end of a phase, a marker signifying departure from this passing world to another of far higher significance and worth. The deceased are not dead but liberated from the mundane dimensions of life here and now. The very moment of death is also the supreme moment of submission to Divine Will. The numerous accounts of men of piety dying while performing their prayers is a direct reflection of several verses of the Qur'an on the theme of death, fortitude, and submission (Q.7:126);¹ while in the case of those who give up their life in the cause of God, the word "dead" does not even apply (Q.2:154).² It is the unbelievers and those immersed in evil deeds who are truly dead even when alive.

This paradoxical language and the breaking of boundaries between concepts of life and death manifest themselves in a variety of ways in the life of Muslim communities in different periods and places. Examples of the dead acting as intercessors are well documented in the literature on dreams and dream interpretation. The tradition of summoning souls from beyond the grave is still practiced within some Islamic societies.

On a broader and more institutional level, the very idea of charity and endowment (*waqf*) is indicative of a firm belief that all benefits from such a venture will reach the spirit of the deceased benefactor on an everlasting basis. The contemporary elaborate funeral rituals, particularly of the Shi'ite world, also merit attention as both a reflection and celebration of the interdependence between the living and the dead.

Religious beliefs, as much as literary and cultural legacies, are often divided into high and low, popular and elitist, and other such clear cut binary divisions culled from other cultures and systems of belief. In dealing with notions of the ever-present departed, this paper will try to show how blurred these lines can be and how texts and traditions constantly impinge upon each other.



The Qur'anic View of the Deceased

Early Islamic texts provide ample support for a view that considers the deceased are merely transferred to the spiritual world. Based on this view, these texts also provide special means, in the form of prayers and rituals by which one could virtually, contact the spirits of the deceased, send them spiritual gifts, receive their spiritual intercession, and receive information from them about future events or current mundane problems. Three Qur'anic verses of Q.2:154, Q.3:169 and 170 provide specific unequivocal assertions that martyrs may not be considered as dead, rather they are alive and receive their sustenance from Almighty: "And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, 'they are dead.' Rather, they are alive, but you perceive it not."³ "And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision, rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and they receive good tidings about those (to be martyred) after them who have not yet joined them- that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve."⁴

These and a few other Qur'anic verses⁵ have been taken by the classical and modern exegetes of the Qur'an⁶ as proofs of and references to the independence of human's soul from body, as well as the presence of a form of life in the Intermezzo (in-between temporal space) that is a stage between the mundane life and Hereafter.⁷

According to the classical exegete Abu al-

Futuh al-Razi, there are several prophetic hadith showing that a second form of life begins immediately after the first death. Most of this hadith literatures refer to the Prophet's frequent assertions that martyrs' souls will be received, immediately after their departure from the mundane life, by angels and *hur al-'ins* (heavenly female companions).⁸ Al-Razi also refers, without refutation, to a few hadith (one narrated by 'Abdullah 'Abbas) that have used a symbolic language by asserting the souls of the martyrs will settle in the body of "heavenly green birds."⁹ One view maintains that that in fact it is the "good reputation" of the deceased that will continue living. Another view refutes the corporeal presence of the deceased in heaven and supports only in the spiritual presence.¹⁰ Al-Razi rejects the latter proposition and holds that since spirits are not in need of food, such an interpretation renders Q.3:169 (where there is an assertion that God provides for the martyrs their subsistence) baseless. Al-Razi then refers to some others genre of hadith, the martyrs appear in the heaven with full glory being accompanied by a hundred and forty two female companions while enjoying a power to save about seventy of his immediate relatives in the next world. A few hadith of the latter type maintain that life after death in the Isthmus stage solely belongs to the martyrs, and the rest of the deceased are dead until they are revived in the day of judgment.¹¹

Mohammad Hosein Tabataba'i (d. 1985) the author of the most renowned contempo-

rary work on exegesis namely *Al-Mizan*, distances himself from the above exaggerations and asserts that Q.40:11, leaves no doubt, by referring to two lives and two deaths, that between the first death from the mundane life and Hereafter, there must be another stage of life and death that occurs in the Intermezzo and applies universally to all the deceased.¹² He emphatically rejects the classical exegeses that pertain the 'living after death,' only to the living of the name (reputation) or to a form of a heavenly bird's life.

By referring to Q.40:46 and 39:42, Tabataba'i concludes that the Intermezzo stage of life (as opposed to the eternity of life in Hereafter) has times (days and nights), and the word *twaffa* used in the Qur'an for death of human beings denotes a mode of transference rather than annihilation.¹³ Furthermore, a great majority of the Muslim exegetes maintain, based on Q.3: 170 that the deceased human beings not only have a second life in the Isthmus stage, but they are also quite informed and cognizant of the lives of others they left in the mundane life. This thought, of course opens the possibility of a two-way or a one-way contacts between human souls living on the opposite sides of the mundane border.

Overall the above arguments and a very rich Islamic literature on the principle of 'the eternity of soul,' (*asl-e baqa'-e* or *tajarrod-e nafs*)¹⁴ have established a firm belief, within the Muslim community since classical times, about the continuance of life after departing the ma-

terial world.

The Literatures of Contacting the Deceased

The above nucleus of thought has gradually developed an extensive literature on conditions, ways, means, and results of contacts between the populations on earth and the one presently living in Intermezzo. This literature becomes quite extensive when it reaches the Shi'i Islam where the concept of intercession has received deep elaborations in connection with the Shi'i concept of infallible leadership (*imama*). According to Shi'ism, all prophets, the Twelve Shi'a Imams, Prophet's daughter Fatima, and other saints (friends of God or *Owlia' Allah*) may enjoy intercessions power and save groups of sinners who may have a chance for forgiveness by God in Hereafter.¹⁵ Thus comes the source of the reverence of shrines for the Shi'i community and the reason that in no other part of the Islamic community, the literature for contacting the deceased in general and with the sacred in particular has developed as much as it did in the Shi'i community.

One of the most influential contemporary prayer manuals that reflect an elaborate body of the abovementioned literature is *Mafatih-al-Jinan* edited by Shaykh Abbas Qummi (d.1359 AH). This manual is a collection of special prayers composed by some of the Shi'i Imams and their companions based on the Qur'anic verses, Prophetic hadith, and their own view of life on both sides of what we know as the death



border. In the next section we will focus on various aspects of the life in the Intermezzo and its relations to our world as seen through the lines and the vocabularies of this specific manual.

Mafatih al-Jinan (Keys to the Heavens) and Methods of Contacting the Deceased.

The first striking feature of this manual is that it employs the idea of intercession in a very comprehensive manner. The whole text is fraught with special prayers addressing various Muslim saints (specifically the Shi'i Imams), in the hope that while they receive these prayers instantly, they may reciprocate in kind and in heavenly terms should God permit this intercession. These special prayers even provide fully elaborate rituals for the entrance of one's shrine. There are also special prayers designed for specific mundane or heavenly purposes. All such prayers are based on three Qur'anic concepts already mentioned: That the deceased are alive in the Intermezzo, that they are aware of the acts of people on earth in trying to reach

them, and that they can respond, if God permits them to do so, in various spiritual ways. In showing the importance of paying respects to the shrines and the spirit of the sacred, Qummi denotes the following hadith:

"He who visits them while being cognizant of their rights, will deserve heaven."¹⁶

The prayer for the deceased, as Qummi reports is not confined to the sacred figures. In fact *Mafatih* points emphatically that according to a number of hadiths (Prophetic or from the Shi'i Imams), it is incumbent upon all Muslims to regularly visit cemeteries, pray for the deceased, and take lessons from the fact that soon they will join them too. Qummi narrates two hadith from Ja'far al-Sadiq (d.148/765) where he stresses on the importance of visiting and praying for the deceased on the account that they (the deceased) hear and respond to the prayers. As for the specific prayer that may be performed for the deceased al-Sadiq suggests the following:

Oh Lord! Take away hardship (literally earth) from their sides, and ascend their souls

towards yourself, let them meet your contentedness (a heavenly residence) and accompany them with your mercy so that it saves them from loneliness and gives them relief from fear, indeed you are Almighty.¹⁷

Additionally Qummi refers to a few Prophetic hadith where the Prophet advises his community to regularly send prayer-gifts to the deceased. He (the prophet) is quoted to have recommended that if the following prayer would be uttered three times over any grave, it will never be rejected:

Oh Lord! I beg you on the truthfulness of Muhammad and his followers that you do not punish this deceased person.¹⁸

Another hadith from Ja'far al-Sadiq, as referred to by Qummi, reflects the depth of this trilateral relationship between god, the deceased person and his living friends and relatives. According to this hadith al-Sadiq points that if forty believers would be present in the funeral of the deceased and utter the following testimony, he will be saved in Hereafter:

Oh Lord! We do not know of him (her) except good and you are more knowledgeable than us about him.¹⁹

According to the hadith, once this prayer is performed, God will say that "I accepted your testimony and forgave all his sins which you are ignorant about and I am fully aware of."²⁰

The ritual of praying for the deceased has received so much attention within the Islamic tradition and specifically within the Shi'i tradition that it has become a supplementary part of daily prayer calls (*adhan*) and obligatory prayers as well as the standard for terminating any prayers or official sermon:

Oh Lord! Bestow your forgiveness upon me, my parents, and all believers on the Day of Judgment.²¹

Mafatih points to a special prayer for all the deceased recommended for daily utterance during the fasting month of Ramadan:

Oh God! Bestow happiness upon the resi-

dents of graves.²²

Qummi refers to a number of hadiths emphasizing that the deceased are expecting their loved ones to send them prayers.²³

Devotional Rituals and the Rights of the Deceased

Mafatih al-Jinan frequently offers elaborate and graphic descriptions for how the devotional rituals done on behalf of the deceased will be received by them instantly and in the most glorious and auspicious manner. "According to a hadith," Qummi mentions, "once a person gives alms on behalf of a deceased, The Angel Gabriel accompanied by seventy thousand other angels descend to his grave each carrying a blessing from God, submitting all the blessing to him, shedding lots of light upon him...and all his wishes subsequently will come true."²⁴

Almost all of the modern jurisprudential manuals of day to day and A to Z devotional rituals contain chapters specifying the duties of the heirs to the deceased in detail. For example, according to these manuals, the elder son of the deceased is obligated to personally perform or to hire someone else to perform for the parental obligatory prayers that have been neglected by them in their life without any justified excuse.²⁵ In fact the duties of the heirs towards the deceased compose a major part of all the juridical rulings in the official manuals of the Islamic jurists.²⁶

All such manuals also permit and encourage the living to do recommended (*mustahabb*) devotional rituals such as performing the pilgrimage on behalf the deceased.²⁷

It is important to note that the introductory part of many manuals on jurisprudence emphatically denote and define a basic tripartite sections of rights that must be observed by and are duty-bound for all individuals: The

rights of God, the rights of other human fellows, and the rights of the deceased.

The legal invention of endowments (*waqf*) that appeared first in the Islamic society around eight century CE was indeed the extension of such well defined rights of the deceased within the Islamic legal structure.²⁸

Companionship (*hashr*) with the Deceased in the Qur'an and Prayer Manuals

The term *hashr* (companionship/gathering) and many of its various forms and synonyms (such as *jam'*) have frequent usage in the Qur'an²⁹ They denotes the concept of companionship of various groups of people with identical beliefs. Q.3:12, 19:68 and many other verses refer to the disbelievers being in each other's company in Hereafter. These terms has also found extensive usage in prayer manuals and supplications encouraging the readers to ask for the companionship of the saints, good-doers (*salihun*) and the loved ones in Hereafter. The following is a recommended phrase by prayer manuals whenever one visits the shrine of a saint or tombs of the loved ones:

May God make us known to each other in the heaven and enter us into your companionship.³⁰

When the Deceased Visits the Living

The relations between the deceased and his

living acquaintances within the Shi'i literature and tradition is mutual. According to this tradition the deceased usually uses the medium of dreams to pay visit, express appreciations, and convey specific messages to the living friends and relatives. A story narrated by the Persian translator of Tabataba'i's *Al-Mizan* is very telling. He narrates that once Tabataba'i finished his 20 volume exegesis, a friend came to him with a dream he had about the father of the author, expressing deep dismay that they (both parents) have had no share in heavenly rewards that their son has accrued for himself by his work. The narrator then witnessed Tabataba'i's tears and how he responded to the dream by dedicating (gifting) the heavenly rewards (thawab) of his exegesis to his parents.³¹

Mafatih refers to a few traditions that provide detailed instruction for the ones who wish to meet a deceased (be it a saint, a friend, a relative or others) in dreams. According to this instructions a combination of the ritual ablutions, recitations of certain Qur'anic verses, and a set of special prayers performed before going to sleep will bring the desired deceased to the dream of the performer.³² According to Qummi, the summoning of a deceased may play the useful function of finding a solution to a problem from which the seeker could not find an escape through mundane means.

Indeed the Islamic dream and soul-summoning literature is replete with anecdotes

about enquirers and scientists trying to reach through to the knowledgeable deceased for help in finding solutions for specific scientific questions.

Conclusion

This paper provided a brief glance at a few aspects of the relations between the living and the deceased, a subject that has deep roots and many ancillaries within various realms of Islamic theory and practice. This is indeed an all too brief a treatment of the subject-matter; however, the author's hope is that even this concise account has provided a clear indication that the concept of death as a human being's total annihilation is totally alien to Islamic cultures. From the small evidence provided by this paper, it is clear that the relations between the deceased and the living in Islam are systematic, mutual, multi-faceted, affectionate, yet legally bound, and deeply embedded in the very structure of Islamic eschatology and worldview. Apparently this system is designed to keep a chain of connections between the two sides of the border. In fact, it can be argued that where the deceased and the living could send gifts to each other, save each other's spirit, convey messages, visit each other in dreams, and perform intercession for each other, there is no real border in between at all. Moreover, as various Qur'anic exegesis and their arguments about the stage

of Intermezzo have suggested, the above relation between the two sides is immediate. This immediacy removes the last possible elements of the concept of death, and substantiates the view that according to Islamic tradition not only the life of the individual is eternal, but so is the life of the society or social life.

ENDNOTES

¹ Q.7:126: "...Oh our Lord! Pour upon us patience and let us die as Muslims [in submission to you]." See Saheeh International, Trans. *The Qur'an, Arabic text with Corresponding English Meanings*, (Riyadh: Abulqasim Publishing House, 1997), 213.

² Q.2:154: "And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, 'they are dead.' Rather, they are alive, but you perceive it not."

³ Saheeh International, Trans. *The Qur'an, Arabic text with Corresponding English Meanings*, (Riyadh: Abulqasim Publishing House, 1997) 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵ Verses such as Q.29: 64: "And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter is the real life if only they knew." Q.32: 9: "Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His soul and made for you hearing, vision, and hearts; little are you grateful." Q.32:11: "Say, The angel of the death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned." Q.23:99, 100: "[For such is the state of disbelievers], until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back. That I might do righteousness in that which I left behind. No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is

a barrier until the Day they are resurrected.” Q.39:42: “Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term. Indeed in that are signs for people who give thought?” Q.40:11: “They will say, ‘Our Lord, you made us lifeless twice and gave us life twice, and we have confessed our sins. So is there to an exit any way?’” Q.40: 46: “The fire, they are exposed to it morning and evening. And the Day the Hour appears [it will be said], ‘Make the people of Pharaoh enter the severest punishment.’” All translations are from: Saheeh International, Trans. *The Qur’an, Arabic text with Corresponding English Meanings*, (Riyadh: Abulqasim Publishing House, 1997).

⁶ For classical exegesis see Abu al-Futuh al-Razi, *Rawh al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Janan*, Abulhasan Sha ‘rani ed. (Tehran: Islamiya Publications, 1382AH) vol. 1, pp. 377-79, and vol.3, pp 243-252.

⁷ The word Intermezzo is author’s choice for it conveys a neutral notion as opposed to purgatory used in religious text for a stage between Heaven and Hell. Purgatory (*a ‘raf*) carries a negative sense for it is a place where those people are kept, according to various religious texts, who neither deserve Heaven nor Hell. Another Qur’anic term *barzakh* used in the three

verses of Q.23:100, 25:53, and 55:20 is more neutral than *a ‘raf*, but it is mostly translated as ‘barrier’ in the Qur’anic interpretations. The stage we are addressing here is before the Day of judgement where all people are kept according to exegetical understanding. Thus a need for a term other than the usually negatively used term of purgatory, perhaps Intermezzo (or perhaps Isthmus) out of its musical context.

⁸ Abu al-Futuh al-Razi, *Rawh al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Janan*, Abulhasan Sha ‘rani ed. (Tehran: Islamiya Publications, 1382AH) vol.3, 251-253.

⁹ Abu al-Futuh al-Razi, *Rawh al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Janan*, Abulhasan Sha ‘rani ed. (Tehran: Islamiya Publications, 1382AH) vol.1, 337.

¹⁰ Ibid., 378.

¹¹ Ibid., 378, 379.

¹² Mohammad Hosein, Tabataba’i. *Tafsir al-Mizan*, trans. Naser Makarem Shirazi, (Tehran: Nashr-e Farhangi-e Raja, nd), vol.1, 492.

¹³ Ibid., 494, 495.

¹⁴ Ibid., 493-523.

¹⁵ Note must be taken that the concept of intercession is not merely a Shi’i concept, rather it is Qur’anic.

¹⁶ Abbas, Qummi. *Mafatih al-Jinan*, with Persian Trans. (Qum: Nubugh Publisher. 1986), 1016.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1028.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1029.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1011.

²⁰ Ibid., 1012.

²¹ This is a standard Qur’anic phrase.

²² Abbas, Qummi. *Mafatih al-Jinan*, with Persian Trans. (Qum: Nubugh Publisher. 1986), 310.

²³ Ibid., 363.

²⁴ Ibid., margins of 366-67.

²⁵ See for example, Fadel, Lankarani, *Towdih al-Masa’el*, (*the fatwas* or rulings), (Tehran: Daftar-e Nash-e Farghang-e Islami, 1998), 265.

²⁶ See the section on rules of inheritance: Fadel, Lankarani, *Towdih al-Masa’el*, (*the fatwas* or rulings), (Tehran: Daftar-e Nash-e Farghang-e Islami, 1998), 537.

²⁷ Ibid., 391.

²⁸ See *EI 2nd ed.* s. v. “*Waqf*,” by Doris Behrens-Abouseif. Also see Fadel, Lankarani, *Towdih al-Masa’el*, (*the fatwas* or rulings), (Tehran: Daftar-e Nash-e Farghang-e Islami, 1998) 527.

²⁹ See for example Q.3:12: “Say to those who disbelieve, ‘you will be overcome and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place.’” Also see 19:68 with similar notions. Saheeh International, Trans. *The Qur’an, Arabic text with Corresponding English Meanings*, (Riyadh: Abulqasim Publishing House,

1997) 63.

³⁰ Abbas, Qummi. *Mafatih al-Jinan*, with Persian Trans. (Qum: Nubugh Publisher. 1986), 1023.

³¹ *Al-Mizan*, vol.20, 692.

³² Abbas, Qummi. *Mafatih al-Jinan*, with Persian Trans. (Qum: Nubugh Publisher. 1986), margins of 887-892.

Jizya:

Towards a Qur'ānically-based Understanding of a Historically Problematic Term

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The Arabic term *jizya* is generally understood to be a kind of tax, in particular, a tax historically levied on non-Muslims, often but not always, Christians and Jews, living in Muslim lands. Some scholars have suggested associations between the Arabic word *jizya* and the Aramaic word *gizit/gizyat*¹ or even to the Persian word *gizyah*², which refer to forms of taxation prevalent in neighboring empires prior to the appearance of the Qur'ān and the rise of Islam in Arabia.³ These associations have helped to further the historical traditional understandings and applications of the term *jizya*, which define it as a tax levied on non-Muslims by Muslim state in return for being allowed to maintain their religion and for protection provided them by the state.⁴ The most odious understanding of *jizya* portrays it as one of three choices offered to Christians and Jews: convert, pay the tax, or die. Indeed, this conceptualization of *jizya* is a popular point from which modern-day detractors of Islam attack the religion itself as inherently intolerant and oppressive.⁵ However, the long and complex history of *jizya* shows such a wide variety of understandings and implementations that it becomes clear that there has been no general agreement among Muslims on what just what the term means.⁶ This ambiguity of definition in both history and tradition has led individual Muslim jurists and scholars throughout history to define and understand the term according to the particular circumstances of their own milieus. In certain times and places, *jizya* as it was applied, was indeed an oppressive tax burden that led some to convert to Islam.⁷ Nonetheless, the wide variety of understandings and implementations of *jizya* indicates that both the meaning and the significance of the term for Muslims are not fixed.⁸ Indeed, *jizya* as a poll tax applied to non-Muslims disappeared with the emergence of the modern nation-state and changing attitudes toward religious diversity.⁹

Focusing on a historic view rather than a Qur'ānic view is problematic in several ways. While an historical examination of how various taxation systems used similar terms may be able to offer valuable insights into influences on the emerging Muslim empire and its development of its own taxation structure, such an examination does not necessarily suggest an essentially Qur'ānic understanding of the term *jizya*. Likewise, an examination of the various ways in which different Muslim authorities understood and implemented *jizya* reflects the values of those authorities rather than values of the Qur'ān. Indeed, the Qur'ān, as any scripture, is refracted through the values of its readers. Changes in understanding and interpretation have, throughout history, led to changes in societies. As Amina Wadud has observed:

To avoid potential relativism, there is continuity and permanence in the Qur'anic text itself as exemplified even through various readings by their points of convergence. However, in order for the Qur'an to achieve its objective to act as a catalyst affecting behavior in society, each social context must understand the fundamental and unchangeable principles of that text, and then implement them in their own unique reflection.¹⁰

This article proposes a literal and holistic analysis of the text from a contemporary perspective and applying the exegetical principle of *tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān* (explaining the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān)¹¹ without refracting the Qur'ānic usage through the lens of history and tradition. Considering the semantic field of the root, together with the ways in which words of this root are used throughout the Qur'ān and the context in which the specific word *jizya* itself is used, together with the Qur'anic discussion of other key issues, suggests a significantly different meaning than “a poll tax levied on non-Muslims.”

JIZYA IN THE QUR'ĀN

The Arabic word *jizya* comes from the root *j-z-y*, which carries the basic meaning of to pay, give, or render satisfaction, and also repay, requite, compensate or recompense someone for something one has done.¹² The various Qur'anic usages confirm this semantic field. The word *jizya* appears only once in the Qur'ān, in chapter 9 verse 29; however, other related words from the same root appear 117 times in 108 other verses.¹³

Before looking at the word *jizya* itself, let us consider some of the other occurrences both verbal and nominal, of the root as they appear in the Qur'ān. Of all instances of the root *j-z-y* used in the Qur'ān roughly two thirds are verbs, while one third are nouns. Most frequently, the root refers to God's rewarding/punishing, in the case of verbal usage and of the reward or punishment itself, in the case of nominal usage. For example: "That God may reward (*li-yajzi*) each soul what it has earned;"¹⁴ and "these, their punishment (*jazā'uhum*) is that God's curse will be upon them as well as that of the Angels and all humanity,"¹⁵ and "these, their reward (*jazā'uhum*) will be a forgiveness from their Lord and gardens with rivers flowing underneath, eternally abiding in it, a blessed wage of the workers."¹⁶ These examples are generally representative of the way in which words from the root *j-z-y* is used throughout the text and serve to support the basic meaning of something that is given or received - either a reward or penalty - because of something one has done. Even the traditional understanding of the term *jizya* fits this broad understanding in that non-Muslims are seen as somehow compensating the Muslim state for allowing the non-Muslims to maintain their own religion.

To better comprehend the background of the traditional understanding of the term, and to lay the groundwork for an alternate understanding, we must examine exactly how the term is used in the Qur'ān. The word *jizya* appears only in Qur'ān 9:29:

qātilū alladhīna lā yu'uminūna billāhi wa lā bil-yawm il-'ākhirī wa lā yu'arrimūna mā arrama allāhu wa rasūluhu wa lā yadīnūna dīn al-aqq min al-ladhīna 'ūtū al-kitāb attā yu'tū al-jizyata an yadīn wa hum ṣāghirūn.

[Fight those who do not appreciate¹⁷ God and the Last Day and do not make sacrosanct what God and His messenger have made sacrosanct and do not follow the religion of truth, from among those who have been given the book, until they give compensation according to their means, when they have been subdued.]

The idea that the *jizya* is a tax levied on Jews and Christians who do not convert to Islam is based primarily on reading the phrase, "those who have been given the book" (*alladhīna 'ūtū al-kitāb*) as synonymous with "do not follow the religion of truth" (*lā yadīnūna dīn al-aqq*), where "the religion of truth" is seen the officially recognized schools of Islam. However, this interpretation comes to us, not from a literal and holistic reading of the Qur'ān itself, but from an atomistic approach to the text at a time when Islam had become a religion of empire. The atomistic approach to interpretation removes a verse from the overall context of the book, reading it within other contexts instead. The variety of different historical understandings and manifestations of *jizya* throughout Muslim history reflect the variety of social and political conditions in different Muslim empires at different times. These differing conditions provide the contexts in which the term has been used, with little or no reference to the broader Qur'anic context.

QUR'ĀNIC CONTEXT

Reading verse 9:29 in the broader Qur'anic context suggests a very different understanding of what it calls for, without ignoring other potentially relevant social and political contexts. A more holistic reading of the Qur'anic text offers answers a number of questions that are crucial to a clear understanding of *jizya* in 9:29. What is the significance of "acknowledging God and the Last Day"? What does it mean to "make sacrosanct that which God and His messenger have made sacrosanct"? What is "the religion of truth"? Just who, according to this verse, does not do these things--that is, who must be fought until they pay the *jizya*?

Qur'anic context provides the answer. Verse 9:29 itself identifies several characteristics:

1. *lā yu'uminūna billāhi wa lā bil-yawm il-'ākhirī* (they do not appreciate God and the Last Day)
2. *lā yu'arrimūna mā arrama allāhu wa rasūluhu* (they do not make sacrosanct what God and His messenger have made sacrosanct)
3. *wa lā yadīnūna dīn al-aqq* (they do not follow the religion of truth)

Let us begin with the third characteristic. As mentioned earlier, the idea that the *jizya* must be paid by Christians and Jews who do not convert to Islam (as the religion of empire) is based on the phrases "those who have been given the book" (*alladhīna 'ūtū al-kitāb*) and "do not follow the religion of truth" (*lā yadīnūna dīn al-aqq*), which are read as if they are synonymous. However, this reading is problematic even at the level of the verse because it does not

take into account the preposition *min* (from among), which precedes *al-ladhīna 'ūtū al-kitāb* (those who have been given the book). This is the partitive *min*, which designates a subset of something. Therefore, only a part of "those who have been given the book" fit the descriptions in the verse. Indeed, the Qur'ān makes it clear that there are Christians and Jews who do "appreciate God and the Last Day."

inna alladhīna āmanū wa alladhīna hādū wa al-ābi'ūna wa al-na'ārā man āmana billāhi wa al-yawm il-'ākhirī wa amila āli an fa-lā khawfun / alayhim wa lā hum ya zanūn

[Surely, those who appreciate, and those who are Jewish, and the Sabians, and the Christians--whoever has appreciated God and the Last Day and does good, will have nothing to fear nor will they grieve.]¹⁸(Qur'ān 5:69)

This same sentiment is expressed with slightly different wording in Qur'ān 2:62.

inna alladhīna āmanū wa alladhīna hādū wa al-na'ārā wa al-ābi'īn man āmana billāhi wa al-yawm il-'ākhirī wa amila āli an fa-lahum 'ajruhum inda rabbihim wa lā khawfun alayhim wa lā hum ya zanūn

[Surely, those who have appreciated (the truth of Muhammad's message), those who are Jewish, the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever has appreciated God and the Last Day, and does good, will have their reward with their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.]

Jane Dammen McAuliffe's careful analysis of a range of Muslim exegetes from the classical to the modern period reveals discomfort related to these verses. Each of the exegetes queried by McAuliffe goes to great lengths to explain the relationship between *alladhīna āmanū* (those who have appreciated) in the first part of the verse and *man āmana* (whoever has appreciated) in the latter part.¹⁹ At face value, this appears

to promise all the mentioned communities a divine reward for believing and behaving righteously. However, as McAuliffe demonstrates, none of the commentators she has examined are “content to allow the second phrase untrammelled inclusivity.”²⁰ Some Muslims argue that this verse was abrogated by Qur’ān 3:85.²¹

wa man yabtaghi ghayr al-islāmi dīnan fa-lan yuqbalā minhu wa huwa fil-ākhirati min al-khāsirin

[Whoever seeks a religion other than *al-islām* it will not be accepted from him, and on the Last Day, he will be among the losers.]

However, the idea of abrogation here is also problematic. First, as McAuliffe has shown, this idea has been rejected by some of the most respected commentators.²² Moreover, as John Burton and Abu Yusuf al-Corentini have demonstrated, there a number of serious issues related to the question of abrogation itself, not the least of which is that there has never been agreement among Muslim scholars on the existence of abrogation within the Qur’ān, let alone on the issue of specific verses are abrogating and which are abrogated.²³ Moreover, for those scholars who accept the existence of abrogation within the text of the Qur’ān, a key criterion is the chronological order of revelation: earlier verses are abrogated by later verses.²⁴ According to both Muslim and non-Muslim chronologies of the Qur’ān, chapter 5 was revealed after chapter 3.²⁵ So, while Muslim scholars may

argue, on the basis of chronology, that Qur’ān 3:85 abrogates Qur’ān 2:62, which is believed to have been revealed much earlier, the claim that 3:85 abrogates 5:69, which is believed to have been revealed later, is problematic. Yet there seems to be a conflict between the sentiment expressed in 2:62 and 5:69 and that expressed in 3:85. This apparent contradiction arises, as does the traditional interpretation of *jizya*, from a definition of Islam as the religion of empire, rather than a definition of Islam as the religion of the Qur’ān.

ISLĀM AND DĪN IN THE QUR’ĀN

Applying the exegetical principle of *tafsīr al-qur’ān bil-qur’ān* (explaining the Qur’ān with the Qur’ān) and the jurisprudential principle *al-fil-kalām al-aqīqa* (the fundamental rule of speech is literalness) shows that there is, in reality, no conflict between Qur’ān 2:62, 3:85, and 5:69. Such a reading also alleviates the difficulties that many exegetes have had with the wording of 2:26 and 5:69. Indeed, applying these two principles reveals the harmony that exists between these verses. The issue hinges on the Qur’ānic usage of the terms *islām* (lit. “submission” or “surrender”) and *dīn* (usually translated as “religion”). Solomon, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, together with those who followed them are defined as *muslim* in the Qur’ān.²⁶ The Qur’ān also orders Muhammad to declare: *mā kuntū bidan min al-rusul* (I

am nothing new among the messengers).²⁷ Additionally, the Qur’ān asserts: *mā yuqālu laka illā mā qad qīla lil-rusul min qablaka* (nothing is said to you that has not already been said to the messengers before you).²⁸ The Qur’ān also connects “those who have been given the book” (*al-ladhīna ‘ūtū al-kitāb*) with “right religion” (*dīn al-qayyima*) in Chapter 98:

wa mā tafarraqa al-ladhīnā‘ūtū al-kitāb illā min ba d mā jā‘athum al-bayyinahu wa mā umirū ‘illā liya budū allāh mukhlī in lahu al-dīn unafā‘ wa yuqīmū al-ṣalāt wa yu utū al-zakāt wa dhalika dīn al-qayyimatī

[Those who have been given the book did not become divided except after clear evidence had come to them. They were only commanded to serve God, being sincere to Him in religion, and to establish prayer, and give alms—that is right religion.]²⁹

Qur’ān 3:113-4 offers further elucidation:

laysū sawāan min ahl al-kitāb ummatun qā‘imatun yatlūna āyāt allāh ānā’ al-layl wa hum yasjudūnyu‘uminūna bi-llāhi wa al-yawm il-ākhir wa yāmurūna bil-marūf wa yanhawna ‘an al-munkar wa yusāri ūna fī al-khayrāt wa‘ulā‘ika min al-āli in

[They are not all the same. Among the people of the book there is an upright community. They recite the signs of God during the night while prostrating. They appreciate God and the Last Day. They enjoin good conduct and forbid wrongdoing, and they hasten to do good works. These are among the righteous.]

“The book” that previous communities received is also clearly identified in the Qur’ān; *innā anzalnā al-tawrah fihā hudan wa nūr* (surely, we sent down the Torah in which there is guidance and light);³⁰ and, *ataynāhu al-injil*

fihī hudan wa nūr (and we gave him [Jesus] the Gospel in which there is guidance and light).³¹ The communities who received “the book” are not asked to abandon what they received in favor of the Qur’ān. Quite the opposite, they are admonished to rule according to “what God has sent down therein” (*bimā anzala allāhu fihī*).³² The Qur’ān further explains:

li-kullin ja alnā minkum shir atan wa minhājan wa law shā‘a allāh la-ja alakum ummatan wā idatan wa lākin li-yabluwakum fī mā ātakum fa-astabiqū al-khayrāt ilā allāh marjī ukum jamī an fā yunabbi‘ukum bimā kuntum fihī takhtalifūn

[To each among you we have ordained a law and a way of doing things. If God had willed, He would have made you a single community, but He tests you according to what He has given you. So, compete with each other in good works. You will all return to God, and then He will inform you of that about which you disagree.]³³

The Qur’ān thus directs Christians and Jews to follow the guidance that God has sent down in the Torah and the Gospel and promises that those who do so: “will have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.”³⁴ Reading the all these verses together and literally, it becomes clear that *islām*, as defined by the Qur’ān, is submission or surrender to the will and authority of God, which God has revealed to humanity in “the book” that He has sent down to the various prophets throughout history. Those who submit to God and follow “what He has sent down,” in the Torah and the Gospel are doing what the Qur’ān calls them to do and can, therefore, be seen as *muslim*, from a Qur’ānic

point of view; although they are not Muslim from a confessional point of view. Such a literal and holistic reading eliminates the alleged contradiction between 3:85, 2:62, and 5:69. It also calls into question the idea that *jizya* is a penalty imposed on Christians and Jews in general for refusing to convert to Islam.

If *jizya* is not a penalty imposed on Christians and Jews for failure to convert, then what is it? Once again, a holistic contextual reading suggests an answer. As we have seen, the verse that mentions *jizya* opens with the command to fight people who fit certain defined categories, and we have seen that according to a literal and holistic reading, continuing adherence to Christianity and Judaism does not put people in those categories. Clarification of what does so comes from the overall Qur'anic discussion of fighting, what justifies fighting and against whom it is justified, together with a close examination of the discussion of fighting in chapter 9 itself.

FIGHTING IN THE QUR'ĀN

Qur'an 2:190 establishes a core principle: *wa qātilū fī sabīl allāhi alladhīna yuqātilūnakum wa lā ta tadū inna allāha lā yu ibb ul-mu tadīn* (fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not aggress. Certainly, God does not love the aggressors). Qur'an 2:191 suggests conditions under which fighting is justified:

wa-aqtulūhum haythu thaqiftumūhum wa akhrijūhum min haythu akhrajūkum wa al-fitna ashadd mina al-qatl wa lā tuqātilūhum inda al-masjid il-harām hatta yuqātilūkum fī-hi fa in qātalūkum fa-aqtulūhum kadhālika jazā'u al-kāfirīn

[Kill them wherever you encounter them and expel them from where they expelled you; cer-

tainly, persecution is worse than killing. Do not fight them at the sacrosanct place of worship unless they fight you there. If they fight you there, kill them, that is the reward of the deniers].

Qur'an 8:30 offers more specific information about the behaviors that justify fighting an enemy: *yamkuru bika alladhīna kafarū li yuthbitūka aw yaqtulūka aw yukhrijūk* [the unbelievers plot to disable you, or kill you or, expel you...]. Verse 56 of the same chapter adds breaking treaties to the list of behaviors: *alladhīna ahadta minhum thu-ma yanqu ūna ahdahum fī kulli marra* [they are those with whom you made a treaty, but they break their treaty every time...].

Chapter 22:39-40 offers further elucidation:

U ina li-lladhīna yuqātalūna bi-annahum ulimū wa-inna allāha alā na rihim la-qadīr alladhīna ukhrijū min diyāribim bi ghayri aqqin illā an yaqūlū rabbunā allāh wa law lā daf'u allāhi al-nās ba dāhum bi ba dīn la-huddimat awāmi u wa biya un wa alawatun wa masājid yuthkaru fihā ism allāhi kathīran wa la-yan uranna allāhu man yan uruhu inna allāha la-qawīyyun azīz

[Permission (to fight) is given to those who are being fought, because they have been oppressed. Certainly, God is able to help them. Those who have been expelled from their homes without justice only because they say: "Our Lord is God." If God did not repel some people with others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which God's name is commemorated frequently would be destroyed, and God will surely help those who help Him; surely, God is Powerful, Mighty.](22:39-40)

Together, these verses establish an overall principle of fighting in response to aggression, together with a clear prohibition of aggression on the part of Muslims: *yuqātilūnakum wa lā ta tadū inna allāha lā yu ibbu al-mu tadīna* [But do not aggress. Certainly, God does not love the aggressors]. This is supported by the verses immediately following:

fa in intahaw fa inna allāha ghafūrun rahīm wa qātilūhum attā lā takūna fitna wa yakūna al-dīnu lillāhi fa in intahawā fa lā udwāna ilā alā al-ālimīn

[But if they desist, God is Forgiving, Merciful; and fight them until there is no more unrest and oppression and religion is for God. But if they desist, let there be no hostility except against oppressors.] (2:192-193)

Thus, the Qur'an indicates whom to fight and details specific behaviors in which they engage that justify fighting them. These same conditions are reiterated throughout the Qur'an in all its discussions of *qitāl*. The same conditions are also described in 9:12-3:

wa in nakathū aymānahum min ba d ahdihim wa a anū fī dīnikum fa qātilū a'immat al-kufr innahum lā aymāna lahum la allahum yantahūn alā tuqātilūna qawman nakathū aymānahum wa hammū bi-ikhrāji al-rasūl wa hum bada'ūkum awwala marratin a takhshawnahum fa-allāh ahaqqu an takhshawhu in kuntum mu'uminīn

[When they violate their pledges after their treaty and attack your religion, then fight the leaders of the unappreciative; surely, they have no pledges; perhaps they will desist.]

a lā tuqātilūna qawman nakathū aymānahum wa hammū bi ikhrāj ir-rasūl wa hum bada'ūkum awwala marratin....

[Will you not fight a people who broke their treaties, planned to expel the messenger, and began hostilities in the first place...?]³⁵

These verses clearly demonstrate that the purpose of fighting, from a Qur'anic perspective, is not to conquer and convert people, but to defend the Muslim community against aggression on the part of others who attack first, and when they enter treaties, they violate them and attack the Muslims because of their religion. This understanding is further support-

ed by chapter 60, verses 8-9, which sets the Qur'anic standard for community relations:

lā yanhākumu allah an alladhīna lam yuqātilūkum fī al-dīn wa lam yukhrijūkum min diyārikum an tabarrūhum wa tuqsi ū ilayhim inna allah yu ibb al-muqsi in

[God does not prohibit you from being kind and just to those do not fight against you because of religion, and do not expel you from your homes. Indeed, God loves the just.]

innamā yanhākum allāh an al-ladhīna qātalūkum fī al-dīn wa akhrajūkum min diyārikum wa zāharū ala ikhrājīkum an tawallawhum wa man yatawallahum fa ūlā'ika hum al-zālimīn.

[God only prohibits you from allying with those who fight you on account of religion and expel you or support expelling you. Whoever allies with them, these are the unjust.]³⁶

A literal reading 9:29 in light of the overall Qur'anic discussions of religion, revelation, righteousness, communities, and fighting and using the various parts of the text to explain each other suggests an understanding of the term *jizya* that is quite different than any of the variety of poll taxes that were historically imposed on Jews and Christians in Muslim lands. The earlier verses in chapter 9 make it clear that those against whom the Muslims are fighting have started the war in the first place: *hum bada'ūkum awwala marratin*.³⁷ Because, according to the Qur'an, aggression is forbidden and God does not love aggressors,³⁸ people who have received scripture from God (*al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) who commit such aggression would fall into the category of "those who do not appreciate God and the Last Day and do not make sacrosanct what God and His messenger have made sacrosanct and do

not follow the religion of truth.” Verse 9:29 orders Muslims to fight such people until they been subdued and pay compensation. In light of the overall Qur’anic principles discussed above, this compensation is not a fine for failing to convert to the official religion of Islam; rather, it is compensation to be paid by those “people who broke their treaties, planned to expel the messenger, and began hostilities in the first place.”³⁹ Understanding the term *jizya* as a form of war reparations paid by those who started the war may represent a dramatic break from past interpretations. However, previous scholarship has demonstrated that past understanding and implementation of the term has varied widely throughout Muslim history. Moreover, as the above analysis demonstrates, it is an understanding that is supported by a reading in which the other relevant Qur’anic discussions are taken together to explain and clarify the term.

ENDNOTES

¹ Harsh Narain, “The Role of Jizyah in the Spread of Early Islam,” *Essays in Indian History and Culture*. New Delhi: Indian History and Culture Society, 1986, 48.

² E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Vol I (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 422b.

³ Narain, 48.

⁴ E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Vol I (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 422b.

⁵ Robert Spencer, *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005), 62.

⁶ “Djizya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd Edition. vol. II (Leiden: Brill 1965), 559a-567b.

⁷ Milka Levy-Rubin, “New Evidence Relating to the Process of Islamization in Palestine in the Early Muslim Period: The Case of Samaria,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 43, No. 3. (2000), 266.

⁸ Daniel C. Dennet, *Conversion and Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i, 2000); Frede Løkkegaard, *Islamic taxation in the classic period: with special reference to circumstances in Iraq*. (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1978).

⁹ “Djizya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd Edition. vol. II. (Leiden: Brill 1965), 559a.

¹⁰ Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur’an and Woman* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn Bhd, 1992), 5

¹¹ Muhammad Ali al-ābūnī, *Mukhtaar Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*. v. 1.28 *al-Muhaddith Program*. v. 11.36. available from www.muhammad.org.

¹² E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Vol I (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 422a-b.

¹³ Qur’an 2:48,85,123,191; 3:87,136,144-5; 4:93,123; 5:29,33,38,85,95; 6:84,93,120,138-9,146,157,160; 7:40-1,147,152,180; 9:26,29,82,95,121; 10:4,13,27,52; 12:22,25,74-5,88; 14:51; 16:31,96-7; 17:63,98; 18:88,106; 20:15,76,127; 21:29; 23:11; 24:38; 25:15,75; 27:90; 28:14,25,84; 29:7; 30:45; 31:33; 32:17; 33:24; 34:4,17,33,37; 35:36; 36:54; 37:39,80,105,110,121,131; 39:34-5; 40:17,40; 41:28; 42:40; 45:14,22,28; 46:14,20,25; 52:16; 53:31,41; 54:14,35; 55:60; 56:24; 59:17; 66:7; 76:9,12,22; 77:44; 78:26,36; 92:19; 98:8.

¹⁴ Qur’an 14:51.

¹⁵ Qur’an 3:87.

¹⁶ Qur’an 3:136.

¹⁷ I have chosen to translate *āmanalyūminu* as “appreciate,” rather than the more common “believe” or “have faith” because the Arabic term carries important connotations not carried by either of these common English renditions. In particular, *āmana* carries the meanings of acknowledging and appreciating the truth of something. Moreover, the Qur’an contrasts *āmana* with its opposite, *kafara*, which means to deny and be unappreciative of the truth of something. Therefore, the Arabic term *āmana* is most accurately rendered in these verses as “appreciate.”

¹⁸ Qur’an 5:69.

¹⁹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: an analysis of classical and modern exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 99ff.

²⁰ Ibid. 127.

²¹ John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 1.

²² McAuliffe, 119.

²³ John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); Abu Yousuf al-Corentine, “The Concept of Abrogation in the Qur’an.” *Journal of Religion and Culture* (10) 1996, Concordia University: 63-76.

²⁴ John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 20.

²⁵ Richard Bell and W. Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Quran*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,

1977, 207. Ahmed von Denffer, *Ulūm al-Qur’ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’an*. Leicestershire, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2000, 87.

²⁶ Qur’an 2:128-133; 3:52; 10:84; 27:44; 38:34.

²⁷ Qur’an 46:9.

²⁸ Qur’an 41:43.

²⁹ Qur’an 98:4-5.

³⁰ Qur’an 5:44.

³¹ Qur’an 5:45.

³² Qur’an 5:47.

³³ Qur’an 5:48.

³⁴ Qur’an 2:62 and 5:69.

³⁵ Qur’an 9:12-13.

³⁶ Qur’an 60:8-9.

³⁷ Qur’an 9:13.

³⁸ Qur’an 2:190.

³⁹ Qur’an 9:13.

The True Man of Faith: A New Look at the Interfaith Dialogue

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There have always been great men of faith, who have lived well and they have also advised others to do so, like Hafiz, Saadi, Khawja Mo-inud Din Cheshti of Ajmir, Kabir of India, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and many others. But no one has put the essence of the Interfaith Dialogue into simple words, and yet deeply touching words, almost impossible to duplicate, as did the blessed Sa-ib of Tabriz, the Great Persian poet and mystics who lived in India three centuries ago.

“Live your life so well
O, Sa’ib of Tabriz!
That should you die one day
And surely you will!
The Muslims wash your body In the
Zam Zam water of Mecca
And The Hindus burn you
In the Holy Banaras!”

The Religious Intolerance

To know what Sa-ib of Tabriz was saying better, we have to put it into the right perspective, in order to understand the context. Since the early days of “religion” (a term that means “re-joining” or “Back-to-God, in Latin) there has always been the conflict between the “believers”, especially the ones who were “self-righteous/better than thou /self-centered, fundamentalist, crusaders, jihadis, and the others. The result of this self centeredness has been the first crime, i.e. the first

murder, which was committed on the basis of “religious intolerance,” which was the murder of Abel at the hands of zealot brother, Cain.

The Abel vs. Cain Religious Intolerance

The story is well recorded in the religious texts especially in the Bible and the Holy Qur’an. The two sons of Adam (A.S) were to present their religious offerings to God Almighty, who would accept or reject anyone, depending on His wish. Abel, who was a shepherd, chose the best sheep in his flock, and he brought it for the offering. His brother, Cain, who was a farmer, on the other hand chose some wheat, but in fact not the best, but the worst, and brought his lowly produce as an offering as well. The rule was that there shall come a fire, from the heaven, to consume that offering which was accepted by the Lord, and to leave untouched the onewhich was rejected. When the “fire” came, it consumed the sheep of Abel, but it left untouched the wheat of Cain! The Holy Qur’an describes what happened next:

He (Cain) said: I shall kill you (Abel)!
Why me? Truly, God accepts the work
of the sincere!¹

The story has been going on in the form of the “Good vs. Evil” in the Magian Traditions, and in the Holy Books of the Persians, later to be fol-

lowed by the Avesta of the Zoroaster, as well as the “Artang” by Maani (3rd century A.D.).

In the Zoroastrian teachings, the concept of Ahura Mazda vs. Ahriman/Spenta Mainyu vs. Angra Mainyu is very expressive of this belief. And the most famous principle of the Zoroastrian religion is “think right, speak right, and do right.”² In Judaism, it was between Prophet Moses (A.S) and the cursed Samery. In Christianity, it was between the Pharisees and Jesus the Messiah (A.S) and finally between him and the traitor Judas, who sold him for 30 Shekels. In Islam, it was between Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and the Oligarchs of Mecca, and later, the Hypocrites of Madinah. And the list goes on and on until now, which seems to be worsening day by day, when even a leader of the “free world” like the former President George W. Bush of America (2001) openly announced that “you are either with us or against us.”³ He was actually saying

what Osama bin Laden and his ilk of followers are practicing: “It’s either us or you! Or my way or the Hi-way!”

The True Religion is “SILM”⁴ or Peace

The true religion has always been based on peace, and non-violence as Rumi ⁵, (1207-1273 A.D) the greatest Sufi in Islam has mentioned, in his monumental work “Mathnawi.”

“When one- colored-ness,
Turned into two, or three
Or even more and more colors!
Then the Mosaics and the Jesuits
Ended up in fighting!
But, if you were to remove
Those temporary colors
And became ‘color blind!’
Then you would clearly ‘see’
That the two or the three
Are actually but one!”

The Scriptures

There are many other examples for this idea of “tolerance” in the Holy Books. The best example of it is what Jesus of Nazareth (A.S.) himself has clearly instructed his followers, and I quote: “Love your neighbor, as you love

yourself”.⁶ Later on, Paul the Apostle, who as a Jewish zealot used to “terrorize” the non-Jews, and especially the Christians, came to see the light/truth, on the road to Damascus, when he changed totally, from an intolerant zealot into a very tolerant believer, he said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbals” Corinthian 13:1.⁷

Islamic Sufis in India

There are close to 600 million Muslims in the Indian subcontinent today, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and some island of the Indian Ocean.⁸ Those are former Hindus or Animist, who were converted to Islam, after the coming of Mohammad Bin Qasim in the 7th century, followed by many others Muslim “invaders” like Mahmood of Ghaznay(971-1030 A.D).⁹ But, what many people often do not realize is that the majority of the people of the Indian sub-continent became

Muslims, not by the force of the invaders, but rather by the tolerant attitude of the Muslim Sufis.

This tolerance of the Persian Sufis was also a remnant of their illustrious tolerant leaders, like Cyrus the Great of Persia, who some 2500 years ago freed the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, and even rebuilt their synagogues and temples with his own money.¹⁰ He also made a universal declaration of the Human Rights (see “The Cyrus Cylinder” in the British Museum) and he officially declared, “in our empire there shall be no slaves, nor any slave masters.”¹¹ Something that took the Romans up to their European descendants and American Whitemen, some 2000 more years before learning to abolish slavery in the 18th and the 9th centuries A.D.

The Persian Sufis is the most important group in the spreading the message of Islam, even more effective than the conquering armies of Sultan Mahmood of Ghaznay and other “Ghazis.” They were the teachers of “understanding of others and the love of God by loving His creatures.”

Aside from the Persian Sufis, the Persian Muslim sailors and businessmen were able to spread the peaceful Islam in the Indian subcontinent, and even in the Southeast Asia region-in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, later in the Philippines and up to China.

They were often mistakenly called “Arabs” just because they came from the Middle East (see for example, Sheikh Ahmad Qommi], the Sheikhul Islam and once the Prime Minister of Thailand, 1600 A.D.). Seyyed Hasan Astar Abadi of Persia, the first Sheikhul Islam of Aceh, Indonesia in 7th century, during the reign of Sultan Malek Salek, and also the Persian scholar Malik Ibrahim Kashani (1399 A.D) who was the the first Islamic preacher in Java, Indonesia.¹²

The first and probably the most celebrated Persian Sufi Muslim who migrated to India is Khawja Moinud Deen Chishti (d.1236), from Chisht of the Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchestan also known as Ajmiri.¹³ His Shrine in Ajmir of India is visited by all the sects and religious groups. Khawja Moinud Deen Chishti is one of the pioneers of the interfaith dialogue along with Ganj-Bakhsh (d.1072 A.D.).¹⁴ Sufi Ali Al-Hujwiri of Lahore, who wrote the first book of Sufi Islam, in Persian language, titled “Kash-ful Mah-Jub.”¹⁵ Baba Ganj-Shakarof Sind (d. 1265) whose full name is Faridud Din Mas-ud or “Baba Farid.”¹⁶ Amir Khusrow of Delhi (1252-1325 A.D.),¹⁷ the greatest poet of the Indian subcontinent, whose parents migrated from the Central Asia (Ancient Persia) who was not only the Grand master of Persian,

Urdu, and Hindi poetry, but also the founding father of the art of “Qaw-wali” Barzanji Music in India. Sayyid Ali Hamadani¹⁸ (of Hamedan of Persia) in Kashmir India, who played a great role in the spiritual life of the Kashmiri people. Khawza Nizamud Din Aulia¹⁹ who had great influence among the different religions group in India. And virtually a host of other Persian Sufis of India and of Persian poets in India especially the most religiously tolerant among them, the great Sa-ib of Tabriz whose poem of religious tolerance has dignified the Interfaith Dialogue today.

As far as the native Indian Sufis and the religious and the intellectual leaders, who were definitely influenced by the Persian Sufis as well as Guru Nanak²⁰ (1464-1539 A.D.), the founder of Sikhism in India, who established a form of understanding between Hinduism and Islam with over 20 million followers around the world.²¹ Kabir, a 15th Century Indian mystic

who was so tolerant of different religions that both Hindus and Muslims claim him as their own, and he himself says in a poem, “Am I a Hindu? Am I a Muslim? That I do not know, yet, but I surely believe in love.”²² Rabindara Nath Tagore (1861-1941 A.D.) who was greatly influenced by the Persian Sufis in India, as well the great Iranian poets like Hafiz and Sa’di of Shiraz.²³ And last, the great Mahatma Gandhi, who was so tolerant of the other faiths that he even started to fast till death. Gandhi went so far as to declare, “the 7th century Muslim Saint Imam Al-Hosain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet Mohammad, is the best example to be followed, in order to liberate India from the colonial rule of Britain.”²⁴

Islamic Tolerance and Peace with Others

The world “Islam” itself means “Peace” and it was based on peace by the Holy Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W) as long as he himself still alive.

After the death of the Holy Prophet, however, Islam was hijacked by militant groups, who not only were violent against the non-Muslims, but also the peace loving family members and the descendants of the Holy Prophet.²⁵

The Qur’anic Message of Peace

Four Qur’anic verses that so clearly promote the better understanding of the other religions, and a peaceful co-existence with their followers.

1. Let there be no compulsion in religion or terror. The truth is made clear from the error. (2: 256)
2. (Tell those who don’t believe) To your religion, and to mine (no impositions). (109:6)
3. Say (O’ Muhammad!) O’ People of the Book. Come, let us unite in those things which are common between us. (3:64)
4. Surely, those who believe (in Islam) as well as the Jews, and the Christians and the Sabians – whoever

believes in God, and in the Day of Judgment, and does good deeds, they will receive their rewards from their lord, and there is no worry for them, nor shall they grieve. (2:62)

The Interfaith Dialogue Now

After the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, while the Islamic government was harshly critical of the superpowers of the east and the west (the USSR and the US). Yet it was very supportive of all the oppressed people around the world—the Muslims as well as the non-Muslims in the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, Europe.

This could be clearly seen from the moral, political and even the material support that were given for them, regardless of their color or creed. In the year 2000 the then President of Iran, Dr. Mohammad Khatami, came up with the idea of the “Dialogue of Civilizations” in answer to the clash of civilization that Samuel Huntington were predicting, or actually preaching, which ended up with the right wing extremists or the “Neo-Cons” who lead the U.S. President George W. Bush in 2003 to invade Iraq with a claim of the weapon of mass destruction, and cause one of the greatest tragedies of the 21st century.²⁶ This idea of “Dialogue of Civilizations” was officially presented by the Ira-

nian Government at the United Nations’ General Assembly, and it was approved by the U.N. As a result, the year 2001 was declared by the United Nations as the year of the dialogue of civilization. Unfortunately, this “medicine reached too late for the sick body of the world” (As Ferdousi in his Shahnamah, said²⁷). Because, in just a few months after its adaptation by the United Nations, the tragedy of the September 9/11/2001 took place, and the world changed beyond recognition.

The End of the World Theory

An American professor, by the name of Francis Fukuyama in his famous book titled, “The End of History and the Last Man, 1992”. He quotes Hegel and Marx to explain how the world is going end by passing through these stages – the primitive to advanced and traditional or modern societies ‘till their fall, as is shown with cracks that are appearing on the walls of the American empire. The Holy Qur’an also talks about the rise and fall of the societies, nations as well as the mankind as a whole. Look at the following verses for example:

1. Everything on this (earth) shall vanish, only the ‘face’ of your Lord shall stay intact. Holy Qur’an (55:26/27)

2. Every nation has its end, and when the end comes, it won't be delayed." Holy Qur'an (7:34)
3. These days (of the world) we will divide among the peoples (of the world)" Holy Qur'an (4:140)

Huntington²⁸ and Fukuyama who saw the end of the Cold War and Communism, as the end of an era (but then they are wrong in picking a fight with the Muslim Ummah as a new boogi that the West has to fight with – a new crusade) are thinking of the clash of the civilizations and conflict between nations. The reality is clearly showing the demise of the Soviet Union and the world communism in the Eastern Europe and even in South East Asia like Cambodia, Vietnam and China, that it has been vanquished except in the name only of their own "successful ideology" that was based on the German philosopher Hegel's Dialectical Materialism – that the world is changing non-

stop and nothing can stop its progress forward towards a classless society.²⁹ But what they could not see or explain was what will happen after it becomes communist? It sure would move forward to the anti-thesis of communism.

The Islamic Holy Book (the Manifesto of Islam, if we used the materialistic terms) not only predicts that change, the rise and the fall of nations and the ideologies, but it even tells us how the old structures start to crumble, as well.

A verse from the Holy Qur'an:

"And when we (God Almighty) decided to destroy any nations, we make their leaders to indulge in excessive luxuries, and then we catch them unguarded (and destroy them)." Qur'an 17:16.

As far as the Islamic concept of life and death of the individual, as well as the nations are concerned – definitely there is an end to everything in this world, as there was a beginning for them.

Is this Century the End of the American Empire?

As the last century the Rise of the Great Britain and then its fall, and before that the Spanish and Portuguese Empire, the Russian Tsars, and before the Mongols, the Muslims, the Romans and the Persians, Babylonians, the Assyrians, etc. Surely there is an end to the super power status of the USA. This is a natural law that cannot be altered. The rise of China, India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, also known as the BRICKS, is one indicator of what is to come.

Going back to the "Dialogue of Civilization," not the "Clash of Civilizations" as the Westerners is predicting, while the rise and fall are eminent and the fall cannot be stopped forever, yet the rising and the falling nations can have good relations and the "dialogue" with each other to make this transition more smooth rather than confrontational and destructive.

In short, the solution to all of these clashes in dialogue

and understanding of the other rather than confrontation and conflicts.

A poem from the world renowned Sufi poet, the Great Hafiz of Shiraz said,

"The peace of the both worlds
Is in the right accord:
Be Kind to your friends
And faith with your enemies."³⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ See the Holy Qur'an: 27-32.

² Lockard, Craig A. *Societies, Networks, and Transitions: A Global History, Vol. A: To 600*. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.

³ "You are either with us or against us," see <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/> (accessed 6 September 2011).

⁴ "Ud-kholu fis-SILM-e kaaf-fah!" (Enter Into Peace Altogether). See Surah Al-Baqarah 208-209.

⁵ Jalalud'din Rumi is one of the world's most revered mystical poets. During his lifetime he produced a prolific range of inspiring and devotional poetry which encapsulates the Sufi's experience of union with the divine. These timeless classics have enjoyed a renaissance in recent years, as Rumi has become one of our most popular poets. Although Rumi was a Sufi and a great scholar of the Qur'an, his appeal reaches across religious and social divisions. Even during his lifetime he was noted for his cosmopolitan outlook. His funeral, which lasted 40 days, was attended by Muslims, Jews, Persians, Christians and Greeks. See Maulana Jalalu'd-din Muhammad Rumi. *The Masnavi I Ma'navi of Rumi: Complete*. Trans. E.H. Winfield. Forgotten Books, 2008 republished.

⁶ See Holy Bible (NAS, Mark 12:28-31).

⁷ "On the Road to Damascus," see <http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/roaddam.htm> (accessed 1 September 2011).

⁸ "Will India ever have a Muslim Code?" see <http://mjakbarblog.blogspot.com/2009/05/will-india-ever-have-muslim-code-bill.html> (accessed 1 September 2011).

⁹ The Masnavi is the great masterpiece of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, who lived in the 13th century. The Masnavi consists of mainly of Sufi teaching stories with profound mystical interpretations. This site also has information about the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema) and the International Mevlana Foundation led by the hereditary leader of all Mevlevi Sufis, the 22nd generation direct descendent of Mawlana Rumi and the 33rd Maqam-i Chelebi. See Na-

jeebabadi, Akbar Shah. *History of Islam: Volume Two*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam, 2001.

¹⁰ Hale, Tom and Thorson, Stephen. *Applied Old Testament Commentary: Applying God's Word to Your Life*. Great Britain: David C. Cook Publishing, 2007.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Tajar, M.S. "Contribution of Persia to the World Civilization," *Easy Way to Learn Persian with Filipino Text*. Manila: National Book Store Inc. & Mahmood Sadeghi Tajar, 2003.

¹³ Chaurasia, Radhey Shyam. *History of Medieval India from 1000 A.D. to 1707 A.D.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distribution, 2002.

¹⁴ Sharib, Zahurul Hassan. *The Sufi Saints of the Indian Subcontinent*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2006.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ "Sikhism: the World's Fifth Largest Religion," see http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/6261846/sikhism_the_worlds_fifth_largest_religion.html?cat=34 (accessed 3 September 2011).

²² Tagore, Rabindranath and Underhill, Evelyn. *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

²³ Chandra, S.S. and Sharma, Rajendra Kumar. *Philosophy of Education*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004, 2006.

²⁴ Bari, S.A. *Gandhi's Doctrine of Civil Resistance*. New Delhi: Kalamkar Prakashan, 1971.

²⁵ See Tajar, M.S. "Islam: A Message of Peaceful Coexistence."

²⁶ *Round Table: Dialogue Among Civilizations United Nations, New York, 5 September 2000, Provisional Verbal Transcription*, see <http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/en/khatami.htm> (accessed 1 September 2011).

²⁷ _____. *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*, Volume 2. London: W. Clowes, 1824.

²⁸ Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997.

²⁹ Hegel, Friedrich. *Dialectical Materialism*. Trans. John Sturrock. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

³⁰ Hafiz. *The Gift: Poems by the Great Sufi Master*. Trans. James Ladinsky. New York: Penguin Group, 1999.

ABOUT AL-MUSTAFA INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

Al-Mustafa International College (AIC) is named after the Last Messenger of God, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). AIC aims to promote montheistic and Islamic thought alongside other religion-oriented academic and research institutions. AIC is one of the 80 worldwide branches of Al-Mustafa International University in Qom, Iran.

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