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Editorial

The recent acts of what might be called 'super-terrorism' inflicted upon the Muslims of Palestine by the enemies of Islam were accompanied by a fervid propaganda campaign that, among other things, spoke ominously of the solidarity and cooperation between the Islamic movements of Palestine and Iran. This was just one note in a crescendo of insidious voices emanating from the global edifice of liberal secularism that has been, for some time now, sounding the alarm bells of the "dangers of a Sunni-Shia alliance". The level of concern and the tenor of the language used illustrate the underlying policies of this Axis of Modernity in its attempts to undermine and sabotage the Islamic Movement. From campaigns that aim to emphasize Sunni-Shia rivalries—stoking the fires of sectarianism on both sides of the "divide"—to covert actions that actually initiate internecine warfare and bloodshed, the West is frantically trying to divide the Muslim Ummah at every turn. This frenzy, belying the desperation that fuels it, is of such intensity that in some cases the masks of "human rights", "pluralism", "democracy" . . . are rent asunder, revealing the true nature and number of the beast hiding behind them.

It was over one year ago that Seymour Hersh blew the whistle in *The New Yorker* on Washington's role in fuelling Sunni-Shia tensions, confirming, what was obvious for many, that the U.S. was behind much of the sectarian violence in Iraq and Lebanon. In an attempt to co-opt radical Sunni groups as well as their own proxies among the "Sunni" Arab leaders of the Muslim world into their nefarious plans, the West has given much currency to the discussions on an "emerging Shia Crescent"—variously referred to as 'the rise of the Shia,' 'the Shia wave,' 'the Shia awakening' and 'the Shia revival.' This strategy which aims to raise the spectre of sectarianism across the Muslim world, along with the covert actions which result in the death of a great many innocent people, is proof enough of the intolerant and ultimately demonic nature of modern liberalism. This proof, before being a scathing moral, legal, social, or political indictment against the West, is first and foremost evidence of the bankruptcy of its secular liberal "civilization" with regards to metaphysical principles and absolute truths.

When this is understood it becomes blatantly clear that the liberal mantra of "world peace through religious pluralism" is a red herring. This form of pluralism has not only failed in achieving any semblance of peace but it cannot do so as a matter of principle. This is because any religious plural-

ism that is based on the relativity of truth or the relativity of knowledge does not have a cognitive foundation upon which to make any statement that can be described as value-laden—including, but not limited to, the above idea of the inherent goodness of pluralism. A more detailed explanation of this truth is in order here as it has profound implications for inter and intra-religious paradigms of unity and tolerance.

Liberalism, in its modern sense, is essentially against all ideologies. It names its dogma—which is purported to be anti-ideological—"pluralism" or "social pluralism." As religions are considered the traditional proponents of "ideology," liberalism seeks to counter them by invoking a "*religious* pluralism." As Legenhausen points out, "Religious pluralism is a theological movement grounded in the ethos of political liberalism and emerging directly out of liberal Protestantism."[1] In its attempts to oppose ideologies, liberalism negates any and all ontologies, both for its opponents and for itself, ultimately seeking recourse to a special epistemological position that is not based on any substantial ontological basis. Historically it was logical positivism and empiricism that first formed the epistemological approach that liberalism was to take towards reality. At a later stage, even they were abandoned due to their ideological undertones and, in their place, a pragmatic empiricism was promoted to deny metaphysics. Since ideological propositions are at root metaphysical and value-laden, the liberalist mentality labelled them as 'non-scientific' and of no cognitive content. With the removal of the ideological and the metaphysical, there remained no basis for ultimate reality and the Absolute, paving the way for pure relativism. According to this view, in the final analysis all propositions ultimately are neither true nor false as there is no concrete and absolute truth by which to judge them. Pluralism in this sense can only be the "position" of the nihilist who considers everything as equal in "value" because he sees it all to be meaningless, which presumably would include his own interjections or claims of meaninglessness.

Logically speaking, an epistemological pluralism based on the relativity of knowledge cannot give rise to any type of categorical or imperatival statement, but rather on the contrary, it removes the very grounding for such a statement to exist. A statement or proposition that is imperatival is value-laden and hence is of the type of propositions that can be called "ideological". So if there is to be any type of imperative attached to tolerance and social liberalism, then two things must take place: first, there must be a way to give validity to ideological propositions; second, there must be

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[1] Muhammad Legenhausen, "Islam and Religious Pluralism," *Al-Tawḥīd*, Vol. XIV, No. 3

a categorical judgement that invalidates those propositions that negate tolerance in an absolute fashion—or in other words, there must still be room to speak of the falsity of some ideological propositions.

Just as the relativity of knowledge was incapable of resolving the dilemma of validating imperative statements about tolerance, by all the more reason, the relativity of truth also fails in this regard since it removes, from the outset, the very idea of an objective truth. The only recourse or type of "relativity" that resolves the above-mentioned dilemma, while still allowing for multiplicity in the realm of human knowledge and experience, is what can rightfully be called "the limitation of human knowledge." This form of "relativity" negates the other two problematic forms since not only does it allow for an objective and concrete criterion on which to judge propositions, but it also makes possible access to that same existing truth. On the affirmative side, it allows for cognitive multiplicity as well as the possibility of error. Hence, by giving credence to the above fundamentals it is possible to arrive at propositions that positively affirm and make imperative 'social tolerance' in its various dimensions, whereas by going the way of relativism, such a conclusion is prohibited from the outset.

Gavin D'Costa foreshadows the palpable consequences of the inherent contradiction of a relativistic pluralism that denies the truth claims of religions but affirms itself in absolutist terms: "Such pluralism cannot tolerate alternative claims and is forced to deem them mythical. The irony about tolerant pluralism is that it is eventually intolerant towards most forms of orthodox religious belief."[2] Hence a pluralism that is based on relativism and is a "universalism" that ends up denying the religious forms their validity, must, by the logic of things, either deny itself formal existence or see itself to be the only truth. In this way, it is forced to become particularistic, thereby defying its initially stated purpose. Reza Shah-Kazemi, the author of our first article titled, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue", puts this poignantly in the following way: ". . . a universalism that does not include particularism is itself particularist and exclusivist—it excludes exclusivism."[3]

Shah-Kazemi rightly notes that this form of religious liberty and pluralism, not being a *forbearance* that is mandated by the religion in question, quickly becomes the absolute non-discrimination of principles and which leads to a situation where "no one is rightfully possessed of the power not to tolerate or to cancel this liberty"—hence, to the *tyranny of tolerance*. Such

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[2] Gavin D'Costa, 'The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions', in *Religious Studies*, no. 32, 1996, p.223; quoted by Shah-Kazemi in *The Other in the Light of the One*, p. 252.
[3] Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, p. xxii.

an illogical and unprincipled stance on the part of secular liberalism has led to a great debate on "Tolerating the Intolerant" and the limits and methodology of tolerance. What is ignored is the fact that there can be no principled reason to define any limits whatsoever other than pragmatic considerations of the biological survival of society, which in themselves are open to subjective interpretation and despotic application.

Liberal theoreticians, basing themselves on an "epistemic democracy" and without recourse to ontological considerations, readily speak of the equality of all different types of thought. From this they come to conclude the necessity of "freedom," social tolerance, and a laissez faire attitude to life. Such a conclusion is logically faulty. This is because if it is held that due to the relativity of knowledge, no conflicting ideas can ever provide proof for their own correctness—implying all ideologies are united in their innate lack of objective truth—then there can be no affirmation or categorical imperative with regards to freedom and social tolerance itself, as this is not an exception to the rule in question. Therefore, liberalism, as an ideology, which affirms and proffers the idea of tolerance as innately good, has no proof of its own correctness and truth. In other words, the call to tolerance is an idea that is contrasted with a call to intolerance; and if the latter is "ideological" then the former must also be similar.

Tolerance, or more accurately, 'forbearance'—when it does not derive from a self-defeating secular liberalism which not only makes it bereft of any positive value but opens the Luciferian doors of the exactly opposite tendency by way of an overbearing and extremist cult of "tolerance" and "freedom"—can find a principled expression through orthodox religious thought and practice. Historically, it is seen to be the case that whenever the Qur'ānic ethos was implemented in the Muslim world, there was great forbearance. In this regard Shah-Kazemi writes:

> A tolerance that is 'transcendently-ordained' is one which carries with it some divinely revealed sanction; tolerance of a non-transcendent order ultimately derives only from a kind of social or humanistic utilitarianism, and is thus at the mercy of the contingencies of pragmatism. The first kind of tolerance is of a much more absolute nature, being sealed, as it were, by Heaven; the second, though laudable in its positive effects, is more fragile, and depends more on the evaluation of what is opportune in any given situation. It is our contention that the Qur'ānic discourse, read in depth and not just on the surface, contains the principles for elaborating just such a 'transcendently-ordained tolerance', a tolerance that is not simply the outcome of a sentimental desire for peaceful relations between adherents of different religions [and different sects], but one which is

deeply rooted in a recognition of, and respect for, the holiness that
lies at the core of all revealed religious traditions.[4]

Transcendently-ordained tolerance or forbearance that is not only en-
couraged but mandated by orthodox religions has a number of forms. In
its most universal form, it tries to include some of those who do not be-
lieve in its truth-claim into a group that is open to salvation and makes
ideological room for them on the pretext of a limitation of knowledge
(both in terms of limited access to it and inability to comprehend it), po-
tential hardships (of accepting it) or the overarching incumbency of Divine
Mercy. In a more particularistic form, it attempts to include the religious-
other in some type of salvation—even if this 'salvation' is exoterically
worded as a "lessening of the punishment". In the most particularistic
form, it legislates the inclusion of those outside of its religious or confes-
sional fold into a group that is guaranteed safety and protection in this
world. This last form is purely out of an adherence to the Law, which tells
the exclusivist to carry out such an "inclusion" even if he does not under-
stand the wisdom behind the Law.

The Qur'ān, as the transcendent source of this mandate, on whatever
level it is envisaged—from the universal-essential to the legal-formal—
provides clear counsel on the types or stages of inclusion. It envisions three
concentric circles by which the practicing Muslim is to have forbearance
with the "other." The first and most inner circle is the intra-Islamic one in
which the believers are commanded to be brothers of one another and not
be divided. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

$$\text{إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ}$$

The faithful are indeed brothers. Therefore make peace between
your brothers and be wary of Allah, so that you may receive [His]
mercy.[5]

In this imperative command, the reason for forbearance is the reception
of Divine mercy; beyond this, however, there are more "practical" consid-
erations of the power and strength that comes with such unity. Any intol-
erance that would lead to intra-Muslim disunity would then presumably

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[4] *Ibid.,* p. xii.
[5] Qur'ān 49:10.

cause the opposite of mercy, namely harshness and the onslaught of Divine wrath.

The next level or circle which is wider that the previous one is the one in which the believers in all Divine revelations are called to become united on the common word as the liaison between them. With respect to doctrine, this point of unity is the fact that we all accept monotheism and do not give importance to anything other than God, and with respect to social practice, we do not lord over each other in a humanistic attempt to play god on earth. The verse reads:

قُلْ يَـٰأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ تَعَالَوْاْ إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَآءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا

نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِۦ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا

مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْاْ فَقُولُواْ ٱشْهَدُواْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah." But if they turn away, say, "Be witnesses that we are Muslims."[6]

The final and most encompassing circle of inclusion is one in which all those who would not count themselves as believers in a revelation but who retain that bare minimum awareness of the original nature of man *(fiṭra)* and who can be said to have a "conscience" whereby they do not oppress the believers are, on that count, given kindness and fair treatment. God speaks to the believers about this group in this way:

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَـٰتِلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن

دِيَـٰرِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓاْ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ

Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed Allah loves the just.[7]

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[6] Qurʾān 3:64.
[7] Qurʾān 60:8.

So tolerance and forbearance is for those people and groups that fall within any one of these three circles of inclusion. This implies that a person who does not fall into any one of these three categories is considered a person who is "at war" with the believers and, hence, is intolerant and must be treated in kind. In describing these three circles or levels, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, during the course of a moving speech, said:

> Islam has a big heart with respect to each of these levels. On the first level, it says to the believers, "You should live in a brotherly way"—*The faithful are indeed brothers.* And even wider and more encompassing than this, Islam orders all the monotheists of the world to make total peace, in saying: *Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah'.* [Then] in the stage where a person is neither a Muslim nor a Christian nor a Jew nor a Zoroastrian, and is just a human being; in this stage as well, Islam prescribes global peace. In Sūrah Mumtaḥinah, God says that as long as you are a human being, you can have a peaceful life. We have all been ordered that with respect to [any person], whether he is a polytheist, a communist, an idolator—of whatever religion that he may belong to—just so long as he is not in revolt against Islam and is not making efforts to go against Islam and the Muslims, well then not only should you not expel him, and not only should you not be apathetic towards him, but, on the contrary, you must be just and merciful, kind and friendly. *Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, that you deal with them with kindness and justice.* Following this He has said: *Indeed Allah loves the just.* Hence in the Islamic order, even a disbeliever must not beg, and the Muslims must be merciful towards him and compassionate. If he is poor, the Muslims must take care of him and his rights are to be respected.[8]

Such a Qur'ānic understanding also explains the categorical positions that Imām Khumaynī adopted in the Islamic Republic of Iran after its inception regarding unity, not only within the Ummah, but on the other levels as well. His son, Aḥmad, expressed it succinctly in this manner:

> Imam wanted unity on all levels: . . . unity on the international front as the Imām believed that the world's oppressed should attempt to unite against the oppressors; unity of the followers of religions and prophets in opposition to profanity, infidelity, and arrogance; unity of the *Ummah* and Islamic countries so as to fight and counter the

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[8] Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Kitab-e Naqd,* no. 4, Fall 1376, p. 352.

> attacks of the enemies of the Islamic world; unity of Shias, Sunnis
> and orthodox Islamic schools and sects within the Islamic world. . . .[9]

Such tolerance towards others—when it is the outcome of a firm belief in one's own religion, in this case Islam, and in one's own *madhhab* within that religion, whether Sunni or Shia—rather than "diluting" belief actually contributes to strengthening it. On the plane of the Law, this is due to the simple reason that one must truly believe in the Law to be able to practice a precept of it that seems, outwardly speaking, to be going against the integrity of the religion or *madhhab* in question. Hence, such a practice—its profound humility aside—is an exercise of the will in its attachment to some level of the truth, and like all exercise, it serves to build up and strengthen the person engaging in it. On the plane of the Spirit, in tolerating the other, one is forced to not just disregard him but, on the contrary, to recognize the commonality that is at play; for to recognize and identify the valid differences in humanity is to give credence to the Source of all identity Who inspires the theomorphic spirit of man.[10] Concentric circles of inclusion are nothing without the Centre that defines them and gives them their existence.

When intra-Islamic unity and tolerance is seen in this way, it avoids the pitfalls of both the liberal, with his secular religious pluralism, as well as the reformist, with his modernistic religious syncretism. Instead it reaffirms the believer's adherence to the *sharīʿah* as received through tradition, while leading him on towards that quintessential basis for true recognition of the "other." This basis, being innate and essential to the human soul, makes more possible that spiritual alchemy that religion ultimately aims for—in one stroke deepening the precepts of the Law and providing a greater understanding of reality as such. The serious seeker then, who humbly abides by the Law, and perseveres on the Path of cognition *(ʿilm)* and understanding *(maʿrifah)* in light of the above mentioned basis for true re-cognition *(dhikr)*, moves towards an integral knowledge of his "self" and, ultimately, his Lord.[11]

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[9] *Āwāy-e Waḥdat*, Papers Presented in the Seventh International Conference of Islamic Unity, July, 1995.

[10] The traditions from Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (ʿa): "Created beings do not comprehend anything but by [way of] God" and, " . . . [God's] servants are known by [way of] God" as well as the statement of the mystics, "Nobody knows anybody but by God" all allude to this reality, the Arabic is as follows:

<div dir="rtl">لا يدرك مخلوق شيئا إلا بالله– الْعِبَادُ يُعْرَفُونَ بِاللَّه–لا يعرف احد احدا الا بالله</div>

[11] As per the famous tradition, "He who knows his self, knows his Lord": مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّـهُ . See the first article for Shah-Kazemi's explanation of the verse 49:13 of the Qurʾān which speaks of distinction and difference being the expistemic means by which knowledge is attained.

The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Qur'ānic Message *

Reza Shah-Kazemi

Abstract:

The Qur'ān as the final and ultimate revelation is unique among the revealed books of the world in the explicit manner in which it refers not only to dialogue between adherents of different religions, but also to the divine ordainment of religious diversity. In its terminal role and as a 'summing up', the various religious paths are presented in the Qur'ānic discourse as so many outwardly divergent facets of a single, universal revelation by the unique and indivisible Absolute for the one common spirit found in all men. This comprehensive paper is a presentation of the key verses relating to this theme from a particular point of view, that adopted by those most steeped in the spiritual and mystical tradition of Islam, the Sufis or the *'urafā'*.

Keywords: Interfaith Dialogue, Sufi exegesis, *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān, Transcendent Unity of Religions, Religious Universality, Universal Islam, world religions, religious unity, world peace, metaphysics, Islam and religious pluralism, Dialogue between Civilizations.

Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.
(Qur'ān 2:62)

This paper is focused upon the Qur'ān as a source of inspiration for interfaith dialogue. The Qur'ān is indeed unique among the revealed scriptures of the world in the explicit manner in which it refers not only to dialogue between adherents of different faith-communities, but also to the di-

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vine ordainment of religious diversity, and, in consequence, to the spiritual validity of these diverse religious paths, which are presented in the Qurʾānic discourse as so many outwardly divergent facets of a single, universal revelation by the unique and indivisible Absolute.

It would be a relatively straightforward task to let the Qurʾān speak for itself, by citing one after the other such verses as that used in our epigraph, verses which relate to these universal themes; the result would be, we believe, a compelling argument in favour of religious dialogue, based on the metaphysical premise that the different revealed religions are truly and effectively paths to salvation. But such a presentation, however immediately intelligible it might be to some, would leave out of account the diverse ways in which the verses in question are, and have been, interpreted.

What follows, therefore, is a presentation of these key verses from a particular point of view, that adopted by those most steeped in the spiritual and mystical tradition of Islam, Sufism. For Sufi expositions of the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of the Qurʾānic revelation can be of inestimable value to all those engaged in religious dialogue, and to those, in particular, who see the different religions not so much as mutually exclusive and inevitably antagonistic systems of dogmatic belief, but rather as so many "paths to the heart".

The most eloquent and compelling contemporary expression of such a view of the religions of the world is to be found in the corpus of Frithjof Schuon (d.1998).[1] In asserting the validity of Schuon's principle of the "transcendent unity of religions", from the point of view of the Islamic tradition as a whole, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's "Islam and the Encounter of Religions" is an important point of reference.[2] After describing the encounter between Islam and other religions on different planes—historical, legal, theological, philosophical, and scientific—Nasr writes that it is on the level of Sufi esoterism that the most profound encounter with other traditions has been made, and where one can find the indispensable ground for the understanding in depth of other religions today. The Sufi is one who seeks to transcend the world of forms, to journey from multiplicity to Unity, and from the particular to the Universal. He leaves the many for the One, and through this very process is granted the vision of the One in the many.

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[1] See especially his seminal work, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (London, 1953). T. S. Eliot wrote of this book that "I have met with no more impressive work on the comparative study of Oriental and Occidental religion" (quoted by Huston Smith in his Introduction to the revised edition of the book [Wheaton, IL, 1993]).

[2] Published in his work, *Sufi Essays* (London, 1972), pp. 123-151.

For him all forms become transparent, including religious forms, thus revealing to him their unique origin.[3]

This unique origin is described as the "Centre where all the radii meet, the summit which all roads reach. Only such a vision of the Centre," Nasr continues, "can provide a meaningful dialogue between religions, showing both their inner unity and formal diversity".[4]

The present paper takes this affirmation as its point of departure. Specifically, in the first part of the paper, the aim is to show the ways in which key Sufi themes of gnosis or *ma'rifah* arise organically out of meditation and reflection upon particular Qur'ānic verses, and to allude briefly to some of the implications of these themes for interfaith dialogue or simply dialogue as such. In the second part of the paper, the aim is to show how a spiritual appreciation of the essence of Islam, based on Sufi exegesis of particularly direct Qur'ānic verses, opens up a path leading to the heart of religion as such, and how such a conception, in turn, helps to situate particular religious traditions within a spiritual universe defined by "quintessential Islam"—that is, Islam understood as universal submission to God, rather than only as a particular religious denomination. In the process, we hope to stress the importance of those Qur'ānic verses which deal with the universality of the religious phenomenon, to show that it is in the hands of the Sufi commentators that the deeper meanings and implications of these important verses are brought to light, and to relate the principles derived from this encounter between Sufi spirituality and Qur'ānic universality to themes germane to dialogue.

As regards spiritual exegesis of specific verses, we shall be drawing from a small number of eminent representatives of the Sufi tradition, such as Ibn 'Arabī, Ghazzālī, and Rūmī, but our principal source of esoteric commentary is that written by 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d.730/1329), a distinguished representative of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. This commentary has played a role of great importance in the tradition of esoteric commentary in Islam, its renown having been amplified in recent times as a result of its erroneous attribution to Ibn 'Arabī.[5] Its value lies principally in the fact that it presents a complete exegesis, chapter by chapter, of the Qur'ān, and it does so from an uncompromisingly esoteric perspective. It thus leads us, according to Pierre Lory, "to the very root of the Sufi endeavour: the encounter with

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[5] The commentary was published under the name of Ibn 'Arabī, with the title *Tafsīr al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, in Cairo (1866), and in Cawnpore (1883); and under his name, with the title *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, in Beirut (1968). We are using the Cairo 1283/1866 edition.

the holy word, and the spiritual force proper to it, not only on the level of meaning, but in the most intimate dimension of the meditating soul".[6]

The Metaphysics of Oneness and Dialogue with the "Other"

What is meant by the phrase "the metaphysics of oneness" is the metaphysical interpretation given by the Sufis to the fundamental message of the Qur'ān, the principle of *tawḥīd*, expressed in the creedal formula: *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* —no god but God. Whereas theologically the statement is a relatively straightforward affirmation of the uniqueness of the Divinity, and the negation of other "gods", metaphysically the formula is read as an affirmation of the true nature of being: no reality but the one Reality. Kāshānī comments as follows on one of the many verses affirming the central principle of *tawḥīd*, namely, 20:8: "Allāh, there is no god but Him": "His unique essence does not become multiple, and the reality of His identity derives therefrom, and does not become manifold; so He is He in endless eternity as He was in beginningless eternity. There is no He but Him, and no existent apart from Him."[7] We have here not only an affirmation of the oneness of God to the exclusion of other gods, but also, and more fundamentally, the affirmation of a unique reality, which is exclusive of all otherness, or rather in relation to which all otherness is unreal.

The shift from "theological" *tawḥīd* to "ontological" *tawḥīd* is one of the hallmarks of another great representative of the school of Ibn ʿArabī, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 787/1385), in whose works one observes a remarkable synthesis between Shi'ite gnosis and Sufi metaphysics. He refers to the "folk of the exterior" (*ahl al-ẓāhir*) who pronounce the formula *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* in the sense conveyed by the following Qur'ānic verse, an exclamation by the polytheists of the strangeness of the idea of affirming one deity: "Does he make the gods one God? This is a strange thing" (38:5). This monotheistic affirmation is, for Āmulī, the essence of the *tawḥīd* professed by the folk of the exterior, and is called "theological" *tawḥīd* (*al-tawḥīd al-ulūhī*). In contrast, the "folk of the interior" (*ahl al-bāṭin*) negate the multiplicity of existences, and affirm the sole reality of Divine being; their formula is: "There is nothing in existence apart from God (*laysa fī al-wujūd siwā*

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[6] P. Lory, *Les Commentaires ésoteriques du Coran d'après ʿAbd ar-Razzāq al-Qāshānī* (Paris, 1980), p.7. It is also noteworthy that Kāshānī was a "Shi'i Sufi", and that his work thus constitutes, as Abdurrahman Habil writes, "one of the several points where the Shi'ite and Sufi commentary traditions meet each other". See his very useful essay, "Traditional Esoteric Commentaries on the Qur'ān", in *Islamic Spirituality*, Vol. I: *Foundations*, ed. S. H. Nasr (London, 1987). See also the excellent work by Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge, 1992), which offers a concise and profound exposition of Sufi gnosis based principally on Kāshānī's commentary on certain Qur'ānic verses.
[7] Kāshānī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. II, p.17.

Allāh)", and they cite the verse "Everything is perishing save His Face" (28:88) in support. This, Āmulī maintains, is "ontological" *tawḥīd* (*al-tawḥīd al-wujūdī*).[8]

Despite appearing to be the concern only of mystics with an other-worldly and introspective orientation, such metaphysical perspectives on the central Qur'ānic message of *tawḥīd* are in fact highly pertinent to the theme of dialogue. In particular, the implications of *tawḥīd* with respect to notions of "self" and "other" are potentially of considerable value in helping to overcome one of the key obstacles to authentic and fruitful dialogue in today's multi-religious world. This obstacle consists in a notion of "identity" or "selfhood" that has become opaque, congealed, or reified. When the self is regarded as the absolute criterion for engaging with the other, there arises a suffocating notion of identity which feeds directly into chauvinism, bigotry, and fanaticism—qualities that are expressed by the Arabic word *ta'aṣṣub*. In its root meaning, this word graphically conveys the self-indulgence that constitutes the life-blood of all forms of fanaticism; the verb *ta'aṣṣaba* primarily signifies binding a cloth around one's head.[9] One becomes literally self-enwrapped, each fold of the cloth compounding the initial preoccupation with one's own congealed frame of identity; one becomes imprisoned within a mental "fabric" woven by one's own prejudices, and as the head swells, the mind narrows.

If the "I" be identified in a quasi-absolute manner with the ego, the family, the nation, or even the religion to which one belongs, then the "other"—at whatever level—will likewise be given a quasi-absolute character. It is precisely such exclusivist notions of "self" and "other" that contribute to the dynamics of suspicion and fear, fanaticism, and conflict. The metaphysics, or science, of oneness, on the other hand, does not so much abolish as attenuate, not equalize but situate, all limited conceptions of identity. It serves to relativize every conceivable degree of identity in the face of the Absolute; in other words, it ensures that no determinate, formal conception of the self is absolutized, or "worshipped", however unconsciously, as an "idol". The metaphysics of integral *tawḥīd* can be regarded as the most complete and effective antidote to fanaticism insofar as it undermines this idolatry of selfhood, a type of idolatry tersely summed up in the

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[8] Sayyed Haydar Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, ed. H.Corbin, O.Yahia (Tehran and Paris, 1969), p.72.

[9] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol.2, p.2058. Needless to say, in the Islamic tradition, the turban is also, and pre-eminently, endowed with a positive value, indicating nobility, dignity, and grace, as attested by numerous sayings of the Prophet.

Qur'ānic question: "Hast thou seen him who maketh his desire his god?" (25:43; almost identical at 45:23).

In the Qur'ān, God says to Moses at the theophany of the burning bush, *Innī anā Allāh*—"Truly I, I am God" (20:12). The following extremely important comment is made on this by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d.148/765), Shi'ite Imam, regarded also in the Sufi tradition as one of the "poles" (*aqṭāb*) or supreme authorities of the early generations. This comment comes in a *tafsīr* that was to have a profound influence both on the unfolding of the genre of esoteric exegesis, and on the articulation and diffusion of Sufi metaphysical doctrines:

> It is not proper for anyone but God to speak of Himself by using these words *innī anā*. I [that is, Moses, according to al-Ṣādiq's commentary] was seized by a stupor and annihilation (*fanā'*) took place. I said then: "You! You are He who is and who will be eternally, and Moses has no place with You nor the audacity to speak, unless You let him subsist by your subsistence".[10]

This expresses a theme of fundamental importance in Sufi metaphysics, or in that dimension of the Sufi tradition that pertains directly to gnosis, *ma'rifah*. The primary focus of *ma'rifah* is God conceived of as *al-Ḥaqq*, the True or the Real,[11] in the face of which the individual "I", on its own account, is reduced to naught. Human subjectivity is strictly speaking nothing when confronted by the divine "I". Another important early Sufi, al-Kharrāz, defines *ma'rifah* in relation to this principle of the one-and-only "I-ness" of God: "Only God has the right to say 'I'. For whoever says 'I' will not reach the level of gnosis."[12]

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of this perspective in both the speculative metaphysics and the spiritual realization proper to Sufism. If the Qur'ānic presentation of the principle of *tawḥīd* predominantly stresses the objective truth of the message, Sufi spirituality finds its apotheosis in the realization of the subjective concomitant of this message, this subjective element being, paradoxically, the very extinction of individ-

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[10] Quoted in C.W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, 1985), p.10.

[11] As regards the increasing use by Sufis of the name *al-Ḥaqq* for God, which is of profound significance for the shift from "theological" to "ontological" oneness, Massignon argues, in his essay on the lexicography of Islamic mysticism, that "it was from the *tafsīr* of Ja'far and the mystic circles of Kufah that the term *al-Ḥaqq* spread, through Dhul-Nūn al-Miṣrī and others, to become the classic name for God in *taṣawwuf*" (cited in John Taylor, "Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: Forebear of the Sufis", *Islamic Culture* [Vol. XL, No.2, 1966], p.110).

[12] Cited in A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina, 1975), p. 55. Also Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj makes the statement that none can say "I" but God, because "I-ness" (*al-anāniyya*) pertains only to God. See the chapter on *tawḥīd* in his *Kitāb al-Luma'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (E. J. Gibb Memorial Series XXII, London, 1963), p. 32 (of the Arabic text).

ual subjectivity, expressed by the term *fanā'*.[13] One might almost say that the truth of *tawḥīd* is realized in direct proportion to the realization of *fanā'*, or to the realization of the realities that flow from the attainment of this state;[14] on the other hand, to the extent that one falls short of the realization of one's nothingness, one cannot escape the "sin" of idolatry (*shirk*): the setting up of "another" as a "partner" or "associate" of the one-and-only Reality, the "other" being one's own self.

The truth which *tawḥīd* declares is thus, from this perspective, radically different from the truth of dogmatic theology, of propositional logic, or of empirical fact: this truth is the intelligible face of an infinite Reality, a Reality which cannot be exhaustively defined or confined by any words, a Reality before which the individuality as such is extinguished.[15] Thus the greatest of all sins is identified by the Sufis not in moral but ontological terms: it is the sin of one's own separative existence. Commenting on the words of the Qur'ān which describe the qualities of the believers, those who avoid the worst of sins (42:37), Kāshānī writes, "Those sins are constituted by their existence (*wujūdātihim*), and this is the most despicable of the qualities of their souls, which manifest through actions in the station of effacement."[16] In relation to the plea for forgiveness at 2:286, Kāshānī comments, "Forgive us the sin of our very existence, for truly it is the gravest of the grave sins (*akbar al-kabā'ir*)." He then cites the following lines of verse:

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[13] It ought to be said that in fact the ultimate "apotheosis" of Sufism is not *fanā'*, but *baqā'*, or subsistence, which follows the state of extinction, as is indicated in the sentence quoted above from al-Ṣādiq's commentary. The "return" to the world of phenomena, and to the individual condition, after having realized one's nothingness in the state of *fanā'*, is deemed a "higher" or more complete attainment than the state of absorption, extinction, or annihilation. Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between those "sent back" (*mardūdūn*) and those "absorbed" or effaced (*mustahlikūn*); the former are deemed "more perfect" and are in turn sub-divided into those who return only to themselves, and those who return with the mandate to guide others to the Truth, these latter being the highest of all. See his *Journey to the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat*—this being a translation of his treatise entitled *Risālat al-anwār fīmā yumnah ṣāḥib al-khalwa min al-asrār*, which is literally a "treatise on the lights in the secrets granted to the one who enters the spiritual retreat". Trans. R. T. Harris (New York, 1981), p. 51. See also our forthcoming publication, *Paths to Transcendence: Spiritual Realization according to Shankara, Ibn 'Arabī, and Meister Eckhart* (State University of New York Press), where the theme of the "existential return" is discussed in comparative context.

[14] Ghazzālī mentions various gnostic sciences (*ma'ārif*, pl. of *ma'rifah*) that are revealed only in the state of *fanā'*, the reason for which is given as follows: the operations of the individual faculties act as obstacles to this mode of inspired disclosure, being tied to the sensible world which is "a world of error and illusion". See No.56 of his treatise *al-Arba'īn*, quoted in F. Jabre, *La Notion de la Ma'rifa chez Ghazali* (Paris, 1958), p. 124. He also speaks of the ultimate degree of *ma'rifah*, the revelation of the sole reality of God, which comes about only through the state of *fanā'*. See *ibid.*, p. 65.

[15] The Arabic root *ḥā-qāf-qāf* represents very clearly this relationship between truth and reality: *ḥaqq* means both "true" and "real" (as well as "right"), with the emphasis on true; while *ḥaqīqah* means both "reality" and "truth", with the emphasis on reality.

[16] Kāshānī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. II, p. 213.

> When I said I have not sinned, she said by way of response,
> "Thine own existence is a sin to which none can be compared."[17]

The relationship between the "truth" of *tawḥīd* and the soul of the individual is thus elevated beyond the spheres of morality, theology, and all formal thought as such. The soul does not "acquire" some cognitive content that is called "knowledge of divine unity"; rather, its very manifestation as soul precludes or contradicts the full, mystical realization of that unity. Ibn 'Arabī quotes Junayd: "When He is there, thou art not, and if thou art there, He is not."[18]

The exoteric notion of a conceptual truth which, *qua* notion, is appropriated by the individual is here inverted: according to Sufi gnosis, it is the reality alluded to by conceptual truth that assimilates the individual to it.[19] On the one hand, there is the effacement of the individual before a truth whose fulgurating reality infinitely transcends all conceptually posited notions, principles, and dogmas; and on the other, there is the entrenchment of the individuality by the appropriation of a truth whose very conceptual form can become a veil over the reality it is supposed to reveal, and which is its *raison d'être*. In relation to the words of the verse describing the hypocrites as those who are wandering blind in their rebellion (2:15), Kāshānī refers to one of the characteristic properties of hypocrisy as being "the acquisition of gnoses (*ma'ārif*) and sciences (*'ulūm*) and realities (*haqā'iq*) and words of wisdom (*ḥikam*) and Divine laws (*sharā'i'*), only in order to adorn the breast with them, so that the soul might be embellished thereby".[20] All knowledge and wisdom, even if Divine in origin, can be so many veils if they contribute not to the effacement but to the glorification of the individual soul.

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[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 100. The "she" in question is the great woman saint Rabi'ah al-Adawiyyah. For a discussion of this theme in the context of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see the chapter "Oneness of Being" (pp. 121-130) in M. Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1971). The statement attributed to Rabi'ah is found on p. 125, n.2. See also the discussion of Kāshānī's treatment of evil by Pierre Lory in Chapter 8, "La Nature du Mal" (pp. 88-97) of his *Les Commentaires ésoteriques*. He cites the reference to Rabi'ah at p. 90, but translates the words *mā adhnabtu* as a question, *quelle faute ai-je commise?* ("what sin have I committed?") instead of as an affirmation, "I have not sinned". Both are possible readings, but the context favours the latter, to which Rabi'ah's words are a fitting riposte: you have indeed sinned, inasmuch as your very existence is a sin.

[18] *The* Tarjuman al-Ashwaq: *A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi*, trans. R. Nicholson (London, 1978), p. 90.

[19] It is difficult to refrain from mentioning here the words of a Christian mystic whom most Sufis would have no difficulty whatsoever in recognizing as an *'ārif bi Allāh*, a "knower of God", namely, Meister Eckhart. He said in one his sermons: "The bodily food we take is changed into us, but the spiritual food we receive changes us into itself" (*Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises*, trans. M. O'C. Walshe [Dorset, 1979], Vol. I, p.50).

[20] Kāshānī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. I, 17.

We have here the definition of hidden, as opposed to overt, *shirk*, polytheism, or "associationism": this is the *shirk* that, even while affirming theological *tawḥīd*, violates ontological *tawḥīd*. Overt, evident, or legalistically defined *shirk* means simply associating other gods with God, attributing "partners" to Him in Divinity; while hidden, subtle, and spiritually defined *shirk* means implicitly attributing to God a "partner" in being, namely, oneself. The only remedy for this subtle form of polytheism is *fanā'*. It is *fanā'*, ultimately, which enables one to see through the artificial walls—individual and collective—that surround the ego, and which allows one to perceive in all its plenitude the truth that there is nothing real but God. It is not difficult to appreciate what the implications of this principle are in relation to the requirements for effective dialogue with the "other"; in the light of these absolute values, it becomes difficult to shut oneself up within the blindingly evident relativity of one's ego, this diminution of egocentricity being essential for really engaging with, and opening oneself up to, the "other", defined both in terms of the human and the divine.

It might however be objected here that such sublime metaphysical ideals and the spiritual states they call forth can be the concern only of a small number of mystics, and highly accomplished ones at that. Can ordinary people concerned with dialogue and coexistence in the modern world really benefit from such perspectives? We would readily answer in the affirmative. For not only do the principles in question—even on the discursive plane—help dissolve the fixations on selfhood that give rise to pride and arrogance, on the individual and collective levels, but also, more directly, the key Qur'ānic verses from which these principles and perspectives flow can bring about, in the heart of the receptive reader, a penetrating sense of the ephemerality of all things, including, crucially, the ego and its manifold extensions.

Two of the most important of these verses are the following:

$$\text{كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ}$$

Everything is perishing except His Face [or Essence] (28:88).

$$\text{كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ۞ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو ٱلْجَلَلِ وَٱلْإِكْرَامِ}$$

Everything that is thereon is passing away; and there subsisteth
but the Face of thy Lord, possessor of Glory and Bounty (55:26-
27).

It should be noticed here that the words indicating the ephemeral nature of all things—*ḥālik*, perishing", and *fān*, "passing away" or "evanescing"—are both in the present tense: it is not that things will come to naught or perish at some later point in time; they are in fact, here and now, "extinguishing" before our very eyes. In the treatise entitled *Kitāb al-fanā' fi'l-mushāhada* ("The Book of Extinction in Contemplation") Ibn ʿArabī writes that the elimination of "that which never was" is tantamount to the realization of "that which never ceased to be".[21] That which will not be is already "not", in a certain sense, and one grasps this not only in the ineffable moments of mystical experience, but also in the very measure that one understands the following principle: Reality is not subject to finality, cancellation, extinction, non-being. That which is absolutely real is That which is eternal: it is the Face of thy Lord that, alone, subsisteth. Conversely, all that which is impermanent is, by that very fact, unreal in the final analysis.

Reflection on the verses above, then, can heighten the sense of the relativity of all things—and, pre-eminently, of the ego, with all its pretensions and extensions—in the face of the one, sole, exclusive Reality. Instead of allowing an egocentric conception of selfhood to be superimposed onto religion and even onto God—both of which are then "appropriated" by the ego[22]—such a perspective helps to engender the opposite tendency: to see the ego itself *sub specie aeternitatis*. What results from this perspective on the ego is a more concrete apprehension of its essential limitations: the contours that delimit and define the ego are more vividly perceived against an infinite background. Thus, what is in question here is not so much a vaguely mystical notion of universal illusion, but a concrete, realistic and effective sense of spiritual proportions. The existential limitations and the psychological pretensions of the ego are cut down to size, and a consciously theocentric focus replaces the all too often unconsciously egocentric one: nothing is absolute but the Absolute. Herein lies the first major lesson given by Sufi gnosis to those engaged in dialogue, a negative one, that is,

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[21] This pinnacle of contemplation, which is predicated on extinction, is discussed in relation to the prophetic definition of *iḥsān*, or spiritual excellence: "that you should worship God as if you could see Him, and if you see Him not, He sees you". By effecting a stop in the phrase "if you see Him not" (*in lam takun: tarāhu*), the phrase is changed into: "if you are not, see Him". See pp. 48-49 of the French translation of M.Valson, *Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation* (Paris, 1984).

[22] This is one meaning of Ibn ʿArabī's daring phrase "God created in beliefs" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-iʿtiqādāt*); see his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Cairo, 1306 AH), p. 225; and p. 224 of the English translation, *Bezels of Wisdom*, by R. Austin (New York, 1980). What is in question here are conceptions of God that are predetermined by the contours of an inherited confessional faith; as such they are more indicative of the believer's own mind than of the Reality of God. See the chapter entitled "Transcending the Gods of Belief" in W. C. Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, 1989), pp. 335-356.

the negation of egocentricity as a source of pride, exclusivity, and fanaticism.

As for the second lesson, this is the positivity which flows from the complementary aspect of gnosis. For the verses quoted above not only assert the exclusive reality of God; they also contain a subtle allusion to the inclusive reality of God. The Face of God, which alone subsists, is not only the transcendent, Divine Essence, in relation to which all things are nothing; it is also the immanent presence which pervades and encompasses all things, constituting in fact their true being. Before focusing on the verse "Everything perisheth except His Face", and in particular on the important and illuminating interpretation of it given by Ghazzālī, one should take careful note of the following verses, which refer to this complementary, inclusive dimension of the Divine reality.

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَشْرِقُ وَٱلْمَغْرِبُ ۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا۟ فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ ٱللَّهِ

And unto God belong the East and the West; and wherever ye
turn, there is the Face of God (2:115).

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ

He is with you, wherever you are (57:4).

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ ٱلْوَرِيدِ

We are nearer to him [man] than the neck artery (50:16).

أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ تَحُولُ بَيْنَ ٱلْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ

God cometh in between a man and his own heart (8:24).

أَلَآ إِنَّهُۥ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ مُّحِيطٌ

Is He not encompassing all things? (41:54).

هُوَ ٱلْأَوَّلُ وَٱلْأَخِرُ وَٱلظَّـٰهِرُ وَٱلْبَاطِنُ

He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward
(57:3).

Each of these verses contains the seeds of the most profound spiritual doctrines;[23] and each has given rise to the most fecund meditation upon that most mysterious of all realities, the immanence of the Absolute in all that exists—the inalienable presence of the transcendent, one-and-only Reality within the entire sphere of relativity, of all that which is, from another point of view "other than God". ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Shiʾite Imam and one of the primary sources of what later crystallized as Sufism, sums up the mystery in these terms: God is "with every thing, but not through association; and other than every thing, but not through separation".[24] Nothing that exists can be altogether separate from the all-encompassing reality of God; and yet this reality has no common measure with anything that exists. His Oneness both includes and excludes all things; hence the affirmation of God's immanence within the world—His being "with every thing"—does not imply any diminution of His transcendence; and conversely, the affirmation of God's transcendence above the world—His being "other than every thing"—does not imply His absence from the world.

Returning to the last of the verses cited in the group above, "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward", the Sufi shaykh Mawlay al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī relates the following incident, which we can take as an indirect commentary on the verse. He writes that he was "in a state of remembrance" when he heard a voice recite the words of the verse. "I remained silent, and the voice repeated it a second time, and then a third, whereupon I said: 'As to the First, I understand, and as to the Last, I understand, and as to the Inwardly Hidden,[25] I understand; but as to the Outwardly Manifest, I see nothing but created things.' Then the voice said: 'If there were anything outwardly manifest other than Himself, I should have

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[23] See the article "The Qurʾān as the Foundation of Islamic Spirituality", by S. H. Nasr in *Islamic Spirituality*, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-10. Frithjof Schuon cites the following relevant verses: "The Hereafter is better for thee than this lower world" (94:4); "The life of this world is but sport and play" (29:64); "In your wives and your children ye have an enemy" (44:14); "Say: Allah! Then leave them to their vain talk" (6:91); "Whoso feareth the station of his Lord and restraineth his soul from desire" (79:40). Then he adds, "When the Qurʾān speaks thus, there emerges for the Moslem a whole ascetic and mystical doctrine, as penetrating and complete as any other form of spirituality worthy of the name" (*Understanding Islam* [Bloomington, 1994], p. 60).

[24] *Maʿa kulli shayʾ lā bimuqārana wa ghayr kulli shayʾ lā bimuzāyala.* This sentence is found in the first sermon of the *Nahj al-Balāgha*. See the English translation of the sermon in *Peak of Eloquence*, by Sayed Ali Reza (New York, 1996), pp. 91-97.

[25] This is the translation of *al-Bāṭin* in the text in which this report is translated by Lings; likewise, *al-ẓāhir* is rendered as "the Outwardly Manifest".

told thee.' In that moment I realized the whole hierarchy of Absolute Being."[26]

The voice declaring that there is nothing outwardly manifest in the world of "created things" other than the being of God can be seen here as providing a commentary on the meaning of God as *al-ẓāhir*, "the Outward", or "the Evident". Likewise, the following remarkable affirmations by Ibn 'Aṭā' Allah al-Iskandari, an earlier Sufi master in the same *ṭarīqah* as Mulay al-'Arabī, the Shadhiliyya, can also be read as an exegesis on the meaning of Gods name, *al-ẓāhir*:

The Cosmos (*al-kawn*) is all darkness. It is illumined only by the manifestation of God (*ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*) in it. He who sees the Cosmos and does not contemplate Him in it or by it or before it or after it is in need of light and is veiled from the sun of gnosis by the clouds of created things (*al-āthār*). That which shows you the existence of His Omnipotence is that He veiled you from Himself by what has no existence alongside of Him.[27]

If, in one respect, God veils Himself from His creatures by Himself, in another, more fundamental respect, He reveals Himself to Himself through His creatures. The central idea here is that of the manifestation (*ẓuhūr, tajallī*) of Divine reality in, through, and as the forms of created things, the cosmos in its entirety. Every phenomenon in creation thus constitutes a locus of manifestation, a *maẓhar* for the *ẓuhūr* or *tajallī* of the Real, the means by which the Real discloses itself to itself through an apparent "other". Herein, one might venture to say, lies the ultimate metaphysical archetype of all dialogue. What we have here is a kind of "dialogue" or communication between different aspects of the Absolute, a dialogue mediated through relativity.

The idea of the self-disclosure of the Absolute to itself by means of the relativity of "the other" lies at the very heart of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics.[28] The whole doctrine of this disclosure of God to Himself is summed up in the opening lines of Ibn 'Arabī's most commented text, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. The chapter entitled "The Ringstone of the Wisdom of Divinity in the Word of Adam" (*Faṣṣ ḥikma ilāhiyya fī kalima ādamiyya*) begins:

The Real willed, glorified be He, in virtue of His Beautiful Names, which are innumerable, to see their identities (*a'yān*)—if you so wish

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[26] Cited in M. Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi (London, 1971), p.131.

[27] Ibn Ata'illāh's *Sufi Aphorisms* (*Kitāb al-Ḥikam*), trans. V. Danner (Leiden, 1973), p. 25.

[28] "The term *self-disclosure* (*tajallī*)—often translated as 'theophany'—plays such a central role in Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings that, before he was known as the great spokesman for *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he had been called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*)" (W. C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* [Albany, 1998], p. 52).

you can say: to see His Identity (*'ayn*)—in a comprehensive being that comprises the entire affair due to its having taken on existence. His Mystery is manifest to Himself through it. The vision a thing has of itself in itself is not like the vision a thing has of itself in another thing, which will serve as a mirror for it.[29]

Man alone reflects back to the Absolute all, and not just some, of the Divine qualities; it is for this reason that man is the "valid interlocutor", the receptacle and the mirror of the Divine qualities, the "other" to whom and through whom these qualities are revealed. The function, then, of an apparent "other", at the level of Divine self-disclosure of itself to itself, is to make possible a particular mode of self-knowledge. One recalls here the holy utterance, or *ḥadīth qudsī*,[30] so fundamental to Sufi spirituality: "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known (*fa aḥbabtu an u'raf*), so I created the world." If the creation of the world springs from a Divine love for a distinct mode of self-knowledge, the Qur'ān indicates that the differentiation, within mankind, in respect of gender, tribe, and race, likewise serves an essentially cognitive function:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓاْ ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ

O mankind, truly We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Truly the most noble of you, in the sight of God, is the most Godfearing (49:13).

Distinction and difference are here affirmed as Divinely willed,[31] and as means by which knowledge is attained. One should note that the word used in the phrase "that ye may know one another" is *ta'ārafū*; and the word for being "known" in the *ḥadīth* of the "hidden treasure" is *u'raf*—both words being derived from the same root, *'arafa*. There is thus a clear connection with *ma'rifah*, spiritual knowledge or gnosis, the essence of which is expressed in the famous *ḥadīth*, "Whoso knows himself knows his Lord" (*man*

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[29] This is cited from the translation of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* by Caner Dagli, published by Kazi Press, Chicago, in 2001, and which is the most accurate and reliable commented translation of this major text in the English language.

[30] That is, a saying in which God speaks in the first person, on the tongue of the Prophet, but which is not part of the Qur'ān.

[31] Cf. "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colors. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know" (30:22).

'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu). Thus, knowledge of self, knowledge of the other, and knowledge of God are all interwoven, and should be seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing, each element having a role to play in the plenary attainment of *ma'rifah*.

The verse cited above is often given as a proof-text for upholding the necessity of dialogue, establishing the principle of peaceful coexistence, and indicating the divine ordainment of human diversity. Now while it does indeed support such principles, the import of the verse is deepened, its message is made the more compelling, and its scope more far-reaching insofar as it is consciously related to the metaphysical principle of self-knowledge through self-disclosure. Thus, dialogue here-below—a dialogue rooted in the sincere desire for greater knowledge and understanding both of "the other" and of oneself—can be seen as a reflection of, and participation in, the very process by which God knows Himself in distinctive, differentiated mode; that is, not in respect of His unique, eternal essence, but in respect of the manifestation of the "treasure" comprised or "hidden" within that essence, yielding the perpetually renewed theophanies of Himself to Himself through an apparent "other", the "seeing of Himself as it were in a mirror".

Another Qur'ānic verse that can be given as a support for this perspective on the cognitive function of creation is the following:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ ٱلْجِنَّ وَٱلْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I only created the jinn and mankind in order that they might worship Me (51:56).

In his *Kitāb al-Luma'*, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) reports the comment on this verse given by Ibn 'Abbās: the word "worship" here means "knowledge" (*ma'rifah*), so that the phrase *illā liya'budūni* (except that they might worship Me) becomes *illā liya'rifūni* (except that they might know Me).[32] This interpretation is given also by several other prominent Sufi authorities, as well as some exoteric scholars.[33] The very purpose of the creation of man thus comes to be equated with that knowledge of God which

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[32] *Kitāb al-Luma'*, p. 40 (of the Arabic text). Ed. R. A. Nicholson, E.J. Gibb Memorial Series XXII (London, 1963).

[33] See for example Hujwiri's (d.456/1063) *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, one of the most definitive of the classic manuals of early Sufism, trans. R. A. Nicholson (Lahore, 1992), p. 267; and Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) in his famous *Risāla*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell as *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 316. As regards exoteric scholars, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for example, cites the *ḥadīth* of the "hidden treasure", as well as the interpretation *illā liya'rifūni*, at the end of his commentary on 51:56. See *Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut, 2001), vol.10, p. 194.

constitutes the most profound form of worship. But it is not just man that, in coming to know God, participates in the Divine dialogue, that is, the Divine self-disclosure of Itself to Itself; in fact, there is nothing in creation that does not obey the ontological imperative of "making known" the Divine treasure, even if it is the prerogative of man alone to "know" the Divine treasure, which he does in two ways: through correctly reading all the signs of God or the manifestations of the "hidden treasure"; and through knowing the essence of his own soul:

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَـٰتِنَا فِى ٱلْـَٔافَاقِ وَفِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ

We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in their own souls, so that it become clear to them that He is the Real (41:53).

As regards the objective signs on the horizons, the Qurʾān refers repeatedly to the universal law of "making known" the hidden treasure, doing so in reference to a broadly conceived notion of praise and glorification:

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ

All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth God; and He is the Mighty, the Wise (57:1).

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتُ ٱلسَّبْعُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّ ۚ وَإِن مِّن شَىْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِۦ وَلَـٰكِن لَّا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise, but ye understand not their praise (17:44).

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُۥ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱلطَّيْرُ صَـٰٓفَّـٰتٍ ۖ كُلٌّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُۥ وَتَسْبِيحَهُۥ

Hast thou not seen that God, He it is Whom all who are in the heavens and the earth praise; and the birds in flight: each verily knoweth its prayer and its form of glorification (24:41).

هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْخَٰلِقُ ٱلْبَارِئُ ٱلْمُصَوِّرُ ۖ لَهُ ٱلْأَسْمَآءُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ

مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ

He is God, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner.
His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and
the earth glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise (59:24).[34]

Thus we see that in the Qurʾānic perspective, every single thing, by dint of its very existence, "praises" and "glorifies" its Creator: its existence constitutes its praise. Every created thing bears witness to, and thus "praises", its Creator; the existence of every existent "glorifies" the bestower of existence. But, more fundamentally, the existence of every existing thing is not its own; this existence "belongs" exclusively to that reality for which it serves as a locus of theophany (*mazhar*); there is no "sharing", "partnership", or "association" in being—no ontological *shirk*, in other words. Thus we return to the metaphysics of oneness: nothing is real but God. Each thing in existence has two incommensurable dimensions: in and of itself a pure nothingness; but in respect of that which is manifested to it, through it, by means of it—it is real. This is the import of the interpretation given by Ghazzālī to the verse cited above, "Everything is perishing except His Face" (28:88). It is worth dwelling on the commentary he provides upon this verse; for it contains, arguably, some of the most radically esoteric ideas of his entire corpus, and also sums up many of the themes expressed thus far.

The commentary comes in his treatise entitled *Mishkāt al-anwār* ("The Niche of Lights"), which takes as its point of departure the famous "light verse":

۞ ٱللَّهُ نُورُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَوٰةٍ فِيهَا

مِصْبَاحٌ ۖ ٱلْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ ۖ ٱلزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ

مِن شَجَرَةٍ مُّبَٰرَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِىٓءُ

وَلَوۡ لَمۡ تَمۡسَسۡهُ نَارٌ نُّورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ يَهۡدِى ٱللَّهُ لِنُورِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ

وَيَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَـٰلَ لِلنَّاسِ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىۡءٍ عَلِيمٌ

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of
His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass.
The glass is as it were a shining star. [The lamp is] kindled from a
blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil
would almost glow forth though no fire touched it. Light upon
light. God guideth to His light whom He will. And God striketh
similitudes for mankind. And God knoweth all things (24:35)

Ghazzālī's commentary on this verse identifies the one, true light of
God as the one, true Being: darkness is nonexistence. The following state-
ment on the nature of existence forms the backdrop for the commentary
on 28:88, which is our focus here:

> Existence can be classified into the existence that a thing possesses in
> itself, and that which it possesses from another. When a thing has ex-
> istence from another, its existence is borrowed and has no support in
> itself. When the thing is viewed in itself, and with respect to itself, it
> is pure non-existence. It only exists inasmuch as it is ascribed to an-
> other. This is not a true existence.... Hence the Real Existent is God,
> just as the Real Light is He.[35]

Then comes the section entitled *Haqīqat al-haqā'iq* ("The Reality of reali-
ties"), which describes the ascent of the gnostics, the knowers of God,
"from the lowlands of metaphor to the highlands of Reality". They are
given a direct vision of the truth that there is none in existence save God,
and that everything is perishing except His Face. [It is] not that each thing
is perishing at one time or at other times, but that it is perishing from eter-
nity without beginning to eternity without end. It can only be so conceived
since, when the essence of anything other than He is considered in respect
of its own essence, it is sheer nonexistence. But when it is viewed in respect
of the "face" to which existence flows forth from the First, the Real, then it
is seen as existing not in itself but through the face turned to[36] its giver of

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[35] Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo, Utah, 1998), p. 16.
[36] We are following Hermann Landolt's translation of *yalī* as "turned to" rather than Buchman's "adja-
cent to". See Landolt, "Ghazali and 'Religionswissenschaft': Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* for
Professor Charles J. Adams", *Ǵtudes Asiatiques*, XLV, No.1, 1991, p. 60. Kāshānī refers to two faces of the
heart: the *ṣadr* (the breast) as the "face of the heart which is turned to (*yalī*) the soul, just as the *fu'ād* is
the face of the heart which is turned to the spirit" (*Tafsīr*, Vol. I, p.17).

existence. Hence the only existent is the Face of God. Each thing has two faces: a face toward itself, and a face toward its Lord. Viewed in terms of the face of itself, it is nonexistent; but viewed in terms of the Face of God, it exists. Hence nothing exists but God and His Face.[37]

Ghazzālī then makes an important distinction within the category of these gnostics who "see nothing in existence save the One, the Real". One group is said to arrive at this vision *'irfānan 'ilmiyyan*, that is, as a mode of cognitive knowledge; and another group possess this vision *dhawqan*, that is, as a mystical state of "tasting".[38] The essential vision is the same, but the depth of assimilation, the mystical attunement to the reality perceived, differs. This distinction helps to underscore the epistemological value of affirming principles of a metaphysical and mystical order, even if the plenary realization of those principles eludes the rational faculty. Reflection and meditation on the principles alluded to can bring about at least some degree of cognitive apprehension of the ultimate realities in question; realities that remain ineffable inasmuch as they are predicated on the extinction of the individuality, and thus on the transcendence of all modes of cognition proper to the individual subject as such. Ghazzālī continues with a description of those who experience this transcendent extinction. Plurality disappears for them, as they are plunged in "sheer singularity" (*al-fardāniyya al-maḥḍa*):

They become intoxicated with such an intoxication that the ruling authority of their rational faculty is overthrown. Hence one of them says, "I am the Real!" (*anā al-Ḥaqq*), another, "Glory be to me, how great is my station!"[39]… When this state gets the upper hand, it is called "extinction" in relation to the one who possesses it. Or rather, it is called "extinction from extinction", since the possessor of the state is extinct from himself and from his own extinction. For he is conscious neither of himself in that state, nor of his own unconsciousness of himself. If he were conscious of his own unconsciousness, then he would [still] be conscious of himself. In relation to the one immersed in it, this state is called "unification" (*ittiḥād*) according to the language of metaphor, or is called "declaring God's unity" (*tawḥīd*) according to the language of reality.[40]

We return to the relationship between *fanā'* and *tawḥīd*, between extinction and, not only "declaring God's unity", which is but one aspect of

[37] The Niche of Lights, pp. 16-17.
[38] *Ibid.*, p.17.
[39] See Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, for a good discussion of these *shathiyyāt*, or theopathic utterances, by Hallāj and Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī, respectively.
[40] The Niche of Lights, pp.17-18.

tawḥīd, but, more essentially, the "making one", according to the literal meaning of the verbal noun *tawḥīd*. One might also translate *tawḥīd* as "the realization of oneness", the "making real" of the actual reality of oneness, through the elimination of all multiplicity.

Earlier, the divinely willed plurality within the human race was referred to: it is God who divided mankind up into nations and tribes, "so that ye may know one another". Is there not a contradiction, it might be asked, between the extinction of phenomenal multiplicity presupposed by the deepest level of *tawḥīd*, and the affirmation of human plurality called forth by the will of God? One way of transforming this apparent contradiction into an expression of spiritual profundity is by returning to the notion of the "face" within each thing that constitutes the real being of that thing. Those Sufis who are extinguished to their own particular "face"—extinguished from their own non-existence—come alive to the Divine face that constitutes their true reality, the immanence of God's presence within them, and also within all that exists: "Wherever ye turn there is the Face of God." Now it is precisely that Divine aspect—in all things, and in all other nations and tribes—that comes into focus when this level of *tawḥīd* is grasped aright. One does not have to experience the grace of mystical annihilation to comprehend this principle; as Ghazzālī put it, one can arrive at this principle not only *dhawqan*, by way of "taste", or mystical experience, but also *ʿirfānan ʿilmiyyan*, as a mode of cognitive knowledge. If the mystical realization of this principle bestows a "taste" of *tawḥīd*, we might say, following on from Ghazzālī, that an intellectual assimilation of the principle bestows a "perfume" of *tawḥīd*. As Ibn ʿArabī puts it, the gnostics cannot explain their spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like.[41] A conceptual grasp of these deeper aspects of *tawḥīd* might be said to constitute just such a beginning. If the ultimate, mystical degree of *tawḥīd* is realized only through extinction, the lower, conceptual degrees imply at least that "beginning" or prefiguration of mystical extinction, which consists in self-effacement, in humility. Now an intellectual assimilation of this vision of unity, together with a moral attunement to the humility that it demands, is certainly sufficient to dissolve the egocentric knots that constitute the stuff of *taʿaṣṣub*, of all forms of fanaticism.

Elsewhere, Ghazzālī gives this telling description of *taʿaṣṣub*. He writes that it "usually comes together with man's disregard of his neighbor, and of his opinions, and the taking root in his heart of certain ideas which be-

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[41] We have slightly modified this sentence, which Nicholson translates in *The* Tarjumān al-Ashwāq, p. 68. The sentence is part of Ibn ʿArabī's commentary on one of the poems.

come so much a part of him that he fails to distinguish between right and wrong".[42] What results, on the contrary, from an apprehension of the deeper implications of *tawḥīd* is a heightened, spiritual discernment: that is, not just a moral judgment between right and wrong, but also a presentiment both of one's own nothingness before the Divine reality, and also of the innate holiness, the Divine "face", within the neighbor. The transcendent, Divine reality before which one is extinguished is known to be mysteriously present within the "other". One observes here the spiritual underpinning of that crucial relationship, so often stressed in Sufi ethics, between humility and generosity, between self-effacement and self-giving; the first being a kind of *fanā'* in moral mode, and the second being a moral application of *tawḥīd*. Respect for one's neighbor is thus deepened in the very measure that one is aware of the Divine presence, which is at once within and beyond oneself, and within and beyond the neighbor. Herein, one might say, resides one of the spiritual foundations of *adab*, or "courtesy", understanding by this word the profound respect, if not reverence, for the "other" that constitutes the true substance of all outward, socially conditioned forms of etiquette, good manners, and propriety towards the neighbor. One sees that it is not so much "religious pluralism" as "metaphysical unity" that establishes a deep-rooted and far-reaching tolerance, one which is not only formulated as a rule, to be obeyed or broken as one will, but which is organically related to an awareness of the Divine presence in all things, an apprehension of the inner holiness of all that exists.

Islam: Quintessential and Universal Submission

In this second part of the paper we would like to begin by stressing one aspect of the meaning of the word "Islam", its literal meaning, that of submission, and to show how, from a Sufi perspective on the Qur'ān, this meaning is tied to a conception of the essence of religion, or to "religion as such",[43] which takes precedence over such and such a religion.

According to one of the most highly regarded translators of the Qur'ān, Muḥammad Asad, the word "Islam" would have been understood by the hearers of the word at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān in terms of its universal, and not communal, meaning. In a note on the first use of the word *muslim* in the chronological order of the revelation (68:35), he writes: Throughout this work, I have translated the terms *muslim* and *islām* in accordance with their original connotations, namely, "one who surrenders [or

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[42] Quoted by H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 197-198.
[43] A key distinction, stressed throughout his works by Frithjof Schuon.

"has surrendered"] himself to God", and "man's self-surrender to God".... It should be borne in mind that the "institutionalized" use of these terms—that is, their exclusive application to the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ)—represents a definitely post-Qur'ānic development and, hence, must be avoided in a translation of the Qur'ān.[44]

He asserts that when the Prophet's contemporaries heard the words *islām* and *muslim*, they would have understood them in this original sense, "without limiting these terms to any specific community or denomination".[45] This meaning emerges clearly from many verses containing the words *muslim* and *islām*. In the following verse, the principle of universal submission is equated with the religion of God:

$$أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ ٱللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُۥٓ أَسْلَمَ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ$$

$$طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ$$

> Seek they other than the religion of God (*dīn Allāh*), when unto Him submitteth whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly? And unto Him they will be returned (3:83)

Kāshānī helps to situate with the utmost clarity the nature of this religion of God. He does so in his esoteric exegesis on two sets of verses. First, in relation to a verse which declares that the religion bestowed upon the Prophet Muḥammad was the very same religion which was bestowed upon his predecessors:

$$شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِۦ نُوحًا وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا$$

$$وَصَّيْنَا بِهِۦٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰٓ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا۟$$

$$فِيهِ$$

> He hath ordained for you of religion (*min al-dīn*) that which He commended unto Noah, and that which We reveal to thee [Muḥammad], and that which We commended unto Abraham and

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[44] *The Message of the Qur'ān: Translated and Explained* by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar, 1984), p. 885, n.17.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. vi.

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> Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided
> therein (42:13)

Kāshānī comments:

> He hath ordained for you of the religion, [that is] the absolute relig-
> ion (*al-dīn al-muṭlaq*), which God charged all the prophets to estab-
> lish, and to be unanimous, not divided, with regard to it. This is the
> principle and root of religion (*aṣl al-dīn*), that is, *tawḥīd*, justice, and
> knowledge of the Resurrection, as expressed by [the phrase] "faith in
> God and the Last Day". This is other than the details of the revealed
> Laws, by which they [the prophets] differentiate this [root of relig-
> ion]; this differentiation occurs in accordance with what is most
> beneficial in [the different situations]—such as the prescription of
> acts of obedience, worship, and social intercourse. As God Most
> High says, "For each We have appointed from you a Law and a Way
> (5:48).[46]

The difference between the "absolute" or unconditional religion (*al-dīn
al-muṭlaq*) and the different forms this unique essence may take is then de-
scribed by Kāshānī in terms of permanence and immutability. He contin-
ues: "So the right religion (*al-dīn al-qayyim*) is tied to that which is immuta-
ble within knowledge and action; while the revealed Law is tied to that
which alters in respect of rules and conditions." The nature of this un-
changing religion, together with its essential connection with the primor-
dial nature of the human soul, the *fiṭrah*, is expounded by Kāshānī in an
illuminating commentary on the following crucial verse:

$$\text{فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّتِى فَطَرَ ٱلنَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا}$$

$$\text{تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ}$$

$$\text{لَا يَعْلَمُونَ}$$

> So set thy purpose for religion as one with pure devotion—the
> nature [framed] of God, according to which He hath created man.
> There is no altering God's creation. That is the right religion (*al-dīn
> al-qayyim*), but most men know not (30:30).

Kāshānī comments:

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46 Kāshānī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. II, p. 109.

> So set thy purpose for the religion of *tawḥīd*, and this is the path to the Real ... or religion in the absolute sense (*al-dīn muṭlaqan*). That which is other than this is not "religion", because of its separation from the [way which leads to] attainment of the goal. The purpose [or "face", *al-wajh*, in the verse being commented on] refers to the existent essence, with all its concomitants and accidental properties; and its being set for religion is its disengagement from all that which is other than the Real, its being upright in *tawḥīd*, and stopping with the Real, without heeding its own soul or others, so that his way will be the way of God; and his religion and his path will be the religion and path of God, for he sees nothing but Him in existence.[47]

Then follows this comment on the primordial nature, the *fiṭrah*, fashioned by God:

> That is, they cleave to the *fiṭrat Allāh*, which is the state in accordance with which the reality of humanity was created, eternal purity and disengagement, and this is the right religion (*al-dīn al-qayyim*) in eternity without beginning or end, never altering or being differentiated from that original purity, or from that intrinsic, primordial *tawḥīd*.[48]

The *fiṭrah* is described as being the result of the "most holy effusion" (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*) of the Divine Essence; and no one who remains faithful to this original nature can deviate from *tawḥīd*, or be veiled from God's reality by the presence of phenomena. Kāshānī cites the *ḥadīth*, "Every baby is born according to the *fiṭrah*; its parents make it a Jew, a Christian." But then he adds this important point: "It is not that this underlying reality changes in itself, such that its essential state be altered, for that is impossible. This is the meaning of His words: there is no altering God's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not."

The following verse (30:31) reads: "Turning to Him; and do your duty to Him, and establish worship and be not of those who ascribe partners." The "turning" to God implies for Kāshānī a turning away from all otherness, from the "demons of fancy and imagination" and from "false religions"; it implies also the disengagement and detachment from the "shrouds of created nature, bodily accidents, natural forms, and psychic properties". As regards the last part of the verse, he comments as follows: "'Be not of those who ascribe partners [or 'be not of the polytheists'].... through the subsistence of the *fiṭrah*, and the manifestation of I-ness (*ẓuhūr al-anā'iyya*) in its

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[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 131.
[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 132.

station."[49] Here the ontological limitation of the *fiṭrah* and its "station" is indicated by Kāshānī. For the *fiṭrah* presupposes an individual soul, of which it is the most fundamental model, pattern, or prototype; as such, it cannot but uphold that I-ness or egoic nucleus that must, from the point of view of absolute oneness, be transcended; and it is only transcended by *fanā'*. Despite this ontological shortcoming attendant upon the operative presence of the *fiṭrah*, it is clear that for Kāshānī it is only through fidelity to the *fiṭrah* that one can open oneself up to that ultimate form of Islam which is constituted—or rather sublimated—by *fanā'*.

At the level of human knowledge, however, the *fiṭrah* is conceived as a fundamental, or "constitutional", affinity between the deepest dimension of the human soul and the ultimate realities expressed through Divine revelation; it is the purest texture of the substance of the soul that resonates harmoniously with the most profound truths conveyed by the revealed word. This harmonious reverberation translates spiritual affinity into mystical unity—the realization, through *fanā'*, of the ultimate degree of *tawḥīd*, as described above in reference to Ghazzālī's exegesis of "everything is perishing except His Face" (28:88).

The mystery of this affinity between primordiality and revelation— between the knowledge divinely embedded *a priori* within the soul, and the knowledge divinely bestowed *a posteriori* upon the soul—seems to be alluded to in the following verse: "Truly there hath come unto you a Prophet from yourselves" (9:128). The literal meaning here, as addressed to the immediate recipients of the revelation, is that the Prophet is one of them: a man, not an angel, an Arab, not a foreigner, and so forth. But the word *minkum*, "from you", also carries a deeper significance. One also has this verse: "The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves" (33:6) Again, the literal meaning refers to the precedence of the Prophet, his greater right or claim over the believers than they have over themselves. But the deeper meaning emerges as a different, and equally legitimate, reading of the words *min anfusihim*. The word *'minkum'* also appears, as noted earlier, in a verse with a similar import: "For each We have appointed from you a Law and a Way (*shir'atan wa minhājan*)" (5:48). Not only the Prophet, but the revealed Law and the spiritual Way he brings—all seem already to be, in essence, within the human soul. To follow the Prophet, to abide by the Law, to follow the Way he traces out is to follow, not some rules arbitrarily imposed from without, but a call from within; it is to follow one's

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[49] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 132.

own deepest nature. It is for this reason that the Qur'ān refers to itself in several places as a "reminder" or as a remembrance (*dhikr*):

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And it is nothing but a reminder to creation (68:52 and 81:27).

مَآ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لِتَشْقَىٰٓ إِلَّا تَذْكِرَةً لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ

We have not revealed unto thee this Qur'ān that thou shouldst be distressed, but as a reminder unto him that feareth (20:2-3).

كَلَّآ إِنَّهُۥ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَن شَآءَ ذَكَرَهُۥ

Nay, verily this is a reminder, so whoever will shall remember it (74:54-55).

This understanding of the meaning of the word *minkum* is a possible but by no means exclusive one. It does flow naturally, however, from a fundamental principle of Sufi spirituality. For our purposes here it suffices to cite the engaging simile offered by Rūmī, by which he explains the verse:

> In the composition of man all sciences were originally commingled so that his spirit might show forth all hidden things, as limpid water shows forth all that is under it ... and all that is above it, reflected in the substance of water. Such is its nature, without treatment or training. But when it was mingled with earth or other colors, that property and that knowledge was parted from it and forgotten by it. Then God Most High sent forth prophets and saints, like a great, limpid water such as delivers out of darkness and accidental coloration every mean and dark water that enters into it. Then it remembers; when the soul of man sees itself unsullied, it knows for sure that so it was in the beginning, pure, and it knows that those shadows and colors were mere accidents. Remembering its state before those accidents supervened, it says, "This is that sustenance which we were provided with before".[50] The prophets and the saints therefore remind him of his former state; they do not implant anything new in his substance. Now every dark water that recognizes that great water, saying, "I come from this, and I belong to this", mingles with that water.... It

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[50] 2:25. This verse is given as the words uttered by the souls in Paradise upon being given fruits of the heavenly garden.

was on this account that God declared: "Truly there hath come unto you a Prophet from yourselves".[51]

Near the end of the *Discourses*, this theme is expressed again, this time in more intimate terms:

> Those who acknowledge the truth see themselves in the prophet and hear their own voice proceeding from him and smell their own scent proceeding from him. No man denies his own self. Therefore the prophets say to the community, "We are you and you are we; there is no strangeness between us".[52]

It is clear from these passages that Rūmī, referring to the prophets in the plural, regards the prophetic mission as one and the same, despite the different forms taken by that message. In the *Mathnawī*, this principle is expressed in many different places. One striking example is his poetic comment upon the words of the Qur'ānic verse "We make no distinction between any of them [God's prophets] (2:136; and at 3:84). Under this verse as a heading come the following couplets:

> If ten lamps are present in (one) place, each differs in form from the other:
> To distinguish without any doubt the light of each, when you turn your face toward their light, is impossible.
> In things spiritual there is no division and no numbers; in things spiritual there is no partition and no individuals.[53]

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The conception of essential or absolute religion, explicitly affirmed by Kāshānī and implicit in so much of Rūmī's writing, is predicated on a clear vision of the spirit of faith which transcends all the forms that religious traditions assume. Before elaborating upon this vision with reference to particular Qur'ānic verses, it is important to mention very briefly the Qur'ānic encounter between Moses and the mysterious personage, not mentioned by name in the Qur'ān, but identified by tradition with al-

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[51] We have slightly modified Arberry's translation of 2:25 and of 9:128, which concludes the paragraph from Rūmī's *Discourses*, pp. 44-45.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 227.
[53] *Mathnawī*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (London, 1926), Book I, 678-679. Nicholson does not include the heading, consisting of the verse, which is given in the Persian. See the edition by Abd al-Hamid Mashay-ikh Tabataba'i, published by Nashr-i Tulū', in Tehran (n.d.), p. 35.

Khiḍr. Even in its literal aspect, the story alludes to the distinction between the form of religion and its transcendent essence, between exoteric and esoteric knowledge. In this encounter certain forms of the law and social convention are violated by al-Khiḍr, who is questioned and criticized as a result by Moses. After committing three acts that flout outward norms, al-Khiḍr tells Moses of the realities hidden beneath the surface of each of the situations in which the acts take place, realities revealed to al-Khiḍr by direct, Divine inspiration.[54]

One of the uses to which Ibn 'Arabī puts this story reinforces its already esoteric nature. Al-Khiḍr becomes the personification of the station of nearness (*maqām al-qurba*), a station which is identified with plenary sanctity (*walāya*),[55] while Moses personifies the law-giving prophet, or prophecy as such (*nubuwwa*). In Ibn 'Arabī's perspective, sanctity as such is superior to prophecy as such, because, as he explains in the chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ* under the heading of Seth, "The message (*al-risāla*) and prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*)—that is, law-giving prophecy and its message—come to an end, but sanctity (*al-walāya*) never comes to an end."[56] Sanctity is higher because the knowledge proper to it is universal, and prophecy is lower insofar as the knowledge comprised within it is delimited by a particular message: "Know that *walāya* is the all-encompassing sphere, thus it never comes to an end, and to it belong [the assimilation and communication of] universal tidings; but as for law-giving prophecy and the message, they terminate."[57] But it is a question of principial priority and not personal superiority: sanctity is more universal than prophecy, but the prophet is always superior to the saint. For, on the one hand, the prophet's sanctity is the source of the sanctity of the saint; and on the other, every prophet is a saint, but not every saint is a prophet:

> When you observe the prophet saying things which relate to what is outside the law-giving function,[58] then he does so as a saint (*walī*) and a gnostic (*'ārif*). Thus his station as a knower and a saint is more complete and more perfect than [his station] as a messenger or as a

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[54] See 18:60-82.

[55] This station "represents the ultimate point in the hierarchy of the saints" (M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard [Cambridge, 1993], p. 58).

[56] *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 34. See R. Austin's translation, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, p. 66.

[57] *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 167; in *Bezels*, p. 168.

[58] Kāshānī comments on the domain which is said to lie beyond the scope of the law-giving function: "The explanation of 'adornment of the soul with the qualities of God' (*takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh*), the proximity [attained through] supererogatory and obligatory devotions; and the stations of trust, contentment, submission, realizing oneness, attaining singularity, extinction, union and separation, and the like" (*Fuṣūṣ*, p. 168).

legislative prophet.... So if one says that that the saint is above the prophet and the messenger, he means that this is the case within a single person, that is: the messenger, in respect of his being a saint, is more complete than he is in respect of his being a prophet or messenger.[59]

According to Ibn ʿArabī, then, the encounter between Moses and al-Khiḍr is understood microcosmically: al-Khiḍr represents a mode of universal consciousness within the very soul of Moses, one which surpasses his consciousness *qua* prophet, whence the disapproval by the prophet of the antinomian acts of the saint: "He [al-Khiḍr] showed him [Moses] nothing but his [Moses's] own form: it was his own state that Moses saw, and himself that he censured."[60] Ibn ʿArabī's conception of *walāya* is a complex and controversial one, but it does cohere with the esoteric implications of the Qurʾānic narrative of the encounter between Moses and the mysterious person who was given "knowledge from Us". This narrative, together with its amplification in Ibn ʿArabī's conception of sanctity, clearly alludes to the relativity of the outward law in the face of its inner spirit, and the limitations proper to the law-giving function as opposed to the universal dimensions of sanctity. There is a clear and important relationship between this universal function of sanctity and the "absolute" or "unconditional" religion referred to above, that religion which is above and beyond all the particular forms—legal, confessional, social, cultural, and psychological—that it may assume.

Now, to consider more explicit Qurʾānic verses describing or alluding to this quintessential religion:

قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَٱلنَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ

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[59] *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 168; *Bezels*, pp. 168-169.
[60] *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, II.261. See the French translation of the chapter on the station of nearness (chapter 161) by Denis Gril in "Le terme du voyage" (pp. 339-347) in *Les Illuminations de La Mecque*, ed. M. Chodkiewicz (Paris, 1988).

> Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us, and
> that which is revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and
> Jacob and the tribes, and that which was given unto Moses and Je-
> sus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction be-
> tween any of them, and unto Him we have submitted (3:84).

Then comes this verse:

وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ ٱلْإِسْلَـٰمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِى ٱلْأَخِرَةِ مِنَ

ٱلْخَـٰسِرِينَ

> And whoso seeketh a religion other than Islam, it will not be ac-
> cepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter (3:85).

Now whereas this last verse is understood, from a theological point of view, as upholding the exclusive validity of "Islam", defined as the religion revealed to God's last Prophet, and, as will be discussed below, as abrogating other verses which point to a different conclusion, it can also be seen as confirming the intrinsic validity of all the revelations brought by all the prophets mentioned in the previous verse. "Islam" thus encompasses all revelations, which can be seen as so many different facets of essentially one and the same self-disclosure of the Divine reality. Both senses can in fact be maintained as "valid" interpretations, according to a key hermeneutical principle of Ibn ʿArabī: namely, that it is not tenable to exclude the validity of an interpretation of a verse which is clearly upheld by the literal meaning of the words.[61] It is one of an indefinite number of meanings that are all "intended" by God to be derived from the words of the verse. No one interpretation is right and true to the exclusion of all others. Furthermore, applying a distinctively Akbarian metaphysical principle, we could say that to exclude the exclusivist reading is in turn to fall into a mode of exclusivism.[62] Thus a truly inclusivist metaphysical perspective must recognize the

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[61] As M. Chodkiewicz writes, in his excellent study of Ibn ʿArabī's hermeneutics, "Given the extremely rich polysemy of Arabic vocabulary, rigorous fidelity to the letter of Revelation does not exclude but, on the contrary, implies a multiplicity of interpretations. Ibn al-Arabi insists on this point on a number of occasions, emphasizing that there is a general rule applicable to all the revealed Books: 'Any meaning of whatever verse of the Word of God—be it the Qurʾān, the Torah, the Psalms, or the Pages—judged acceptable by one who knows the language in which this word is expressed represents what God wanted to say to those who interpreted it so.' As a corollary, none of these meanings is to be rejected. To deny the validity of this rule is to limit divine knowledge" (*An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ʿArabī, the Book, and the Law*, trans. D. Streight [Albany, 1993], p. 30).

[62] This accords with the principle, expressed in a variety of paradoxical ways throughout the Akbarian corpus, that "part of the perfection of being is the existence of imperfection within it; for were it other-

validity of the exclusivist, theological perspective, even if it must also—on pain of disingenuousness—uphold as more compelling, more convincing, and more "true", the universalist understanding of Islam.

This universalist conception of religion is linked to the innate knowledge of God within all human souls, or within the soul as such, and to the universal function of revelatory "remembrance"—that innate knowledge which is re-awakened within the forgetful soul by Divine revelation. The following verse establishes with the utmost clarity the fact that knowledge of the Divine is inscribed in the very substance of the human soul at its inception, and is thus an integral dimension of the *fiṭrah*:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِى ءَادَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ

أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُواْ بَلَىٰ ۛ شَهِدْنَآ ۚ أَن تَقُولُواْ يَوْمَ

ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَـٰذَا غَـٰفِلِينَ

And when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves [saying], Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. [That was] lest ye say on the Day of Resurrection: Truly, of this we were unaware (7:172).

At the dawn of creation, then, knowledge of the Divine lordship, the reality of the Absolute, and all essential truths deriving therefrom is infused into the human soul—into all human souls, all Children of Adam, without exception. Another way of presenting this universal fact, with the stress on the spiritual substance of these principial truths, is given in these verses:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَـٰئِكَةِ إِنِّى خَـٰلِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّن صَلْصَـٰلٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ

مَّسْنُونٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِى فَقَعُواْ لَهُ سَـٰجِدِينَ

And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Verily I am creating a mortal from clay of black mud, altered. So, when I have made him

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wise, the perfection of being would be imperfect because of the absence of imperfection within it" (*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 296).

and have breathed into him of My Spirit, fall ye down, prostrating
yourselves before him (15:28-29).[63]

Thus, it is this spirit of God, breathed into man that constitutes, according to the Qur'ān, the fundamental, irreducible substance of the human soul. It is for this reason that the angels are commanded to prostrate to him. The act not only proceeds from obedience to the command of God, but also is an acknowledgement of the breath of God that articulates the Adamic substance—the reason for the command, one might say.

One can understand the truths comprised within the Divine Spirit, which is "breathed" into the soul, in terms of the "names" taught to Adam by God, in virtue of which his knowledge transcends that of all other beings, including the angels. The story of the creation of Adam, the transcendent knowledge proper to the human soul, the Fall, and the means of overcoming the consequences of the Fall—all these fundamental principles are given in the following verses in a manner which succinctly presents both the universality and necessity of Divine revelation:

And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Verily I am placing a
viceroy (khalīfah) on earth, they said: Wilt Thou place therein one
who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn
Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which
ye know not.

And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful.

They said: Be Thou glorified! We have no knowledge save that
which Thou hast taught us. Truly Thou, only Thou, art the
Knower, the Wise.

He said: O Adam, inform them of their names, and when he had
informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I
know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that
which ye disclose and that which ye hide.

And when We said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before
Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He refused and waxed
proud, and so became a disbeliever.

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[63] Identical to 38:72. Cf. also the verse "Then He fashioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit" (32:9).

> And We said: O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat freely thereof where ye will; but come not near this tree lest ye become wrong-doers.

> But Satan caused them to slip therefrom, and expelled them from the state they were in. And We said: Fall down, one of you a foe unto the other! There shall be for you on earth a habitation and provision for a time.

> Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He relented toward him; verily He is ever-Relenting, all-Merciful.

> We said: Go down, all of you, from hence; but verily there cometh unto you from Me a guidance; and whoso followeth My guidance, no fear shall come upon them neither shall they grieve.

> But they who disbelieve, and deny Our revelations, such are rightful owners of the Fire. They abide therein (2:30-39).

Adam is therefore not just the first man, but also the first prophet, the first to have received words from his Lord. The guidance promised by God—the means by which the primordial human condition is restored to its plenary state—is, it is to be noted, immediately defined in terms of Our revelations, or Our signs, that is, *āyātinā*. One is given a sense here of a single religion, Divine guidance, which comprises diverse forms of expression, different "signs".

The universality of this guidance through revelation is clearly stressed in the following verses. First, "For every community (*umma*) there is a Messenger" (10:48). As noted above, the Qur'ān makes explicit reference to several prophets, but the scope of prophetic guidance extends far beyond those mentioned, for "Verily, We sent Messengers before thee; among them are those about whom We have told thee, and those about whom We have not told thee" (40:78). Moreover, that which was revealed to the Prophet in the Qur'ān does not differ in essence from what was revealed to all the prophets:

$$\text{وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا مِن قَبْلِكَ مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِىٓ إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَهَ إِلَّآ}$$

$$\text{أَنَا۠ فَٱعْبُدُونِ}$$

> And We sent no Messenger before thee but We inspired him [saying]: There is no God save Me, so worship Me (21:25).

مَّا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِن قَبْلِكَ

Naught is said unto thee [Muḥammad] but what was said unto the
Messengers before thee (41:43).[64]

This single, unique message of guidance is always revealed to the Messenger in the language of his folk (14:4).

To appreciate more fully the relationship between the substance of the message and its form, one can benefit from a distinction found in Ibn ʿArabī's writings. This is the distinction, within the Speech of God, between the "necessary Speech" (*al-qawl al-wājib*), which is not subject to change, and the "accidental Speech" (*al-qawl al-maʿrūḍ*), which is subject to change.[65] It is the former, the necessary Speech, which one can identify with the unchanging substance of the Divine message. This view is articulated more explicitly in the following comment on the oneness of the religious path. It is, he writes, that concerning which Bukhārī wrote a chapter entitled, "The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one". He brought the article which makes the word "religion" definite, because all religion comes from God, even if some of the rulings are diverse. Everyone is commanded to perform the religion and to come together in it.... As for the rulings which are diverse, that is because of the Law which God assigned to each one of the messengers. He said, "To every one (of the Prophets) We have appointed a Law and a Way; and if God willed, He would have made you one nation" (5:48).[66] If He had done that, your revealed Laws would not be diverse, just as they are not diverse in the fact that you have been commanded to come together and to perform them.[67]

Thus, on the basis of scriptural and exoteric orthodoxy, Ibn ʿArabī points to the substantial content of religion, which both transcends and legitimizes the various revelations; the key criteria of this substance are centered on two elements: Divine command and human response. In other words, however diverse the particular rulings pertaining to the different religions may be, the substance or principle of these rulings remains the

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[64] Cf. "Say: I am no innovation among the Messengers" (46:9).
[65] See "Le Livre du Nom de Majesté", trans. M. Valsan, *Études Traditionelles*, No. 272, December, 1948, p. 345.
[66] We quote here Chittick's rendition of the verse. Our preferred translation of the first part of the verse is: "For each We have appointed from you a Law and a Way". The importance of translating the phrase literally, together with the mysterious word *minkum*, "from you", has been noted above in connection with Rūmī's illuminating comments.
[67] Quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 303.

same: to submit to that which has been divinely instituted. The inner reality of religion is thus unfolded for the individual, of whatever religion, in the course of his submission to God and the practice of the worship enjoined upon him.

Returning to the verse "We never sent a Messenger save with the language of his folk", one can apply Ibn 'Arabī's distinction and assert that the essence of the message, the necessary Speech, is one, whereas the "languages", the accidental Speech, are many. Needless to say, the distinction in question is not to be understood as relating to a merely linguistic difference with identical semantic content, but rather by "language" should be understood the whole gamut of factors—spiritual, psychological, cultural, and linguistic—that go to make the message of the supra-formal Truth intelligible to a given human collectivity. Herein lies an important aspect of the message conveyed by Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*: the nature of the jewel (Revelation) is shaped according to the receptivity—conceptual, volitive, affective—of the bezel (*faṣṣ*, singular of *fuṣūṣ*), that is, the specific mode of prophetic consciousness as determined by the particular human collectivity addressed by the Revelation.

The above considerations lead one to posit the distinction between religion as such, on the one hand, and such and such a religion, on the other. While such and such a religion is distinct from all others, possessing its own particular rites, laws, and spiritual "economy", religion as such can be discerned within it and within all religions—religion as such being the exclusive property of none, as it constitutes the inner substance of all. It must be carefully noted here that this view of a religious essence that at once transcends and abides within all religions does not in the least imply a blurring of the boundaries between the different religions on the plane of their formal diversity; rather, the conception of this "essential religion" presupposes formal religious diversity, regarded not so much as a regrettable differentiation but a divinely willed necessity. The following verses uphold this calibrated conception, which recognizes the inner substance of religion inherent in all revealed religions, on the one hand, and affirms the necessity of abiding by the dictates of one particular religion, on the other:

لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً

وَٰحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِى مَآ ءَاتَىٰكُمْ ۖ فَٱسْتَبِقُوا۟ ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ ۚ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ

مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

For each We have appointed from you a Law and a Way. Had
God willed, He could have made you one community. But that
He might try you by that which He hath given you [He hath made
you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto
God ye will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein ye
differed (5:48).

لِّكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ ۖ فَلَا يُنَزِعُنَّكَ فِى ٱلْأَمْرِ ۚ

وَٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۖ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

Unto each community We have given sacred rites (*mansakan*)
which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with thee
about the matter, but summon them unto thy Lord (22:67).[68]

These diverse laws, paths, and rites, however, ought not obscure the fact
that the religion ordained through the last Prophet is, in essence, the very
same religion as that ordained through all previous prophets:

۞ شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِۦ نُوحًا وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ

وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِۦٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰٓ ۖ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَا

تَتَفَرَّقُوا۟ فِيهِ

He hath ordained for you of the religion that which He com-
mended unto Noah, and that which We reveal to thee [Muḥam-
mad], and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses
and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided
therein (42:13).

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[68] Cf. "And each one hath a goal (*wijha*) toward which he turneth" (2:148).

This is the verse quoted by Ibn ʿArabī in the citation above; after quoting it, Ibn ʿArabī refers to a passage in the Qurʾān which mentions the prophets Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elias, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot, and which ends with the words: "Those are they whom God guideth, so follow their guidance" (6:90). Ibn ʿArabī adds: "This is the path that brings together every prophet and messenger. It is the performance of religion, scattering not concerning it and coming together in it."[69] Again, what is being stressed here is quintessential religion, *al-dīn*.

The "Islam" revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad is unique, and thus a religion; but at the same time, it is identical in its essence to all religions, and is thus *the* religion; in other words, it is both such and such a religion, and religion as such. "Establish the religion, and be not divided" (42:13), for "naught is said unto thee [Muḥammad] but what was said unto the Messengers before thee" (41:43). In another important verse, used above as our epigraph, we are given a succinct definition of what constitutes this inner, essential religion. The verse also stands out as one of the most significant proof-texts in the Qurʾān for upholding the principle that access to salvation is not the exclusive preserve of the particular religion of Islam, that is, the specific Law and Way ordained through the last Prophet. On the contrary, the description given here of that which is necessary for salvation gives substance to the universal definition of Islam that we are trying to bring out here:

$$\text{إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَٱلنَّصَـٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّـٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ}$$

$$\text{ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْأَخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ}$$

$$\text{وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ}$$

Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2:62).

It was seen above that the number of prophets is given indefinite extension by verses which mention several by name and then add, "We sent Mes-

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[69] Quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 303.

sengers before thee; among them are those about whom We have told thee, and those about whom We have not told thee" (40:78). Likewise, in the preceding verse, the explicit mention of four distinct groups—those who believe, referring to Muslims in the particular sense, alongside the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans—is indefinitely prolonged by the universal category comprising "whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and is virtuous". In a moment, we shall return to this crucial, and controversial, position, one which holds out the possibility of salvation beyond the confines of Islam *qua* particular religion. At this point, however, attention should remain focused on the ramifications of this "essential religion" of faith in God and in the Hereafter, allied to virtue.

The following verse is akin to a veritable creedal affirmation:

ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ

وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ

The Messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto
him from his Lord, and [so do] the believers. Every one believeth
in God and His angels and His scriptures and His Messengers—
we make no distinction between any of His Messengers (2:285).[70]

What should be underscored here is the fact that belief in all the revealed scriptures is followed by the declaration that no distinction can be made between any of God's Messengers. Again, there is the recognition of the formal diversity of revelation combined with the affirmation of a unique message.

In the Qur'ān, this universal religion, or religion as such, which resists any communal specification, is often referred to as the religion of Abraham, *al-ḥanīf*, "the devout".[71] Abraham stands forth as both the symbol and the concrete embodiment of pure, monotheistic worship: "he was not one of the idolators". In the following verse, also from the *Sūra al-Baqara*, we read:

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[70] The phrase "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers" also comes earlier in the same *Sūrah*, at 2:136, which we cite below.

[71] We translate this word as "devout" on the basis of the following explanation of Asad: "The expression *ḥanīf* is derived from the verb *ḥanafa*, which literally means 'he inclined [towards a right state or tendency]'. Already in pre-Islamic times, this term had a definitely monotheistic connotation, and was used to describe a man who turned away from sin and worldliness and from all dubious beliefs, especially idol-worship; and *taḥannuf* denoted the ardent devotions, mainly consisting of long vigils and prayers, of the unitarian God-seekers of pre-Islamic times" (*The Message of the Qur'ān*, p. 28, note 110 on 2:135).

وَقَالُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَـٰرَىٰ تَهْتَدُوا۟ ۗ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ

حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ

> And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided.
> Say Nay but [we are of] the religious community (*milla*) of Abra-
> ham, the devout (*hanifan*), and he was not one of the idolators
> (2:135).

Then, in the verse immediately following this one, one finds a descrip-
tion of what affiliation to this *milla*, or religious community, entails:

قُولُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ

وَإِسْحَـٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِىَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَآ أُوتِىَ

ٱلنَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ

> Say: We believe in God, and that which was revealed unto Abra-
> ham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that
> which was given unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from
> their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and
> unto Him we have submitted (2:136; this verse is almost identical
> to 3:84).

After this comes another important verse, which reinforces the interpre-
tation of religion as universal submission:

فَإِنْ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِمِثْلِ مَآ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦ فَقَدِ ٱهْتَدَوا۟ ۖ وَّإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ

فِى شِقَاقٍ

> And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then they
> are rightly guided. But if they turn away, then they are in schism
> (2:137).

The next verse is also highly relevant to our theme. It begins, mysteri-
ously, with a reference to the colour of God (*sibghat Allāh*). Pickthall ren-
ders the verse thus, making explicit what he sees as intended by the ellipse:
"[We take our] colour from God; and who is better than God at coloring?

And we worship Him" (2:138).[72] The verses immediately following this one suggest what this "colour" might mean:

$$قُلْ أَتُحَاۤجُّونَنَا فِى ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَاۤ أَعْمَـٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ$$

$$أَعْمَـٰلُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُخْلِصُونَ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ$$

$$وَإِسْحَـٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا۟ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَـٰرَىٰ ۗ قُلْ$$

$$ءَأَنتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ ٱللَّهُ$$

Say: Dispute ye with us concerning God, when He is our Lord
and your Lord? Ours are our works, and yours your works. We
are devoted purely to Him. Or say ye that Abraham, and Ishmael,
and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say:
Do you know best or doth God? (2:139-140).

Here we are given a strong sense of the need to view religious affiliation in the light of absolute values, rather than allowing religious affiliation to determine the "colour" or nature of the Absolute: "We are devoted purely to Him"; it is not religion, but God Who is worshipped. "And we worship Him." One is reminded here of the image given by Junayd, and so often quoted by Ibn 'Arabī: "Water takes on the colour of the cup."[73] The imperative of 'transcending the gods of belief', mentioned earlier, can be seen as concordant with the need to go beyond the "colour" imparted by religious dogma or affiliation, to the pure Absolute, at once surpassing all colour and assuming every colour. As Rūmī puts it:

Since colorlessness (pure Unity) became the captive of color (manifestation in the phenomenal world), a Moses came into conflict with a Moses.
When you attain unto the colorlessness which you possessed, Moses and Pharaoh are at peace.[74]

And again:

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[72] The Arabic here is *naḥnu lahu 'ābidūn*, which can also be translated as "we are His worshippers"; the strong implication, in both senses of the phrase, is that God is the sole object of worship, and that for this reason true worshippers "belong" to God alone, this being made explicit in the verses which follow 2:138.

[73] See *Sufi Path*, pp. 149, 229, 341-344.

[74] *Mathnawī*, I, 2467-8.

> The religion of Love is separate from all religions: for lovers, the religion and creed is—God.[75]

It might be objected here that the Qur'ānic verses cited above could just as easily be interpreted as an affirmation of Islamic exclusivism, the "Islam" revealed by the Qur'ān being the purest form of that primordial religion of Abraham that was subsequently distorted by the Jews and the Christians. It must readily be conceded that such a view would indeed be upheld, in differing degrees, and with varying implications, not only by traditional theological and exoteric authorities, but also by their mystical and esoteric counterparts, including those cited here, Ibn 'Arabī, Rūmī, Kāshānī, and Ghazzālī. For all such Sufis—those belonging to what one might call the "normative" Sufi tradition, in which the *Shariʻah* is scrupulously upheld—Islam in the particular sense would be regarded as the most complete religion, *qua* religion, and thus the most appropriate one to follow.[76] This belief, however, on the plane of religious form, does not translate into chauvinism, and still less, intolerance. For the metaphysical vision of the religious essence that transcends all forms leads directly to an appreciation of the possibility of salvation and sanctification through diverse, and unequal, religious forms. Even if other religious forms be regarded as less "complete" than Islam, or in a certain sense superseded by it, all believers in God can nonetheless be regarded as belonging to the same community, the same *umma* defined in terms of essential faith, rather than as a confessionally delimited community. In the *Sūrah* entitled "The Prophets", the following verse is given, after mention is made of several prophets, finishing with a reference to the Virgin Mary: "Truly, this, your *umma*, is one *umma*, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" (21:92). Just as our God and your God is one,[77] so all believers, whatever be the outward, denominational form taken by their belief, are judged strictly according to their merits, and not according to some artificial religious label:

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[75] *Mathnawī*, II, 1770.

[76] For example, Kāshānī, after pointing out the flaws in the religions of Judaism and Christianity, avers that Islam is "altogether true; indeed, it is the truth of truths. It is the supreme and most brilliant truth" (cited in Lory, *Commentaires ésoteriques*, p. 132).

[77] The verse in which these words are given is as follows: "And only discourse with the People of the Book in a way that is most excellent, save with those who do wrong. And say: We believe in that which hath been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender" (29:46). We shall return to this verse below.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّـٰتٍ تَجْرِى

مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ خَـٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۖ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقًّا ۚ وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ

مِنَ ٱللَّهِ قِيلًا

And those who believe and do good works, We shall bring them
into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will
abide forever—a promise of God in truth; and who can be more
truthful than God in utterance? (4:122).

Lest one think that the category of "those who believe and do good
works" refers only to the Muslims in the specific sense—one possible read-
ing, admittedly—the very next verse establishes the universal scope of the
promise. This verse, indeed, is of the utmost importance for the perspective
or "reading" being expounded here:

لَّيْسَ بِأَمَانِيِّكُمْ وَلَآ أَمَانِيِّ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ ۗ مَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا يُجْزَ

بِهِۦ

It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of
the People of the Scripture. He who doth wrong will have the
recompense thereof (4:123).

One can read this verse as implying that insofar as the Muslim "desires"
that salvation be restricted to Muslims in the specific, communal sense, he
falls into exactly the same kind of exclusivism of which the Christians and
Jews stand accused: "And they say: None entereth paradise unless he be a
Jew or a Christian. These are their own desires" (2:111). It should be noted
that the very same word is used both for the "desires" of the Jews and the
Christians, and the "desires" of the Muslims, *amāniyy*. As noted above, the
logic of these verses clearly indicates that one form of religious prejudice or
chauvinism is not to be replaced with another form of the same, but with
an objective, unprejudiced recognition of the inexorable and universal law
of Divine justice. This universal law is expressed with the utmost clarity in
the following two verses, which complete this important passage from the
Sūra al-Nisāʾ:

وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ مِن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ

فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا

مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَٱتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا

And whoso doeth good works, whether male or female, and is a
believer, such will enter paradise, and will not be wronged the dint
of a date-stone. Who is better in religion than he who submitteth
his purpose to God, while being virtuous, and following the reli-
gious community of Abraham the devout? (4:124-125).

In these four verses, taken as a whole (4:122-125), the Divine "promise" of salvation is starkly contrasted with confessional "desires"; on the one hand, there is an objective and universal criterion of wholehearted submission to God, and on the other, a subjective and particularistic criterion of formal attachment to a specific community. To return to the verse cited above, one should note the riposte that follows the unwarranted exclusivism of the People of the Book:

And they say: None entereth paradise unless he be a Jew or a
Christian. These are their own desires. Say: Bring your proof if ye
are truthful. Nay, but whosoever submitteth his purpose to God,
and he is virtuous, his reward is with his Lord. No fear shall come
upon them, neither shall they grieve (2:111-112).

Verse 112 thus comes as a concrete rebuttal of unwarranted exclusivism. It does not contradict the exclusivist claims of the Jews and the Christians with an exclusivism of its own, that is, with a claim that only "Muslims", in the specific sense, go to Paradise. Access to salvation, far from being further narrowed by reference to the privileged rights of some other "group", is broadened, and in fact universalized: those who attain salvation and enter paradise are those who have submitted wholeheartedly to God and are in-trinsically virtuous. Faithful submission, allied to virtue: such are the two indispensable requisites for salvation. Thus it is perfectly justified to argue that the verse does not respond "in kind" to the exclusivism of the People of the Book, but rather pitches the response on a completely different level, a supra-theological or metaphysical level, which surpasses all reified defini-tions, confessional denominations, communal allegiances, and partisan affiliations.

It is also important to note that the words cited earlier, "Unto God belong the East and the West, and wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God", come two verses later, at 2:115. This verse is referred to by Ibn ʿArabī at the end of the following well-known warning to Muslims against restricting God to the form of one's own belief, a warning that is entirely in accordance with the thrust of the Qurʾānic discourse:

> Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief! Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious belief. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He says, Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God.[78]

We can also turn to Ibn ʿArabī for a useful Sufi means of overcoming one of the obstacles to wholesome dialogue between Muslims and members of other faiths: the traditional legal notion of the abrogation of other religions by Islam. Before doing so, however, it is important to situate the principle of abrogation in relation to the verse cited above, 2:62, in which salvation is promised not just to Muslims in the specific sense, but also to Jews and Christians and Sabeans, whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds. A great deal hinges on the meaning attributed to this verse. Its literal meaning is clear enough: all believers who act virtuously, in consequence of their faith, are promised that their reward is with their Lord, and "no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve". But it is held by many of the traditional commentators, based on a report from Ibn ʿAbbās, that this verse is abrogated by 3:85—"And whoso seeketh a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter." Among the classical commentators, however, it is noteworthy that Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and the Shiʾite commentator Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153) both reject the idea that the verse can be subject to abrogation. In general, as regards the principle of abrogation (*naskh*), Ṭabarī writes, in his commentary on verse 2:106—"We abrogate no verse, nor do We cause it to be forgotten, but that We bring one better than it or like it":

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[78] Quoted by T. Izutsu in his *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 254. We have modified somewhat Izutsu's translation of this passage from the *Fuṣūṣ* (pp. 135-16). In particular, the word ʿaqīda, should, we believe, be translated as "creed" and not, as Izutsu has it, "religion". Izutsu's translation nonetheless adequately conveys the clear intention behind this warning to believers not to restrict God to the form of their own belief, whether this is a doctrinal form *vis-à-vis* other possible forms within the same religion, or a religious belief *vis-à-vis* the beliefs of other religions. But, as has been discussed in the previous section, for Ibn ʿArabī, there is but one religion, which comprises diverse modes of revelation and different rulings, according to the requirements of different human collectivities addressed by the one and only Divinity.

> Thus, God transforms the lawful into the unlawful, and the unlawful into the lawful, and the permitted into the forbidden, and the forbidden into the permitted. This only pertains to such issues as commands and prohibitions, proscriptions and generalizations, preventions and authorizations. But as for reports (*akhbār*), they cannot abrogate nor be abrogated.[79]

In regard to verse 2:62, he writes that the literal meaning of the verse should be upheld, without being restricted in its scope by reference to reports of its abrogation, "because, in respect of the bestowal of reward for virtuous action with faith, God has not singled out some of His creatures as opposed to others".[80] Ṭabarsī, in his commentary *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān*, argues that "abrogation cannot apply to a declaration of promise. It can be allowed only of legal judgments which may be changed or altered with change in the general interest".[81]

Nonetheless, as regards the specifically juristic point of view, it is almost universally upheld that Islam "abrogates" the previous dispensations, in the sense that its revealed law supersedes the laws promulgated in pre-Qur'ānic revelations, with the concomitant that it is no longer permissible for Muslims to abide by those pre-Qur'ānic revealed laws, the *Sharī'ah* brought by the Prophet being henceforth normative and binding. How, then, can a Muslim today, concerned with dialogue, reconcile the idea of salvation being accessible to non-Muslims who faithfully follow their religions, on the one hand, with the principle that Islam abrogates or supersedes all previous religions? One answer is given by Ibn 'Arabī, for whom the fact of abrogation does not imply the nullification of those religions which are superseded, nor does it render them salvifically inefficacious. In a brilliant dialectical stroke, Ibn 'Arabī transforms the whole doctrine of abrogation from being a basis for the rejection of other religions into an argument for their continuing validity. For one of the reasons for the pre-eminence of Islam is precisely the fact that Muslims are enjoined to believe in all revelations and not just in that conveyed by the Prophet of Islam:

> All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muḥammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are

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[79] Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl ayāt al-Qur'ān (Beirut, 2001), Vol.1, p. 546.

[80] *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p. 373.

[81] Quoted by M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (Albany, 1984), Vol. I, p. 110. In the contemporary period, both Rashid Rida and Allamah Tabataba'i likewise uphold the literal meaning of the verse, and reject the possibility that it is subject to abrogation. See the discussion of this issue in Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 162-166; and in Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 29-34.

hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muḥammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation—that is the opinion of the ignorant.[82]

Finally, one has to address the fact that the Qur'ān not only contains verses that clearly assert the Divine ordainment of religious diversity, the exhortation to engage in dialogue, and the presence of piety and righteousness in religions other than Islam; it also contains verses of a polemical nature. For example:

$$\text{يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ ٱلۡيَهُودَ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَ ۘ بَعۡضُهُمۡ}$$

$$\text{أَوۡلِيَآءُ بَعۡضٖ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُم مِّنكُمۡ فَإِنَّهُۥ مِنۡهُمۡ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِى}$$

$$\text{ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ}$$

O ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians for guardians. They are guardians one to another. He among you who taketh them for guardians is (one) of them. Truly, God guideth not wrongdoing folk (5:51).

$$\text{وَقَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ عُزَيۡرٌ ٱبۡنُ ٱللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَى ٱلۡمَسِيحُ ٱبۡنُ ٱللَّهِ ۖ}$$

$$\text{ذَٰلِكَ قَوۡلُهُم بِأَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ ۖ يُضَٰهِـُٔونَ قَوۡلَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن}$$

$$\text{قَبۡلُ ۚ قَٰتَلَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۚ أَنَّىٰ يُؤۡفَكُونَ}$$

And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of God. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. God fighteth them. How perverse are they! (9:30).

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[82] Cited by W. C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, 1994) p. 125

There are numerous such verses, which demonstrate the formal contradictions between different theological perspectives, and the consequent difficulties attendant upon the effort to engage in effective dialogue on the basis of theological perspectives alone. They also indicate, albeit indirectly, the necessity of elevating the mode of discourse to a metaphysical, supratheological level, from the vantage point of which those formal contradictions are rendered less decisive as determinants of dialogue. The contradictions remain on their own plane; but the more challenging question is to determine the significance of that plane, and to make an effort to discern within the text of the Qur'ān itself those openings that warrant a transition to a higher plane. This is what has been attempted in this paper, with the help of Sufi metaphysical perspectives on the Qur'ān.

But one must also respond to the specific question: in the concrete context of interfaith dialogue, how is one to relate to the verses that severely criticize the dogmatic errors of the People of the Book? Apart from pointing out the need to examine carefully each such verse, to contextualize it, and to examine the degree to which the error in question is attributable to the orthodox theologies apparently being censured, one would respond immediately by referring to the following verse: "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and hold discourse with them [the People of the Book] in the finest manner" (16:125). One is urged to use one's judgment, one's own "wisdom" to debate with the "other" in the most appropriate manner, taking into account both the particular conditions in which the dialogue is being conducted, and the principial priority that must be accorded to universal realities—so clearly affirmed in the Qur'ān—over historical, communal, and even theological contingencies. In other words, insofar as one's orientation to the religious "other" is determined by spiritual, rather than theological or legal considerations, one should give priority to those verses which are of a clearly principial or universal nature, as opposed to those which are clearly contextual in nature.[83] By "contextual" is meant those verses which relate to the plane of theologi-

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[83] It should be noted that this stress on certain verses—those which are universal in content, and which promote peace and harmony between the different faith communities, as opposed to those which are more aggressive in tone, and which reflect particular historical situations or specific theological controversies—is not totally unrelated to Ghazzālī's principle of the "variance in the excellence of the Qur'ānic verses". See his *Jewels of the Qur'ān :Al-Ghazali's Theory*, trans. M. Abul Quasem (London and Boston, 1983), pp. 64-5. Needless to say, for Ghazzālī, the Qur'ān in its entirety is of a revealed substance, so each verse is equal to all others in respect of revelation; but some verses are of more profound import and of greater theurgic value than others, as attested to by the Prophet in many sayings. Ghazzālī refers to the "light of insight" that helps us to see "the difference between the Verse of the Throne (2:255) and a verse concerning giving and receiving loans, and between the *Sura* of Sincerity (112) and the *Sura* of Destruction (111)" (p.64).

cal exclusivism or inter-communal conflict, the very plane that is transcended by the vision that unfolds from the verses stressed and commented upon above.

Secondly, there is no warrant, even with an exclusivist reading of the Qur'ān, for any brand of religious intolerance, and still less, persecution of non-Muslims. Far from it. In fact the Muslims are enjoined to defend churches and synagogues, and not just mosques—all being described by the Qur'ān as places "wherein the name of God is much invoked" (22:40). One should also cite in this connection the historically recorded acts of tolerance manifested by the Prophet himself: for example, the treaty of Medina, in which the Jews were given equal rights with the Muslims;[84] the treaty signed with the monks of St Catherine's monastery on Sinai;[85] and, especially, the highly symbolic fact that, when the Christian delegation arrived from Najran to engage the Prophet in theological debate, principally over the Divine nature of Christ, they were permitted by him to perform their liturgical worship in his own mosque.[86]

One observes here a perfect example of how disagreement on the plane of dogma can co-exist with a deep respect on the superior plane of religious devotion. This example of the prophetic *sunnah* or conduct is a good background against which one can evaluate the following important passage from the *Discourses* of Rūmī. In one part of the book, he clearly takes to task a Christian, Jarrah, for continuing to believe in certain Christian dogmas, in particular, the idea that Jesus is God,[87] but this disagreement on the plane of dogma does not blind Rūmī from his majestic vision of the spirit above all religious forms—a vision so often evoked in his poetry—nor does it preclude discourse with Christians, or mutual inspiration. In Rūmī's words:

> I was speaking one day amongst a group of people, and a party of non-Muslims was present. In the middle of my address they began to weep and to register emotion and ecstasy. Someone asked: What do they understand and what do they know? Only one Muslim in a thousand understands this kind of talk. What did they understand, that they should weep? The Master [*i.e.*, Rūmī himself] answered: It is

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[84] See the useful discussion of the first Constitution of Medina in S. H .M. Jafri, *Political and Moral Vision of Islam* (Lahore, 2000), pp. 11-41.

[85] A copy of the document is displayed to this day in the monastery itself, which is the oldest continually inhabited monastic establishment in Christendom, and which—it is of considerable interest to note—includes within its precincts a mosque, constructed by the monks for the local Bedouins. See J. Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai* (London, 1985), pp. 18-19.

[86] See A. Guillaume, trans., The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh (Oxford, 1968), pp. 270-277.

[87] *Discourses*, pp. 135-136.

not necessary that they should understand the form of the discourse; that which constitutes the root and principle of the discourse, that they understand.[88] After all, every one acknowledges the Oneness of God, that He is the Creator and Provider, that He controls everything, that to Him all things shall return, and that it is He who punishes and forgives. When anyone hears these words, which are a description and commemoration (*dhikr*) of God, a universal commotion and ecstatic passion supervenes, since out of these words comes the scent of their Beloved and their Quest.[89]

In this passage the notion of creative, spiritual dialogue is given clear definition. Receptivity to innate spirituality, such as is rooted in the *fiṭrah*, constitutes the inalienable substance of the human soul; and this innate spirituality recognizes no confessional boundaries. Rūmī is not so much denying the fact that Muslims and non-Muslims disagree over particular dogmas, as affirming the ever-present validity of spiritual dialogue, a mode of dialogue which bears fruit despite theological disagreement, and which serves to limit the negativity arising out of that disagreement, while turning to spiritual account the underlying, devotional orientation to the transcendent Reality that defines the essential reality of all believers.

This mode of dialogue is possible because the receptivity proper to spiritual substance is of infinitely greater import than the limitations that circumscribe all mental conceptions. This is how one can understand the following statement, in which both faith and infidelity are transcended by something more fundamental than the plane on which this dichotomy exists: "All men in their inmost hearts love God and seek Him, pray to Him and in all things put their hope in Him, recognizing none but Him as omnipotent and ordering their affairs. Such an apperception is neither infidelity nor faith. Inwardly it has no name."[90] This perspective is reinforced by the following statements from the same work. Prayer, Rūmī says, changes from religion to religion, but "faith does not change in any religion; its states, its point of orientation, and the rest are invariable".[91] "Love for the

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[88] We have taken the liberty of substantially altering Arberry's translation in this sentence. He translates the Persian *nafs-e īn sukhan* as "the inner spirit of these words"; whereas Rūmī's contrast between the *nafs* of the "words" and the *aṣl* of the "words" makes it clear that the latter is in fact the "inner spirit" and the former is something relatively superficial, the formal correlate of the *aṣl*, the supra-formal principle, or the "inner spirit".

[89] *Discourses*, p. 108.

[90] *Ibid.*, p.109.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 43. Arberry translates the word *qibla* as locus; but we prefer to translate this word as "point of orientation" in the above sentence.

Creator is latent in all the world and in all men, be they Magians, Jews, or Christians."[92]

Now, to return to the polemical verses that the Qurʾān contains, in addition to all that has been said above, one has also to counterbalance such verses with the Qurʾānic order to engage in constructive dialogue, and to avoid disputation—an order which is given added depth by affirmations of the presence of piety and faith in other religious traditions. For example:

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً ۗ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ أُمَّةٌ قَآئِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ ءَايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ءَانَآءَ ٱلَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْأَخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَـٰرِعُونَ فِى ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ وَأُوْلَـٰئِكَ مِنَ ٱلصَّـٰلِحِينَ وَمَا يَفْعَلُواْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِٱلْمُتَّقِينَ

They are not all alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of God in the watches of the night, falling prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. These are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, they will not be denied it; and God knows the pious (3: 113-115).

وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةً لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا نَصَـٰرَىٰ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِّيسِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

Thou wilt find the nearest of them [the People of the Scripture] in affection to those who believe to be those who say: Verily, we are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and they are not proud (5: 82).

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[92] *Ibid*., p. 214.

ءَامَنتُ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِن كِتَٰبٍ ۖ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ بَيْنَكُمُ ۖ ٱللَّهُ

رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ۖ لَنَآ أَعْمَٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَٰلُكُمْ ۖ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا

وَبَيْنَكُمُ ۖ ٱللَّهُ تَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ

I believe in whatever scripture God hath revealed, and I am commanded to be just among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us our works and unto you your works; no argument between us and you. God will bring us together and unto Him is the journeying (42:15).

۞ وَلَا تُجَٰدِلُوٓا۟ أَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ

ظَلَمُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَقُولُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا بِٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ

وَإِلَٰهُنَا وَإِلَٰهُكُمْ وَٰحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ

And only discourse with the People of the Book in a way that is most excellent, save with those who do wrong. And say: We believe in that which hath been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender (29:46).

And finally, it is worth repeating the following verse, which can justifiably be put forward as altogether definitive in respect of dialogue:

ٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ ۖ وَجَٰدِلْهُم بِٱلَّتِى

هِىَ أَحْسَنُ

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and hold discourse with them in the finest manner (16:125).

For those wishing to engage in dialogue with other faiths and their representatives, the key question devolves upon the way in which one understands that which is "finest", "most excellent", or "most beautiful", the word *aḥsan* comprising all these meanings. One is urged to use one's own

intelligence, one's own "aesthetic" feel for what accords most harmoniously with the conditions of one's own "dialogical" situation. The verse also links the "call" to the way of God with holding discourse with adherents of other belief-systems. Thus dialogue can itself be seen, not as contrary to the Muslim duty of bearing witness to his faith, but as an aspect of that duty, and perhaps, in the modern world, the wisest way of performing that duty. In an age when, in the words of Frithjof Schuon, "the outward and readily exaggerated incompatibility of the different religions greatly discredits, in the minds of most of our contemporaries, all religion",[93] a "call to God" which is based on universal inclusivity rather than dogmatic exclusivity is much more likely to be heeded. The Qur'ānic discourse explicitly refers to the fragility and illogicality of confessional or denominational exclusivity, and affirms truths of a universal nature, doing so, moreover, with an insistence and in a manner that is unparalleled among world scriptures. It is therefore uniquely situated, in intellectual terms, to assist in the resolution of the contemporary crisis precipitated by mutually exclusive religious claims.

Wisdom is explicitly called for in the verse we have cited above; and wisdom, by definition, is not something that can be laid down in advance of all the concrete and unique situations in which wisdom needs to be applied, as if it were a formal rule or a blue-print. On the contrary, it is, on the one hand, a Divine bestowal, and on the other, a quality that can be developed and cultivated only through intellectual, moral, and spiritual effort. In the Qur'ān, wisdom is described as a gift from God: "He giveth wisdom to whom He will; and he to whom wisdom is given hath been granted great good" (2:269). But it is also a quality which can be cultivated, acquired, or learned, and this is implied in the following verse, where the Prophet is described as one who teaches and imparts not just the formal message, but the wisdom required to understand and creatively apply that message: "He it is Who hath sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow [in purity], and to teach them the Scripture and wisdom" (62:2).

One of the most important aspects of wisdom taught by the scripture of the Qur'ān and the conduct of the Prophet is tolerance of those with belief-systems different from one's own, a tolerance grounded in a consciousness of the Reality which transcends all systems of belief, one's own included, but which is also mysteriously present in the depths of each human soul. Authentic dialogue emerges in the measure that this presence of God in all

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[93] F. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL, 1993), p. xxxiii.

human beings is respected. For Muslims living at a time when the alternative to dialogue is not just diatribe but violent clash, the imperative of highlighting that which unites the different religions, of upholding and promoting the common spiritual patrimony of mankind, is of the utmost urgency. As we have seen, there is ample evidence in the Qurʾānic text itself, and in the compelling commentaries on these verses by those most steeped in the spiritual tradition of Islam, to demonstrate that the Qurʾān not only provides us with a universal vision of religion, and thus with the means to contemplate all revealed religions as "signs" (*āyāt*) of God, but also opens up paths of creative, constructive dialogue between the faithful of all the different religious communities, despite their divergent belief-systems. It provides us with the basis for dialogue and mutual enrichment on aspects of religious life and thought that go beyond the outward forms of belief, yielding fruit in the fertile fields of metaphysical insight, immutable values, contemplative inspiration, and spiritual realization.

Types of Unity in the Qur'ān and Fundamental Causes of Disunity[*]

Ustādh Muḥammad Wā'iẓ Zādeh Khurāsānī[1]
Translated by Salim S. Yusufali and Shaista K. Yusufali

Abstract

It is an obligatory duty on Muslims to strive for a single *ummah*, in the same way that they are obligated on the basis of *tawḥīd* to worship one God. A single, united *ummah* can only be actualized when the whole group follows one political, social and ideological path, and falls under the umbrella of one law, one system of economics, etc. Establishing such an *ummah* is a duty whose burden is shared by all Muslims. The fundamental causes of disunity are: *siyāsat* (politics) of a perilous nature, political exploitation of *madhhab* (schools of jurisprudence, theology, or thought), and nationalism.

Keywords: Muslim unity, politics, Muslim sects, Islamic sectarianism, history of Islamic sects.

إِنَّ هَـٰذِهِۦ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّـةً وَٰحِدَةً وَأَنَاْ رَبُّكُمْ فَاَعْبُدُونِ

Indeed this *ummah* (community) of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me.[2]

The great many followers of the Noble Messenger (ṣ) throughout the world consider themselves not just as his followers but also as his devotees and lovers. It is hoped that the Muslim community can re-unite in light of the love they share for the Messenger of Allah. Just as the Messenger lay emphasis on unity before all things, we too must regard this matter with grave regard.

My discussion consists of an introduction and several points.

Introduction

Two lessons can be derived from the noble verse [quoted above]:

Firstly, the unity of the *ummah* is consignificant with *tawḥīd*, or in other words, unity [like *tawḥīd*] is one of the pillars of Islam.

It is a matter of regret that the issue of unity is spoken of as something that is merely advisable—a noble matter that ought to exist among Muslims and that they must exhort one another to adopt. In reality, however, the Qur'ān highlights unity with the same emphasis as it highlights *tawḥīd*. So great is the stipulation of a united *ummah*, that the call for unity precedes the command to worship the One God:

$$\text{إِنَّ هَـٰذِهِۦ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً وَأَنَا۠ رَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُونِ}$$

Indeed this *ummah* (community) of yours is one community, and I
am your Lord. So worship Me.[3]

[In this verse,] worship of the One God is predicated on the unity of the *ummah* and the unity of the Lord. Together, these two form the pillars for the monotheistic (*tawḥīdī*) worship of God.

The second lesson learnt from this verse is regarding the unity of the *ummah* itself. The phrase (*ummah wāḥidah*) is the answer to the question, "What is unity?" It can be ascertained that the Islamic community in its path for unity must reach a stage where it is able to form *one ummah*. It is an obligatory duty, therefore, on Muslims to strive for a single *ummah*, in the same way that they are obligated on the basis of *tawḥīd* to worship one God.

The words *ummah* and *imāmah* (leadership) stem from the same root. Consequently, an *ummah* is a group that follows the same leader (*imām*), objective, and book. The Qur'ān even uses the word *imām* for the Torah[4]. A united *ummah* can only be actualized when the whole group follows one political, social and ideological path, and falls under the umbrella of one law, one system of economics, etc. As long as this is not true, there can be no realization of a single *ummah*. The distinguished reformer, 'Allāmah Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' (may Allah be pleased with him) has captured well the afore-mentioned lesson we derived from the verse in one of his aphorisms:

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[3] Qur'ān 21:92.
[4] Qur'ān 11:17. (Tr.)

بني الإسلام على كلمتين (أو على دعامتين)، كلمة التّوحيد و توحيد
الكلمة

Islam has been instituted on two expressions (or two pillars): the expression of *tawḥīd* and the *tawḥīd* (unity) of the expression [or a single, united voice].

Truly, if there is no unity of expression there cannot exist any expression of *tawḥīd* [i.e. no expression of the creed of Islam]. *Tawḥīd* is more than worship; *tawḥīd* is the principle that there is only one Lord and one leader in the Islamic community:

لَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ

…that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah…[5]

Tawḥīd cannot prevail in an Islamic community where illegitimate rulers, kings, sultans, and tyrants have authority over the Muslims. Neither will "*wa anā rabbukum*" (I am your Lord) ring true for such a society nor will *ummah wāḥidah* (a single *ummah*) be realized. [Why not?] Because tyrants are always in battle with each other in order to take possession of more power. Each one desires to pull the community towards himself. As long as this is the status quo, a single *ummah* cannot be realized. Therefore, there is a necessary correlation between *tawḥīd* in its true meaning and a single *ummah*.

Types of Unity in the Qur'ān

In addition to *tawḥīd* which is the foundation of all types of unity, there are several forms of unity that appear in the Qur'ān:

1. Unity of the *ummah*:

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّـةً وَٰحِدَةً وَأَنَا۠ رَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُونِ

Indeed this *ummah* (community) of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me.[6]

2. Unity of all those who follow the heavenly books:

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[5] Qur'ān 3:64.
[6] Qur'ān 21:92.

قُلْ يَـٰٓأَهْـلَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ تَعَالَوْاْ إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَآءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِۦ شَيْئًا

Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him…[7]

3.   Unity of all religions:

شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِۦ نُوحًا وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِۦٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰٓ أَنْ أَقِيمُواْ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُواْ فِيهِ

He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, 'Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.'…[8]

لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ

…[The apostle and the faithful declare:] 'We make no distinction between any of His apostles.'…[9]

4.   Unity of humanity:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَـٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَـٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓاْ

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another.[10]

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[7] Qur'ān 3:64.
[8] Qur'ān 42:13.
[9] Qur'ān 2:285.

Perhaps it may be said that the sermon of the Messenger given in the early days after the Emigration encompasses all these forms: "O Mankind! Surely you have only one Lord and your father is one. Each one of you is from Adam, and Adam is made of clay. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you[11]. There is no preference for an Arab over a non-Arab except due to his *taqwā* (God wariness)."

Thus prior to examining the causes of discord, it is first necessary to believe that the unity of the *ummah* is a duty and an obligation on all of us. It is a duty whose burden is shared by all Muslims; only when each individual Muslim carries out his share can it be fulfilled. This obligation is not one of the *wājibāt-e-kifāyī* (collective obligations), so that if one individual carries it out, the burden is lifted from the rest. Nor is it one of the *wājibāt-e-infirādī* (one-time obligations) so that when it is carried out once then it need not be carried out again. Unity is a distinct reality that applies to all Muslims. The greater one's intellectual, political, and financial abilities are, the heavier this burden is. Clearly the burden on a scholar, a *marja'-e-taqlīd* (legal authority capable of practical emulation), and a leader is very great, because when he fulfills his obligation his adherents will also follow suit.

Sadly there are many who are not aware of such a duty. It is crucial that each must take care not to disrupt the unity of the Islamic *ummah* through his speech, writings or actions.

The parable of Islamic unity is like that of a building where each individual brick plays a role in the fortification and protection of the building as a whole. Any action or transgression that is carried out against this unity is equivalent to removing one brick from the building that is Islamic unity, resulting in the eventual destruction of the entire structure.

Fundamental Causes of Disunity

Many [potential] causes for discord can be enumerated but for now we will limit ourselves to actual [current] obstacles to unity. These obstacles can be summarized into three main categories:

First Cause of Disunity: Politics

Islam must be freed from *siyāsat* (politics) of a perilous nature. Approximately 35 years earlier in a meeting attended by a number of distinguished individuals, I commented *"Islam must be freed of the evil of politics."* One of the attendees replied: Do you too belong to the group which alleges

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[10] Qur'ān 49:13.
[11] Reference to Qur'ān 49:13. (Tr.)

the separation of religion and politics? I said: No, in this lies the very mistake. We have two issues at hand here: firstly, religion (*dīn*) is the same thing as politics and politics is the same thing as religion. Since Islam includes a system of government, it necessarily comprises of politics as well. Those who due to alien influence claim that religion and politics must be separated are in fact stripping religion of the strength it gains by providing a system of government. The second type of politics to which I was referring, is the form of politics that from the first century of Islam and throughout the history of Islam has obstructed the path to unity. Below is a mention of significant dynasties that have been in rivalry with one another:

1. Rivalry between Banī Umayyah, the family of 'Alī (*'a*), and the Khawārij
2. Rivalry between the Banī Umayyah and the Banī 'Abbās
3. Rivalry between the Banī 'Abbās and the family of the Prophet (*ş*)
4. Rivalry between the Banī 'Abbās and the Banī Umayyah (in Spain)
5. Rivalry between the Banī 'Abbās and the Egyptian Fatimiyyads
6. Rivalry between Ayyūbīs and the Fatimiyyads
7. Rivalry between the Būyids (a Shi'ite *maddhab*) and the Seljuks (a Sunni *maddhab*)
8. Rivalry between the Ottoman caliphs and the Safavid sultans

It is naïve to imagine that these caliphates, dynasties, and powers played no role in the creation of disunity among the Muslims. Sadly most if not all of these regimes purposely misused *madhhab* (schools of jurisprudence, theology, or thought) to create dissention between the masses.

Islam must be freed from the perils of such unhealthy politics that have racked Islamic history for the last 10-12 centuries. Muslims all over the Islamic world, both in the West and the East, are still suffering the consequences of these unfortunate politics.

At this point it is appropriate to quote one of the leading players in the efforts to create unity within Islam, the late Shaykh 'Abd al-Majīd Salīm, one of the foremost scholars of Al-Azhar, a teacher of Shaykh Shaltūt, and a founder of *dār al-taqrīb bayn al-madhāhib al-islāmiyyah* (Society for the Proximity between the Islamic sects). This was narrated from Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Qummī, the director of Dār al-Tablīgh: Shaykh 'Abd al-Majīd Salīm once said in a meeting, "*Madhāhib* [plural of *madhhab*] that have gained ground in Islamic countries have not done so by [convincing others with] reason and logical proof, but rather, they have spread and made progress due to political forces."

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This is a reality that only furthers the argument that the matter of politics is a lone factor [in the genesis of *madhāhib*]. The unfortunate consequences of this form of politics are to be found in the Islamic countries and we must make attempts to remove them. To this end, it is first necessary to scrutinize each and every common practice and tradition among Muslims and seek out its origin so as to clarify the original source from which it stems. The traditions whose origins lie in politics need to be sifted out and only those which can be established with proof [from Islamic sources] ought to be practiced.

The late Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn Jabal ʿĀmilī, another reformer of this century, has a beautiful saying regarding the matter at hand:

<div dir="rtl">

فرقتنا السّياسة و ستجمعنا السّياسة

</div>

That is, the form of deviant politics which is opposed to Islamic values has caused divisions amongst us; however, a humane and just Islamic political system will soon gather us around one another. Perhaps this great man had been divinely inspired with the knowledge that the Islamic Republic of Iran would soon come into existence and gather Islamic nations around each other.

Consequently, no amount of effort spent in speaking and writing is too great in countering the dire effects the policies of corrupt rulers of the past have had on the views, practices, traditions, and on what the Muslims love and hate. As an example, in Egypt it was common to hold celebrations on the day of ʿĀshurāʾ. It is not clear which government or political faction started this unacceptable and divisive practice. But I recall that newspapers narrated that one year, the late Shaykh Shaltūt and his colleagues held mourning ceremonies on the day of ʿĀshurāʾ in al-Azhar commemorating Imām Ḥusayn (a), in order to expunge that evil policy left over from an earlier era.

There are both [positive and negative] examples. The opposite has also held true in other places [where influential forces have promoted divisive practices].

Astonishingly, even now when the dire consequences of such mistaken politic maneuvering have become clear, there are those who insist on carrying on the erroneous practices of the past.

[Corrupt] rulers have consistently promoted their own unwise and anti-Islamic politics by resorting to *madhhab* and by means of court-scholars *(darbārī)* and preachers of the sultans. In other words, corrupt scholars have been a part of the promotion of such political strategies. From this does the

relationship between these forms of politics and *madhāhib* become clear, forming our point of departure for the second cause of discord.

Second Cause of Disunity: Madhhab

In our discussion of *madhhab* as the second factor in disunity, we must first clarify the true meaning of *madhhab* and to what extent it can be a cause of discord.

Madhhab differs from religion (*dīn*). When we say the religion of Islam, our intention is those beliefs and rulings that are present in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah that the Noble Messenger (ṣ) propagated. *Madhhab*, however, is a path started among the Muslims as a way to bring clarity to religion. On the whole, we can speak of three categories of *madhhab* that correspond with three dimensions of Islam:

1. The dimension of beliefs and the formation of the theological *madhāhib* of the Ashʿarī, Muʿtazilī, Shīʿī, etc. whose underpinnings lie in beliefs. Followers of a *madhhab* maintain the belief that the path to true religion is the path that they are traversing, and all agree that the path of *madhhab* differs from religion.
2. The practical and *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) dimension.
3. The dimension of *akhlāq* (ethics) and *ʿirfān* (gnosis).

Usually when disagreement among *madhāhib* is spoken of, the second dimension (jurisprudential differences) comes to mind. These sects correspond to the four mainstream and well-known Sunnī *madhāhib* and the two or three Shīʿī *madhāhib*, as well as those less-popular *madhāhib* in both groups.

It is evident that in some instances the above *madhāhib* are in alignment with their theological counterparts, and in some instances they differ. For example the Shīʿī *madhhab* has independence in the dimensions of beliefs and jurisprudence, and each is a necessary corollary of the other. However this is not the case for the Sunnī *madhāhib*, where it is possible that someone who belongs to the Shāfiʿī *madhhab* in jurisprudence may belong to either the Muʿtazilī or the Ashʿarī theological *madhhab*.

Viewpoints regarding the genesis of madhāhib

The different viewpoints about the genesis of these *madhāhib* can be divided in two major stances:

The first stance is that of the Salafīs, or those who maintain loyalty to the Pious Predecessors (*salaf-e ṣāliḥ*) and believe that the genesis of *madhāhib* in Islam is an innovation (*bid'ah*). The current leaders of this group are the Wahhābīs. One of their leaders by the name of Shaykh Nāsir al-Dīn Ālbāni has written a book about innovations that exist even within the *madhāhib* of the Ahl al-Sunnah. In this he declares any *fatwā* (legal opinion) that does not suit his own taste as an innovation.

They are of the belief that the Islam of today should be identical to the Islam of the time of the Prophet (s), the companions and the Pious Predecessors, when no *madhhab*, path, or differences had yet appeared. Anything that came to be after that time is an innovation.

The second group holds the belief that the development of *madhāhib* is a positive event. However this group as well errs in that they typically have chosen *madhhab* in place of religion, asserting that anyone who opposes the roots and branches of the *madhhab* is in fact opposing the religion.

This second view is in direct opposition to the first. The first viewpoint states that no *madhhab* should exist since it is an innovation, whereas the second states that my *madhhab* is the scale by which religion is measured and whoever disagrees with my sect is in fact disagreeing with Islam.

Given the above, which one of these two opinions should we adopt? Which represents the truth?

We can not take the view that *madhāhib* are contrary to the nature of Islam. The Qur'ān says:

$$\text{أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ}$$

Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān?[12]...

and

$$\text{فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَآئِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُواْ فِي ٱلدِّينِ}$$

...Why should not there go forth a group from each of their sections to become learned in religion...[13]

The Qur'ān's primary goal is to call its readers to thought, comprehension (*fahm*), and *fiqh* (deep understanding). Is it not the case that in its general meaning, *tafaqquh* (becoming learned) in the dimensions of beliefs,

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[12] Qur'ān 47:24.
[13] Qur'ān 9:122.

practice, and *akhlāq* necessarily requires thought, deduction (*istinbāt*), and *ijtihād* (intellectual effort to derive legal conclusions)?

Indeed it may be said Islam itself has laid the foundations of *ijtihād* and forming one's own opinion. Therefore Islam must allow for difference of opinion to a reasonable extent. This is because it is not possible for the Qur'ān on one hand to command us towards *tafaqquh* in religion, and on the other hand for any matter that arises to declare, "Say this, and nothing else!"

Fortunately scholars of all the sects believe that in fundamental (*ḍarūrī*) issues there is no room for *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*. However, such fundamentals can be and have been used as a basis for *ijtihād* in non-fundamental issues. It is important here to remind ourselves that issues in Islam belonging to all the three spheres fall within three categories. One category consists of the fundamental issues, the same issues belonging to the spheres of jurisprudence, *akhlāq*, and beliefs that during the time of the Prophet and the Pious Predecessors existed in a general, summary form but at no point came under scrutiny or study. For example, never did the question arise, is the speech of God uncreated and eternal (*qadīm*) or created and temporal (*ḥādith*)? Are the Divine Attributes separate from or identical with the Divine Essence? Such questions were not even posed. All that was discussed was that the One God has been described with those attributes that have been mentioned in the Qur'ān.

However as the Islamic sciences advanced and such questions arose in the Islamic world, what ought to have been done? Is it correct to say that no discussion should have taken place at all?

The result of restricting such discussions is that all of Islamic heritage in all its spheres would be left aside. That would mean that the extensive *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of the *madhāhib* should be erased, because in the earliest era of Islamic history there was no *fiqh*. There were only the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. In the theological sphere as well, all the research of the different *madhāhib* should be abolished, because too came to exist anew. The same would be done in the sphere of *akhlāq* as well.

If the past scholars of the Islamic world had also considered every new thought and methodology to be an innovation, would it be expected for someone of the likes of Ghazzālī to come about in the last part of the fifth century and produce books in all of the Islamic sciences such as *fiqh*, *usūl* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), theology, and *akhlāq*? Or would it have been possible for someone like Shaykh Ṭūsī to appear in the same century?…Or would Ibn Taymiyyah and his student Ibn Qayyim, the founders of Salafī thought, have arisen in the 8th century? Didn't they make use of

the knowledge of previous centuries in compiling and writing their own views?

The invalidity of such views is blatant. Islam itself has encouraged *ijtihād*, reflection, and contemplation [in verses containing]: *a falā taʿqilūn* (do you not apply reason?) and *a falā tatafakkarūn* (do you not reflect?), and so it must permit the people to think about different issues. Of course there are conditions on how to go about the process of deriving opinion that have been stipulated elsewhere. We must be aware of God as Omnipresent and All-Seeing when presenting our opinion.

Ijtihād must exist, and its existence necessitates differing paths and tendencies, all of which are mercy [from God]. Of course different *madhāhib* should not be seized upon for political purposes, as has unfortunately been the case. Differences are necessary for reaching the truth, and until we have not arrived at this truth, differences will exist and are laudable. Only those sort of differences that exist even after the truth is made clear are reproachable:

$$مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ$$

…after the manifest proofs had come to them…[14].

Differences in and of themselves are not the cause of discord. There is no end to the amount of difference of opinion that can be found in the scientific world, in disciplines such as physics, chemistry, and medicine. Why then is difference of opinion in *fiqh*, *kalām*, and other Islamic sciences problematic? These types of differences should not be the cause of discord, hatred, and the shedding of blood! They only begin when political forces side with one opinion and promote it as part of advancing their own political strategy.

Third Cause of Disunity: Ethnicity and Nationality

Islam accepts nationalities and ethnicities to a reasonable, normal extent:

$$إِنَّا خَلَقْنَـٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَـٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓا۟$$

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[14] Qur'ān 2:213.

> …Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made
> you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one
> another…[15]

The creation [of human beings] is based on tribes and nation. However *lita'ārafū* (so that you may identify yourselves) means that different tribes and nations should be friendly with one another and have mutual ties, not that they should deny one other. However, when one of these ethnicities falls prey to *ta'aṣṣub* (prejudice), they act contrary to Islam and the Qur'ān, as seen in the statement of the Prophet (ṣ):

<div dir="rtl">

ليس منّا من دعا الى عصبية

</div>

One who summons to prejudice is not from among us.

But unfortunately, throughout history, and particularly in the present century, this matter has had extremely negative effects in the Islamic world.

Colonial powers have understood all too well how to unwind the thread that ties together Arabs, Turks, Persians, Kurds, Lurs, non-Arabs, and others under the banner of one Islamic *ummah*. That is why they appealed to nationalism, especially Arab nationalism, which was a blow the entire Islamic world has felt. The following slogan was written on one of the squares in Cairo: الحكم لله و العزة للعـــرب (Judgment belongs to Allah and might belongs to the Arabs) whereas God says,

<div dir="rtl">

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِۦ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

</div>

…all might belongs to Allah and His Apostle, and the faithful …[16]

There is no preference for any ethnicity over another, and the only cause for preference is *taqwā* (God wariness). I would like to bring my discussion to an end and embellish these words with a verse from the Noble Qur'ān:

<div dir="rtl">

وَٱعْتَصِمُواْ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْ وَٱذْكُرُواْ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ

عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ

إِخْوَٰنًا

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[15] Qur'ān 49:13.
[16] Qur'ān 63:8.

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided] into sects [. And remember Allah's blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing…[17]

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[17] Qur'ān 3:103.

Islamic Welfare and Muslim Unity in the Path of Imam ʿAlī

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī
Translated By Adill Hissan

Abstract:

After the demise of the noble Prophet (ṣ) of Islam, there developed in his Ummah a most precarious situation surrounding the issue of *khilāfah*. Amidst the various claims and counter-claims to this political post and due to its potentially explosive and schismatic nature, the policy and methodology adopted by Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) is of paramount importance and interest. While claiming his right to the *khilāfah* in principle, the Imam strove to preserve the integrity of Islam and was extremely conscious of maintaining the general interest of the religion above all. His initial refusal to give allegiance to the first caliph, as well as his later concessions in this regard, must be interpreted in this light. The present article is the first part of a detailed study on the events of that tumultuous period—explaining the policies and principles that animated them from within, as well as expounding upon the Imam's pivotal role with regards to them.

Keywords: *khilāfah, wilāyah,* Imām ʿAlī, caliphs, Muslim unity, Islamic good, sectarianism, *ummah,* companions of the Prophet, Shia-Sunni unity, Shia-Sunni cooperation, Shia-Sunni polemics.

In analyzing any event, a researcher must go beyond his own previously-held beliefs and assumptions in an attempt to form a new and more objective analysis. He should not let his confessional and partisan beliefs become the spring board from which he makes his judgements. With this in mind, the following is a study of the life of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) that is based on common religious teachings and interpretations, which are agreed upon by all Muslim sects and schools of thought. One hopes that it becomes the common criterion and standard to follow and in the light of which we may proceed.

Peaceful Opposition to the Outcome of Saqīfah

After the demise of the noble Prophet (ṣ), a group from among the *Anṣār*[1] and the *Muhājirūn* met in Saqīfah[2] of banī Sāʿidah. After many hours of deliberations and discussions, a party from among the *Muhājirūn* along with some of the *Anṣār* rushed to offer their allegiance to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, whose nomination was announced soon after. However, some other members of the *Muhājirūn* did not agree with this nomination and did not, therefore, offer their allegiance; instead, they favoured the nomination of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa).[3]

When Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) found out about the event, he expressed his objection to the nomination of Abū Bakr, and he refused the calls of those who demanded he give allegiance to the newly elected leader. It is worth noting here, however, that his opposition, in this regard, was peaceful. In addition, he was clear in expressing his opinion in a commonly acceptable manner that was in consonance with this form of opposition. Among his statements challenging the nomination of Abū Bakr, is the following:

> I have more rights to this matter than you, and I shall not offer my allegiance to you; rather, you ought to offer your allegiance to me. Surely you have stripped this matter from the *Anṣār* under the pretext of your blood relationship to the Messenger of Islam (ṣ) but then you usurped it from us, the *Ahl al-Bayt*. So I could argue and dispute about this matter using the same arguments which you presented against the *Anṣār*.[4]

In the midst of these charged circumstances, Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) has directed the attention of the *Muhājirūn* to the true characteristics and attributes which indicate who is the most worthy to succeed the Prophet of God (ṣ) in accordance with the tenets of religion and intellectual principles. This situation can be seen when Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) addressed the *Muhājirūn*, and said:

> By God, O community of *Muhājirūn*, verily we have more rights to this matter than you. Surely there is no one among us except he is a reciter of the Book of Allah, an erudite in the religion of Allah, a knower of the Sunnah of Allah's messenger, one experienced in the affairs of His subjects, and one who repels from them evil and dis-

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[1] The *Anṣār* refers to those individuals residing in Medina who invited the noble Prophet when he was persecuted in Mecca. As for the *Muhājirūn*, they were the companions of the Prophet from Mecca who migrated with him to Medina.
[2] Saqīfah was a roofed building used by the tribe of Sāʿidah, a faction of the Khazraj in Medina.
[3] Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī, 2:124.
[4] al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah, 1:11.

tributes among them equally. By God, such a person is from among us.[5]

Certainly Imam ʿAlī's opposition to the nomination of Abū Bakr was within his natural rights and in accordance with a substantial body of evidence. This granted him the right to express his opposition and to uphold his own nomination. In spite of these justifications, which are deemed sufficient proof for his right to succeed the messenger (ṣ) of God—both in regards to the *ta'wīl* (hermeneutic interpretation) and the *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur'ān—and while accepting the major points of agreement among the companions in this regard, we still find that Imam ʿAlī's opposition to the outcome of the *Shūrā* did not exceed the norms of disputation. His request was balanced and within reasonable standards of political and social discourse. One of the most important grounds for his position was the fact that many of the companions of the Prophet and members of *Banī Hāshim* were absent from the meeting at Saqīfa, and hence did not participate in the *Shūrā*. Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) alluded to this: "If it was by council (*Shūrā*) that you took charge of their affairs, then why is it that the councillors were absent?"[6]

In all the areas and issues of dispute, we find Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) dedicated to preserving the religious rules and principles in the etiquette of opposition, dialogue and protest. His conciliatory stance did not venture beyond elucidating his right to the leadership. This can be seen in his statement to Abū Bakr, "It was evident to us that we had the right to this matter, but you acted despotically against us in this regard." Then the Imam continued addressing Abū Bakr and reminded him of his kinship to the messenger (ṣ) of Islam and the rights of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) upon all Muslims. The Imam did not desist from speaking in this manner until Abū Bakr began to cry.[7]

Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) maintained his opposition toward the nomination of Abū Bakr, and he did not offer his allegiance until the demise of his wife, Faṭima al-Zahrā' (ʿa), the daughter of the messenger (ṣ) of God. In all of the stages of his movement, he always considered the higher interest of Islam—both during the time when he abstained from offering his allegiance and that time when he eventually offered it. Hence, the general interest and welfare of Islam was the dominating force in all of his stands and disputes.

Muslim historians and narrators of traditions differ concerning the details regarding the allegiance of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) to Abū Bakr with respect to

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[5] *Ibid.*, 1:12.
[6] Nahj al-Balāgha, 503.
[7] Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, 2:236.

its time frame, circumstances, method, reasons and motives. Nevertheless, all of them agree and share a common consensus that Imam 'Alī's approach and handling of this dispute was driven by his desire for preserving the integrity of the Muslim state and the unity of the Muslim *ummah*. It is clear that the Islamic state was in its infancy stage and hence, there was a dire need for Imam 'Alī ('a) to play his role, during this pivotal time, in ensuring its success and progress. This could only be guaranteed through ensuring the unity among the Muslims.

If we consider the account of Imam 'Alī ('a) being threatened with death unless he offered allegiance to Abū Bakr, we can conclude that [given the validity of this report] Imam 'Alī's decision [to pay allegiance] was certainly based upon his moral and divine obligations to preserve the general Muslim interest and the unity among Muslims. Imam 'Alī ('a) recognized that if he was killed due to his refusal to give allegiance, it would lead to bloodshed and sectarian violence between the Hashemites and his supporters on one side and the *khalīfa* and his supporters on the other side. Moreover, this violence would ultimately destroy the infant Islamic state in a very critical time when the hypocrites and the polytheists were waiting for an opportune time to destroy the message of Islam.

However, if we consider the various narrations that allude to the positive reasons [ones that did not stem from any fear of threats] of his allegiance to Abū Bakr, we find them in line with the path of Muslim unity and within the framework of the general interest of Muslims. One such tradition is as follows:

> 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān said to Imam 'Alī ('a): 'O cousin, surely no one will leave to fight this [external] enemy while you have not given your allegiance yet.' Immediately, Imam 'Alī ('a) set out to meet Abū Bakr and paid his allegiance. This event brought joy to all Muslims and consequently they were eager to fight the enemies of Islam.[8]

This particular tradition is recorded in the Shia books. In the case of its authenticity, we can conclude that the reason that Imam 'Alī ('a) gave his allegiance was to push forward the movement of *jihād* against the opportunists, apostates and those who carried enmity towards Islam. In wanting to fully realize the Islamic interest for the sake of unity, Imam 'Alī ('a) took into account these dangerous elements threatening the stability of the Muslim state.

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[8] *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Beirut: Mu'asisah al-Wafā', 1403), Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, ed., 28:310.

Furthermore, there are other traditions which allude to his peaceful and unifying position and the real circumstances and motives which led him to pay allegiance. In one such tradition, he states:

> When Allah received the soul of His Prophet (ṣ), the Quraysh seized this affair from us and pushed us away from a right which we were more entitled to than all the people. So I realized that adopting patience over this issue is vastly superior to causing divisions within the unified voice of the Muslims and the shedding of their blood. This is because the people were still new to Islam and the religion was still in its early development, and hence vulnerable to instability and weakness; a moment of negligence would revert it.[9]

Keeping the ranks of Muslims united was of greater importance in the sight of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) than the *khilāfah*. In taking this position, Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) strove to maintain the greater good of Islam. On another occasion, in respect to his reasons for paying allegiance to Abū Bakr, he stated:

> What truly alarmed me was the gathering of people around Abū Bakr and their rushing towards him to offer their allegiance. I held back my hand and I was certain that I had more right to the station of Muḥammad (ṣ) amongst the people than the one who turned towards the affair after him. I remained in this way by what Allah willed until I saw many people revert from Islam. They called to destroy the religion of Allah and the creed of Muḥammad. Hence, I was very concerned that if I do not aid Islam and its people then I would witness its breakup and collapse. Such a calamity would have a far greater impact upon me than the loss of the *wilāyah* (guardianship) of your affairs. For this reason, I walked towards Abū Bakr and paid my allegiance to him. By so doing, I rose in the face of these challenging events until falsehood was contained and annihilated and the Word of Allah was the most high.[10]

On another occasion, the Imam was more forthright in emphasizing Islamic unity and its greater good:

> By Allah, had it not been for the fear of causing divisions among the Muslims, the return of unbelief, and the demise of religion, we would have taken with them a different approach than what we have adopted towards them.[11]

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[9] *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, 1:308.
[10] *Ibid.*, 6:95.
[11] *Ibid.*, 1:307.

As seen from the above remarks, we find Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) abandoned many alternatives and did not choose to adopt any position which would cause a rift between Muslims or weaken their newly formed state. Instead, he chose the option of giving allegiance over other alternatives in order to preserve the unity of Muslims and the unity of the Islamic state.

His Position towards those who Instigated against the Khalīfah

During the stage which preceded the allegiance, or shortly thereafter, Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) rejected all types of reactionary positions which may have led to revulsion and hatred and which would have encouraged rebellion and civil disobedience. One example was in the Imam's stance against ʿUtba ibn Abī Lahab, who said to some people:

> I was not expecting that the affair [of leadership] would depart from the Hashemites and from Abū Ḥasan (i.e., Imam ʿAlī). Is it not a fact that he was the first to perform prayer towards your *qibla*, the most knowledgeable in the Qurʾān and the Sunna, the closest from among the people to the time of the Prophet, and the one who was aided by angel Gabriel to wash and shroud the body of the Prophet?

When Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) came to hear about these words, he summoned ʿUtba and commanded him not to resort to such speech. He uttered his famous statement: "the integrity of the religion is more beloved to us than anything else."[12]

Indeed, the integrity of the religion has a priority over all things and resides in the good of Islam and the best course of action for the betterment of Muslims. It is to be placed above all limited desires and personal interests. In fact, it has more priority than the *khilāfah* and the right of the Imam (ʿa) to it. It is for this reason that he abstained from seeking his right to this *khilāfah*. Moreover, the Imam (ʿa) did not just suffice himself from abstaining to seek his right but also forbade any speech or action that would contribute in stirring up commotion or cause disarray within the ranks of the Muslims. It is for this reason that this provocateur was forbidden by the Imam to engage in such provocative discussions.

Also, when Abū Sufyān came to Medina, he said:

> I see (a vision of) smoke rising and nothing will put it out except blood. O people of ʿAbd Manāf, see your affairs and ponder about Abū Bakr's abilities. Where are the two men, ʿAlī and Al-Abbas?

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[12] al-Akhbār al-Mūfaqīyāt, 581.

> What is going on that you let this affair [i.e., of the *khilāfah*] fall to the lowest community from among the Quraysh?

Then he turned to ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) and said to him, "Extend your hand to me that I may pay allegiance to you and by God, if you should so desire, I will fill the streets of Medina with cavalry and infantry." Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) rejected Abū Sufyān's offer and rebuked him, saying: "By Allah, you want nothing in this but *fitnah* (mischief) and by Allah, you have always wished evil for Islam. We have no need for your advice."[13]

Here, in the face of this provocative situation, Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) refused such a position which emanated from a naive tribal vision influenced by racism and ethnicity. This insular approach did not conform to the lofty ideas of Islam nor its ascendency. It also did not conform to Imam ʿAlī's goals in preserving the Islamic order because the purpose of *khilāfah* is to expound the principles of Islam in light of the real challenges of life and to make these principles guide and direct the thoughts, emotions and aspirations of the people. These goals cannot be fulfilled in the presence of internal disturbances and marginal skirmishes. Therefore, without the fulfilment of these honourable goals, there is no real value to the *khilāfah*.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that what was said and offered by Abū Sufyān would have contributed in the appointment of the Imam to the *khilāfah* of the Muslims and the consequent deposing of Abū Bakr from its seat. In fact, many from the *Anṣār* had refused to give their allegiance to Abū Bakr. This is explicitly mentioned by the second *khalīfa* who said, "Surely ʿAlī and al-Zubayr and their supporters have distanced themselves from us in the house of Fāṭima, and the entire group of *Anṣār* have also done so."[14] Another tradition states, "The *Anṣār* chided each other [during the events at Saqīfa] and remembered ʿAlī and hailed his name."[15]

Despite all of these circumstances and events which were in Imam ʿAlī's favor and which would certainly have enabled him to assume the *khilāfah*, he chose to give priority to the greater good of Islam and the unity of the Muslims over his right to leadership. This noble position was the means to preserve the divine tradition and the integrity of the Islamic entity. In this sense, there is no significance to the *khilāfah* vis-à-vis the essential integrity of religion itself.

To be continued . . .

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[13] al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh, 2:326.
[14] Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, 3:205.
[15] al-Akhbār al-Mūfaqiyyāt, 583.

Islamic Consolidation and Solidarity

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Abstract:

Islam is a unified religion that gave rise to a singular civilization. Although there are different *madhāhib* which have formed within the matrix of Islam—either due to political, ideological or *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) reasons—the need for solidarity between Muslims today is of utmost importance. This article discusses some of the differences and commonalities between the *madhāhib*, and encourages Muslims to find common ground with each other. It also calls on the *'ulamā* of all schools of thought to conceptualize a religiously sanctioned (i.e., *shar'ī*) vehicle through which the leadership issue in the Muslim ummah can be resolved. In this regard, it commends the Islamic Revolution in Iran as well as organizations such as the *Majma' al-Taqrīb bayna al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah* for helping to pave the way towards a sustained unity.

Keywords: Islamic unity, Shia-Sunni relations, *Ibāḍī, Zaydī, madhāhib, fiqh, ḥadīth*, Islamic leadership, Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Introduction

There is no doubt in the mind of any objective observer within the Muslim ummah, during our time or that of our forefathers, that Muslims have settled into centuries of their own *madhāhib* or "schools of thought." These schools of thought, in many instances, have become akin to cultures, and these "cultures" have taken on the definition of "religion" and even of Islam itself. In some instances, the cross-cultural Islamic dynamic is normal, but in other instances it is non-existent. Even if we go back to the first centuries of Islam, we find that there was a sometimes vibrant and sometimes "self-centered" exchange of ideas from one Islamic persuasion to another.

We Muslims, it must be stated from the outset, belong to the same Islamic civilization and history that has come down to us throughout the centuries by way of our own particular interpretation of this history and civilization. We may say that Muslims, in the span of the last fourteen centuries, have had differences of opinion in three areas of *ijtihād*. The first

was, and perhaps still is, the political sphere of activities. In this defined area, our common history speaks of "Sunnis", "Shias", and "Khawārij". The second was the conceptual or philosophical differences that are found more in our history books than in our everyday lives. These ideas come under the historical titles of *Murji'ah, Qadariyyah* and *Mu'tazilah.* Whether for good or bad, no one nowadays is consciously living or behaving as if he belongs to any one of these historical and philosophical schools of thought.

And third, we have the *fiqhi* (jurisprudential) schools of thought. These are the scholarly opinions and judgments that developed early in Islamic history, particularly during the first two centuries after the demise of the Prophet (ṣ). Initially there were tens of these *fiqhi madhāhib*; however, today the survivors are generally limited to the following: the *Ḥanafīs,* the *Shāfi'īs,* the *Mālikīs,* the *Ḥanbalīs,* the *Ja'farīs, the Zaydīs* and the *Ibāḍīs.*

Our Islamic history in the past millennium shows a scant interest in intra-Islamic discussions and scholarly input when it comes to these historical developments within the larger Islamic reality. Recently, though, in the past century, there are two noteworthy attempts to bridge the differences among these schools of thought. The first one was Dār al-Taqrīb, which was established in Egypt and which brought within its fold many scholars who are well known within the major Islamic schools of thought. Among them were such scholars as Ayatullah Qūmī, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr, 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madanī, and many other prominent personalities. The effort of Dār al-Taqrīb in facilitating the meeting and written correspondances of these scholars continued for a good many years until about half a century ago when it came to a screeching halt.

More recently, in the developing outcome of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, we have now a strong, vibrant and continuous momentum to bridge the gaps among the Muslim peoples and their schools of thought. This is best represented by Majma' al-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah (the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought). I understand that for the past two decades, it has been a formidable contributor to a historical understanding and reconciliation of the broad scholarly works that have come to us in the packages of the "*madhāhib*".

When Islamic scholars meet one another to discuss sensitive issues with the hope of bringing Muslims of different schools of thought together, this does not mean that their differences will vanish; these scholars will, most certainly, continue to have varying opinions. But this needs to be acknowledged at the outset before we can begin to work with each other. We must remind ourselves that we share a variety of legitimate and authentic opin-

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ions, and we cannot let our prejudice or discrimination come in the way of this noble goal.

We have heard a statement of truth by Ayatullah Taskhīrī to this effect when he says that bringing the schools of thought closer to each other does not mean canceling out any one of them. Instead, it is to bring the adherents of these schools of thought closer to each other, to identify and find the common grounds that they share, and to help them assist each other in their mutual endeavours, so that together they can put into practice the many things they have in common.

In another reference to the same theme, the Mufti of Oman, Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khalīlī in commenting on the idea of bridging the Islamic divisions, says that our thoughts should be focused on those issues that consolidate the ummah since there are many common denominators between the Muslims. Among the common references that the ummah shares is the Book of Allah (*swt*), which is the first reference that pertains to the realm of ideas, *fiqh* and life-methodology. Another reference is the Prophet (*ṣ*) himself, as an authentic model worthy to be emulated. As for the differences of interpretation, extrapolation and other secondary issues, Shaykh al-Khalīlī views them as an opportunity for a calm and friendly discussion—free of recriminations and negative feelings.

Thus, we can say that in our time and age, there is a broad agreement on the highest levels of Islamic scholarship which welcomes a sincere approach of common understanding among all current Islamic schools of thought. This brings to mind the open and free discussion that took place in and around the Kaʿbah between two illustrative personalities in the early years of Islam – ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbbas and Nafiʿ ibn al-Azraq (the famous *Khārijī*). This critical discussion, with open minds and hearts among Muslims of differing legitimate opinions, may have been the impetus that led al-Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī to put together his book *al-Kāfiyah fī al-Jadal* (*The Contentment of Argumentation*). It may have also spurred Abū Isḥāq al-Shirāzī to write his book *al-Talkhīs fī al-Jadal* (*The Abridgment to Argumentation*).

As far back as over a thousand years ago, Islamic history records a sincere yet exacting exchange of opinions between a representative of *Ahl-Sunnah* by the name of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī and a representative of *Ahl al-Tashayyuʿ* by the name of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd. More recently, even though this may not have been a sustained intellectual effort, the well-known Islamic trailblazer, al-Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (Asadabādī), called for a well-thought out program to tie together the Islamic schools of thought. His famous student, al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh also favoured a

"*madhhabī* togetherness". The now defunct Islamic magazine *al-Manār* had an editorial policy that accommodated and printed articles from different Islamic schools of thought. Its editor was the well known Muḥammad Rāshid Riḍā, whose Qur'ānic *tafsīr* is known by the name *Tafsīr al-Manār*.

The Common Denominators among the Islamic Schools of Thought

All Muslims share the same fundamentals or foundations of this *dīn*. They believe in the oneness of Allah, the Exalted, and that His Divinity is not shared by anyone or anything. They believe in all the *rusul* or messengers of Allah (swt), and they believe that Islam is Allah's last religion.

All Muslims are of one mind that Muḥammad (ṣ) is Allah's last prophet and messenger. Their schools of thought harken back to Muḥammad and no one else. All Muslims believe that the Holy Qur'ān is their summons and citation on all affairs of life, existence and the Unknown. They share the same standard and depth of moral, social and political values and principles. At times, they may have a dissimilar understanding of some details, but the reference material is one and the same. They believe that Islam is the framework through which the individual and social lifestyles can be molded.

All Muslims face towards one *qiblah*. No *ṣalāh* is accepted towards any other *qiblah* as a matter of Islamic consensus. Although, there may be some very technical hair-splitting difference pertaining to the timing of the *ṣalāh*, the overall and general performance of the *ṣalāh* is similar and standardized. All Muslims perform their *ḥajj* and *'umrah* to the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. And finally, all Muslims fast the whole month of *Ramaḍān* from dawn to dusk.

Some Differences between the Islamic Schools of Thought:

With all this said and done, there appears to be an area of *ijtihādī* differences between what we refer to today as "the people of the *Sunnah*" and those who follow the *Ithna 'Asharī* school of thought.

What appears here is that the *Ahl al-Sunnah* have placed a historical and scholarly emphasis on the *ḥadīth* that was spoken or acted upon by Allah's dearest Prophet (ṣ). Out of this prophetic paradigm emerges a practical set of behavior that delineates a believing Muslim's pragmatic practice of Islam. This paradigm has been established throughout the course of our Islamic history and civilization. The *Zaydīs* and Ibāḍīs have a similar grasp of this origination, though they may not have the depth and range of it found

among the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. This may be due to some of the details that are peculiar to the early history of both the *Zaydīs* and the *Ibāḍīs*.

The *Ibāḍīs* are not in objection to the *Sunnah* as a reference; on the contrary, they are in full agreement with it. The intervening variable in their peculiar history was that the channels of communication of the *ḥadīth* within their school of thought was subjected to the brutal use of force by the Umayyads, which seriously hampered their ability of "history writing". The fierce use of force against them by the government went to the extent of labeling them as "heretics" or "heathens"—an accusation that almost placed them outside the fold of Islam!

The *Zaydī* school of thought also adopts the *ḥadīth* as the second reference after the Glorious Qur'ān. The distinguishing feature here is that the followers of the *Zaydī* school of thought, because of their heroic opposition to the Umayyad and Abbadis rulers, would rely only on a *ḥadīth* that is quoted or transmitted by the household of the Prophet (ṣ). The *Zaydīs* also had strict conditions for accepting and circulating a particular *ḥadīth* within a social and political atmosphere that turned against them because of the influence of the Umayyad dynasty which was unrelenting in its persecution of supporters of the Prophet's descendants.

Nonetheless, these schools of thought do have a common feature which places the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (ṣ) second only to the Qur'ān. This may explain to a certain extent why there are "joined prayers" in "mixed mosques" throughout Yemen, Oman and North Africa where all these schools of thought meet and commingle.

As we see it, the Imāmiyyah have a comprehensive and paradigmatic assembly of *fiqh*, theological doctrines and political discourses. At the pinnacle of this paradigm, and by divine decree, there stands the "infallible Imam." This peculiar *Ithna 'Asharī* definition of *'iṣmat* (infallibility) is parallel with the infallibility of the prophets as understood by the rest of the Muslims. The only legitimate ruler is this type of Imam—and there were only twelve of them from the household of the Prophet (ṣ).

This paradigm lay dormant in the course of over a thousand years until the advent of the Islamic Revolution under the capable and far-sighted leadership of Imam Khumaynī (r). The Islamic Revolution, which was a first of our time, ushered in the concept of *Wilāyat-e-Faqīh*. Thus, there is now a full-fledged Islamic state with an Islamic leadership that has taken on the responsibility of substituting or "standing in" for the absent Imam, whose name is Muḥammad the son of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260 H.). This Imam, in accordance with *Ithna 'Asharī* belief, is in *ghaybah* (hidden).

The *Ithna ʿAsharī* and *Zaydī* schools of thought both agree that the leadership of the Muslim society and government belongs to the descendants of the Prophet (ṣ). The details of this, though, are not the same between these two schools of thought. It appears that the majority of *Zaydīs* do not attribute the same concept of *ʿismat* to the Imams as do the *Ithna ʿAsharīs*. There also does not appear to be within the mainstream *Zaydī* school of thought a "divine decree" to have the Prophet's descendants assume the leadership of the ummah. Therefore, according to *Zaydī* beliefs, even though the Imams from the Prophet's descendants are the most qualified to lead the Muslims, nevertheless, if there are others who the Muslims in their consensual majority agree to as leaders, they may do so with a degree of credibility.

Thus, the *Zaydīs* have accepted the weight of a free and fair *shūrā* as a determining factor in deciding who the leader of the Muslims shall be even though, they state clearly and firmly, that the most qualified to lead the Muslims is one who meets the standards of leadership and is a descendant of the Prophet (ṣ).

The *Ahl al-Sunnah* who concede that the Islamic leader should be from the Quraysh, as a matter of principle, have not followed through on this criterion. We see, in the course of Islamic history, that rulers who were not from Quraysh assumed the leadership of the Islamic ummah with the acquiescence of *Ahl al-Sunnah* under the pretext that the *shūrā* determines who the ruler is!

The *Ibāḍīs* had no precondition for the Islamic leader except having gained the allegiance and loyalty of the Muslim public. On the basis of this type of *shūrā*—not a governmental orchestrated *shūrā*—the Muslims gain their legitimate leader. They did not have stipulations pertaining to lineage or family ties either.

It appears that the theoretical basis for selecting or electing the Islamic leader (whether in the form of the *Imam* or the *Khalīfah*) has been, in a sense, bypassed by the contemporary adherents of the different Islamic schools of thought. All schools of thought appear to have worked their way into a practical application of their overall "thesis" of who the correct and most qualified leader is.

Considering the reality of the global situation today, we believe that the Muslims, with their varying schools of thought, are in need of each other to formulate a compatible scholarly opinion and conceptualization of an institution that looks for the most-qualified Muslim leader. It is hoped that through the legal *sharʿī* channels, such an individual can become the occu-

pant of the highest office in the Islamic world—with all the humility and meekness that goes with it.

Some Obstacles on a Course of Islamic Reconciliation

As we said above, all Islamic persuasions and schools of thought agree to the fundamentals and bases of Islam. There are issues, of course, around which there is the practice of free thought permitted within the legitimate parameters of *ijtihād*. Sometimes, these extrapolations themselves are perceived as a barrier to Islamic solidarity and conformity. What has transpired in Islamic history is that a particular school of thought will only recognize its own personalities, narrators of ḥadīth and *fuqahā'* to the exclusion of all others. In this sense, Islamic history itself has more than one narrative and more than one analysis. This aspect of Islamic history is not to be seen in a negative light; it only becomes negative when a particularized version of history is considered as the only version, to the exclusion of all other sincere and time-honored renderings of the same history. The effects are more devastating when based on a particular reading of history, other Muslims are considered either "lesser-Muslims" or even, God forbid, non-Muslims!

The fault line within the Islamic ummah pertains to doctrines, politics, narration of the ḥadīth and *fiqh*. Obviously, most divergent intra-Islamic opinions can be traced to some political developments early on in Islamic history.

With the possible and arguable exception of the *Imāmī Ithana 'Asharīs*, the other three blocs of Muslims (i.e., the Sunnis, *Ibāḍīs* and *Zaydīs*) do not have scriptural texts naming particular individuals as being "God-appointed" leaders of the Muslims, after Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ). No one comes close to the Prophet (ṣ) in his sublime and unequaled character, particularly as it pertains to scriptural disclosure and law-giving. In the three Islamic blocs mentioned above, there is no explicit naming of the leader of the Muslims who will assume the "*imāmah*" in the absence of the popular will by divine feat. Popular participation via a full *shūrā* is understood to be part of the process. The freedom is a guaranteed Islamic freedom. Despite this fact, these three blocs of Muslims still have their differences of understanding and differences of interpretation pertaining to the events that transpired after the demise of our dearest Prophet (ṣ).

This pertains to the era known as *al-khilāfah al-rāshidah*. The details referred to here are known by all close observers and ardent students of that pivotal period in Islamic history. Generally speaking, the *Zaydīs* and *Ibāḍīs*

see nothing binding on them from that interpretive time. They do not hold those referred to as *al-ṣaḥābah* to have "any halos around their heads" so to speak, as is the case with the majority of the *Ahl al-Sunnah,* who postulate the eminence of the *ṣaḥābah,* especially those of them who became *khulafāʾ* or rulers. Even, within some Sunni discourses, the rank of virtue is a time and sequential rank which holds the first *khalīfah* to be the highest followed by the subsequent *khulafāʾ* in descending order: ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī (ʿa). Some, if not most, Sunnis consider the method in which these *khulafāʾ* assumed power to be legitimate and workable patterns to assume power. Out of this comes a set of political principles through which Islamic rulers are legitimized.

In further detail we may say that the *Zaydīs* consider Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) and his descendants from Fāṭimah (ʿa) to be more eligible and qualified as leaders of the Muslim ummah than those who assumed leadership positions after the Prophet (ṣ). Most of the *Zaydīs* do not vitiate the Islamic qualities and characters of Abu Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān as they assumed their leadership responsibilities the way they did. Hence, they were contractual and validated rulers even in the presence of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa)—who was more accredited and, to a greater extent, accorded/nominated by the Prophet (ṣ) to lead the Muslims. Moreover, in all the early historical developments that took place, the *Zaydīs* remain ardent supporters of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) and continued to affirm that the most qualified to lead the Muslims is he who is a descendant of Muḥammad (ṣ) through his daughter, Fāṭimah (ʿa).

The *Ibāḍīs* hold to the opinion that the majority of the *ṣaḥābah* were of an untainted character. However, they are strongly critical of some of them, due to the unfolding of early Islamic history. Most of this can be traced to the division that jolted the Muslims during the time of Imam ʿAlī (ʿa). The faults and scandals that came out of that era are attributed to some of these figures, who, in the *Ahl al-Sunnah* context, are generally considered as *ṣaḥābah.*

The *Ibāḍīs* believe that there are stages to redeem the injunctions or procedures of this *dīn* in its political applications, the most manifest of which is the phase of *ẓuhūr* (prominence). This is when Muslims have their own Islamic state on the basis of justice and equality. In this sense, the *Ibāḍīs* identify mostly with the rule of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Moreover, they submit to the legitimacy of a popular vote to select the Islamic senior head-of-state.

As we can see from the above, our common history can give rise to divergent opinions and evaluations of the political process. If we are not able to absorb and understand the dynamics pertinent to these thoughts and

evaluations, they have the potential of dividing us. In the "gap" of these potential misunderstandings, enemies may move in and stir sectarian strife or civil wars among the Muslims. Any political disagreement in our contemporary world affairs can draw in the cloudy details of an ill-defined distant history and ignite nationalist and clannish tendencies, starting many conflicts though not doing must to help end them.

Pertaining to issues of *fiqh* and *riwāyah* (ḥadīth narration), the *Ithna 'Asharī* Muslims assert the infallibility of twelve Imams, their unquestionable leadership over the Muslims and their authority of interpreting the *dīn* after the Prophet (ṣ). This systemic arrangement of conceptual beliefs gives the *Ithna 'Asharī* Shias what appears to be a degree of separateness from the rest of the Muslims. Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the implementation of the concept of *wilāyah al-faqīh*, the doctrines of this school of thought were generally unknown by the majority of those outside of it. It was after the Islamic Revolution in Iran that other Muslims began to take notice of this school of thought. In fact, even non-Muslims began to look more closely at this "sector" of Muslims. Cognizant of this fact, the Islamic leadership in Iran came to the decision that Muslims are in need of an intimate and more personal understanding of who they are. In this regard, the *Majma' al-Taqrīb* was established at an appropriate time to diffuse the potential trouble-making that is brewing in certain imperial and Zionist quarters against Islamic Iran and its Islamic leadership.

One of the main differences between the *Ithna 'Asharī* school of thought and that of the other three is in the inclusiveness of the *ḥadīth* literature, the second reference after the impeccable Qur'ān, where the *Ithna 'Asharīs* only accept *aḥādīth* from the *ma'ṣūm* Imam. Unfortunately, this difference has found its way to the minds of many trouble makers, who use it as a formula for tension, an outline for civil instability and a strategy for warefare.

Furthermore, the *Zaydīs* give particular credibility to the *ḥadīths* that are narrated by Imam Zayd ibn 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn on the authority of his father and grandfathers. This becomes the "backbone" of their school of thought in as far as the ḥadīth narration is concerned.

The Ibāḍīs consider *Musnad al-Rabi' ibn Ḥabīb al-Farāhidī* to be the most reliable book of ḥadīth. Al-Rabi' narrated his ḥadīth from the Prophet via Jābir ibn Zayd, one of the founders of the Ibāḍī school of thought.

The *Ahl al-Sunnah* consider the compilation of Imam al-Bukhārī to be one of the most authentic, if not the most authentic and reliable book of

the Prophet's ḥadīth. In this book of ḥadīth there are narrators who are disqualified by the other Islamic schools of thought.

As for the *fiqhi* issues, the *Ithna ʿAsharī* Shias refer to a scholarly class of *ʿulamā* as their certified and credentialed authoritative sources. Each *Ithna ʿAsharī* Shia is required to conscientiously choose a *mujtahid* to follow. In the end, an intra-Islamic network of *ʿulamā* is created, who are mutually supportive of their privileged but fiducial obligations.

The concept of *wilāyah al-faqīh*, in its dynamic application at the level of the state, has taken the *Ithna ʿAsharī* Shias to new heights in their acknowledgment of the Islamic leadership in Iran. Due to this fact, the *walī al-faqīh* in the Islamic State in Iran is ahead by leaps and bounds of all others in matters of decision-making and authoritative responsibilities.

As for the other schools of thought, at the moment, many remain at the behest of decisions made by obscure individuals or "underground committees" that find an outlet through the general global Islamic movement. Others are politically "attached" to some secular governments, even though they may not want to admit it. In general, the Islamic leadership among non-Shia Muslims does not have the full range of political independence as is the case with Islamic Iran.

All this put together gives us a picture and an impression of an Islamic populace that needs to work on a thorough and healthy understanding of what its collective and historical character is. We cannot permit ignorance to substitute knowledge nor can we continue to allow prejudice and bigotry to define our social relations. Moreover, we must not allow imperialist- and Zionist-imposed politics and policies to act on our almost two billion population bloc of this world.

Many common impressions that Muslims have of other Muslims are inaccurate, to put it mildly; others are just plain fabrications. Some misunderstandings, which may have a semi-valid basis within the interpretative ideology of a particular school of thought, can nevertheless become obstructions and hurdles within the House of Islam if they are not understood properly.

The time has arrived for us to open up and understand each other without preconceived notions and without presuppositions or biases. Most of our ideas about other Muslims come from "structural historically unfavorable judgments". The time to shed light on these dark corners of our common mind and psychology is now.

We hope and pray that the *Majmaʿ al-Taqrīb Bayn al-Maḏāhib al-Islamiyyah* will be able to diffuse the explosive ideas that are buried deep down inside our historical terrain. We also hope that they will be able to

provide Muslims everywhere with the aspiration and inspiration that will offer them the fertile grounds of Islamic brotherhood and human cooperation on the basis of the following verse:

وَٱعْتَصِمُواْ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْ

And hold on to the strong cord of Allah and be not divided . . .[1]

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[1] Qur'ān 3:103.

The Muslim World: An Unbiased Perspective

Adapted from Jürgen Tödenhöfer[1], "Ten Theses," in *Why do you kill, Zaid?*

Abstract:

The last two hundred years have seen Muslims at the receiving end of an oppressive form of colonialism. They have been misrepresented and often vilified in the popular media. The following adaptation of Jürgen Tödenhöfer's "Ten Theses," in his book *Why do you kill, Zaid?* is an attempt to portray the world from the viewpoint of a Muslim. In it, the author enumerates ten theses, or discussion points, with the hope of challenging some of the common assumptions regarding Muslims, such as the link between Islam and "terrorism". He concludes by calling Western governments to focus more on the art of statesmenship and not the art of war in divising their foreign policy. It is hoped that these ten theses will open a window onto another way of seeing the Muslim world.

Keywords: Muslim world, colonialism, Islam and the West, U.S.-Iran relations, Iraq war, terrorism, tolerance in Islam, U.S. foreign policy.

Thesis 1: The West is much more violent than the Muslim world. Millions of Arab civilians have been killed since colonialism began.

The great French historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville was a passionate champion of the freedom of the individual. . . . In his major work Democracy in America, published in 1835, Tocqueville made a remark that characterized the era: "If we reasoned from what passes in the world, we should almost say that the European is to the other races of mankind, what man is to the lower animals: he makes them subservient to his use, and when he cannot subdue, he destroys them." For the liberal thinker there was "consequently no reason to treat Muslim subjects as if they were equal to us." And that is precisely how the West has treated the Muslim world for the past two hundred years. . . . The strategy that the 19th-century colonial rulers adopted to break resistance to their "civilizing mission" was

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[1] Dr. Jürgen Todenhöfer has been an executive at a major European media group for more than 20 years. Prior to that, he was a member of the German parliament for 18 years and spokesman for the CDU/CSU on development and arms control. He has written two bestsellers about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

to "ruin, hunt, terrorize" (Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison). In Algeria entire tribes that had sought refuge in caves were "smoked out" ("enfumades"). . . . Napoleon III, nonetheless, saw the hand of God at work: "France is the mistress of Algeria, because that is what God wanted." The Algerians saw it differently. They had to pay a very high price for their freedom. In the war of independence from 1954 until 1962, 8,000 Algerian villages were destroyed with napalm bombs by the French air force. The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) also committed gruesome acts of terror, as Albert Camus rightly pointed out. But in terms of numbers, there is no comparison between those acts and the violent deeds committed by the colonialists. During their 130-year civilizing mission they killed well over two million Algerians, according to Algerian sources. French estimates say more than one million Algerians and 100,000 French nationals were killed. The Iraqis, colonized by Britain, did not fare much better. When they rose up against British oppression in 1920, Winston Churchill accused them of "ingratitude" and used chemical weapons against them - "with excellent moral effect," as he noted. . . . During the Kabyle rebellions in Morocco the Spaniards also used chemical weapons with horrible effect here too. The model for the treatment of the Arabs was the strategy adopted to wipe out the indigenous peoples of America. The mad ideas about racial and cultural superiority prevalent at the time knew no bounds. Gustave Le Bon, founder of mass psychology and opponent of the "superstition of equality," divided mankind into four classes: the native Australian and American peoples he termed "primitive races," "Negroes" as "inferior," Arabs and Chinese as "intermediate" and the Indo-Europeans as a "superior race." Since the Second World War as well, the West has often treated the Arabs as subhuman beings on a "level with the higher apes" (Jean-Paul Sartre). This is true of the wars against the colonial powers, interventions to secure supplies of raw materials, for the question of Palestine and for the sanctions against Iraq that were pushed through by the United States and Britain. According to UNICEF, these punitive measures, which the Vatican called "perverse," caused the deaths of more than 1.5 million civilians, including half a million children. . . . A study conducted by independent American and Iraqi physicians, and published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, estimates that more than 600,000 Iraqis had met with violent deaths by June 2006 as a result of the war and the chaos caused by occupation forces. It says 31 percent were killed by U.S.-led coalition forces, and 24 percent as a result of sectarian violence and suicide attacks. . . .

A study by the independent British research institute, ORB, in autumn 2007, estimates that more than one million Iraqis have been killed and

around the same number injured. It reports that in Baghdad almost one in two households has lost a family member. According to Human Rights Watch, Saddam Hussein was responsible for the death of 290,000 Iraqi civilians in the course of his 23-year rule.

Since fall 2007, the number of fatalities has declined in Iraq. But according to experts' conservative estimates, more than 6,000 Iraqi civilians are still dying each month in the chaos of the war. . . .

Over the past two hundred years, no Muslim state has ever attacked the West. The European superpowers and the United States have always been the aggressors and not those under attack. Since the beginning of the colonial era, millions of Arab civilians have been killed. The West is clearly at the top of the league when it comes to killing, by a ratio of more than ten to one. The current debate about the Muslim world's alleged propensity to violence is a mockery of historical facts. The West was and is much more violent than the Muslim world. The problem of our era is not the violence of Muslims but the violence of some Western countries.

To understand Muslim extremism, one has to try to see the world, at least for a moment, from the point of view of a Muslim. Our horizon is not the end of the world. A young Muslim, who follows the news on television, sees day after day how Muslim women, children and men are killed by Western weapons, Western allies and Western soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia and elsewhere.

It is cynical of great Western thinkers to furrow their brows and ponder the decline and fall of Arab civilization, which once was "militarily, economically and culturally far superior" (Hans Magnus Enzensberger). The West played a major part in making that happen. It plundered and ravaged the colonies and then withdrew. In 1830, when the colonization of Algeria began, that country had a literacy rate of 40 percent, higher than that of France or England. In 1962, when the French occupying forces pulled out, it was under 20 percent. Colonialism stole from the Arab world more than a century of development. Seventeen years after the French conquest of Algeria, Tocqueville noted with resignation: "The lights have been extinguished… We have made Muslim society much more miserable, disorganized, ignorant and barbaric."

Thesis 2: Western oppression supports the growth of Muslim extremism.

Western colonialism raged in almost all parts of the world. But in the oil-rich countries of the Mideast it never stopped. That sets this region

apart from other regions in the world, and makes it a breeding ground for terrorism.

Terrorism is not a Muslim problem but a global one. It has always existed and has been used by all kinds of movements. Alongside Arab terrorists who murdered Jewish settlers, there were also "Zionist terrorist organizations" such as Irgun, led by Menachem Begin, and the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, led by Itzhak Shamir, who described themselves as terrorists. They fought with terrorist tactics – also against civilians – against the British and the Arabs for a free Israel.

In the current debate on terrorism it is often said: "Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims." That is simply wrong. Until September 11, 2001, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka were indisputably considered the world's deadliest terrorist organization. They murdered thousands of innocent civilians. They professionalized and perfected suicide terrorism, and were copied down to the last detail by others around the world, especially in the Mideast. They continue to bomb and murder even today. They are Hindus, not Muslims. And they do not kill Westerners. That is why their attacks are not reported in depth. Of the 48 organizations classified as terrorist by the European Union in 2006, 36 have nothing to do with Islam. These "anti-imperialist," "anti-capitalist," "anti-Indian," or "anti-Singhalese" terrorist groups are responsible for the deaths of countless civilians in Latin America, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the West, they do not figure in public awareness because they do not kill people from our cultural sphere.

After the official end of colonial rule, the colonial powers were often replaced by financially and militarily dependent puppet regimes, pawns in the geopolitical game of Western superpowers.

Whoever did not play along were advised that a people only have a right to self-determination as long as it did not infringe Western interests. Freedom never meant freedom from us. One might call this "lex Mossadeq" in memory of the Iranian prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who was democratically elected in 1951 and deposed two years later by the CIA and the British.

Whoever fails to act in accordance with this law is ousted in a putsch or subjected to a concerted media campaign and branded a "rogue". Using the media to create "villains" is a specialty of Western foreign policy. As the example of Gaddafi shows, the title of 'rogue' can be revoked at any moment.

Even Saddam Hussein, a "partner" who was renamed a "rogue," might still be doing as he pleases, even today, had he remained a partner of the

United States. The massacre of Dujail, in which 148 people died and for which he was executed, occurred 26 years ago in 1982. At the time, Saddam was, for the United States, an important player in the Mideast and waged war with Western support against Khumaynī's Iran. Donald Rumsfeld visited Saddam in 1983, as special envoy of the U.S. president, even though he had been thoroughly informed about Dujail. Saddam was, after all, our anti-Islamist comrade-in-arms; he was supplied by Germany with components for chemical weapons, by France with fighter jets, and by the United States with satellite data on Iranian positions. In the Mideast, the West never showed any interest in human rights or democracy; it was and is fighting for oil.

Cynical dehumanization in the name of human rights, which the bloody images from Iraq, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries document daily, has left a deep and painful mark on the Muslims' cultural memory. Samuel Huntington was right on at least one point: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." How can the Muslim world believe in our values of human dignity and the rule of law and democracy if all it sees is the way we oppress, humiliate and exploit it? Is it really surprising that extremists gain more and more support? Or that some people eventually hit back when their families are again and again mowed down by our machinery of destruction? Nobody is born a terrorist.

Despite all this, the kindness and hospitality still shown to Western visitors in oriental countries is overwhelming. One can visit religious sites with no problem, not only in secular Syria, but also in theocratic Iran - churches, synagogues and mosques. Most Muslims feel more respect towards Judaism and Christianity than we do. . . .

The Muslim world is a far cry from the image depicted in the Western media. Western television broadcasters show a manufactured, distorted image of mobs raging against the West. In September 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center, many television stations showed Palestinian children rejoicing. But the footage had been staged. According to reports in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the children had been given sweets so that they would rejoice in front of the cameras. "Spontaneous" anti-Western demonstrations in the Arab world usually take place only when they are carefully organized and staged in cooperation with Western broadcasters. As soon as the cameras are turned off, the "TV demonstrators" are given a little *baksheesh* and are taken back home in the same trucks that brought them. In contrast to the West, xenophobia is unknown in the Muslim world. We

may be more economically and technologically advanced than these countries - but not in human terms. When it comes to kindness and love of one's neighbor, and a sense of family and hospitality, we could learn a lot from the Muslims.

This cordiality can, as in the case of Iraq, turn into raging anger when the West yet again scornfully tramples upon the rights of the Muslims. Jean-Paul Sartre described this self-destructive despair during the Algerians' war of liberation in 1961: "If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves. In order to liberate themselves they even massacre each other. The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy - and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries; . . . the torrent of violence sweeps away all barriers. . . . It is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and as before, we fail to realize that it is our own violence."

The "coalition of the willing" has taken from the Iraqis everything that might have given them the opportunity to be as "noble, helpful and good" as we like to perceive ourselves. It has destroyed all their state structures and has trampled upon their dignity and pride. It has systematically incited the Iraqis to turn on each other. It is so hypocritical of the West to then be "amazed" that the strategy really works and that the despair of the Iraqis sometimes turns into self-destruction. It is absurd to claim that "something like that could never happen here" – a claim often uttered with an undertone of racist disgust. Just consider how a power outage in New York in 1977 and a hurricane in New Orleans in 2005 were enough to trigger widespread looting, murder and mayhem. Homo homini lupus – "Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe" (Thomas Hobbes). This is true, not only of Muslims, but of Jews and Christians as well.

Thesis 3: Terrorists in Islamic disguise are murderers; but the same holds true for those disguised as Christians who wage wars of aggression in contravention of international law.

The attacks carried out since the mid-ninety's by Arab terrorists on Western facilities are in their view a response to the never-ending "organized robbery and murder" on the part of the West. The attacks, including those on the World Trade Center have killed more than 5,000 Western civilians. They are morally completely unacceptable. The end never justifies the means. That is why the attacks on the World Trade Center were condemned by all Muslim governments: by Syria and Iran and even by Hizbol-

lah and Hamas. In many Muslim countries, distraught people laid flowers in front of the U.S. embassy. Terrorists who kill innocent people are not freedom fighters, resistance fighters, holy warriors or martyrs. They are murderers.

But are not those who mastermind illegal wars of aggression also terrorists and murderers – even murderers of their own soldiers? If one talks about the 5,000 Westerners murdered by Al-Qaeda, must one not also talk about the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have been killed in George W. Bush's illegal war? Do not the legal yardsticks we apply to Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic also apply to Western heads of governments? Why do Western elites not even dare to ask whether George W. Bush and Tony Blair should be brought before an international criminal court because of a war in Iraq that was based on lies?

In the opinion of the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, "To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime: it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within it the accumulated evil of all crimes of war." The chief U.S. prosecutor Robert H. Jackson stated: "We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today constitutes the record on which history will judge us tomorrow."

"Wars of aggression are the terrorism of the rich," as Peter Ustinov put it. For an Iraqi child it makes no difference whether he is blown apart by an "Islamic" suicide bomber or a "Christian" bomb. For this child, George W. Bush and Tony Blair are just as much terrorists as Bin Laden is for us.

The high number of civilian victims of military operations is often excused with the argument that such "collateral damage" is not intentional. That is disingenuous – at least with respect to aerial attacks – because the death of civilians is almost always tacitly accepted in such cases. However, in advanced legal systems "tacit acceptance" means 'intent.' Aerial bombardment is, moreover, rarely effective. Special-forces operations on the ground can usually achieve much more. But then one would have to accept a greater number of fatalities within one's own ranks. And that could cost votes. So instead one drops cluster bombs and tacitly accepts the death of civilians. Dropping cluster bombs from the safety of a pilot's cockpit is the most cowardly form of terrorism on the part of the powerful. The myth of the honorable war is mankind's greatest lie. "Dulce bellum inexpertis" – War is sweet to those who have not experienced it (Erasmus of Rotterdam).

Armed resistance to wars and occupation that are illegal under international law is nonetheless only legitimate if it is conducted in accordance with the humanitarian law that applies in armed conflicts. Suicide attacks

against civilians who have different beliefs, such as we see every day in Iraq and elsewhere, are acts of terrorism. They have nothing to do with legitimate resistance. The most spectacular attacks on civilians in Iraq are, however, for the most part directed from outside the country. According to a statement issued on July 11, 2007, by the spokesman for the multi-national forces in Iraq, General Kevin Bergner, between 80 and 90 percent of the suicide bombers come from abroad.

One must clearly distinguish between this almost entirely foreign terrorism directed against civilians, and the legitimate multi-confessional Iraqi resistance to foreign occupation. Nobody can take away from the Iraqis' their right to resist. It is a timeless inviolable right of all peoples. The great majority of the Iraqi people support the resistance movement, which explicitly rejects attacks on civilians. The resistance not only involves Sunni and Shia Muslims, but Christians as well. The number of Christian resistance fighters in Iraq is greater than the number of Al-Qaeda fighters. Women also fight in the multi-confessional Iraqi resistance. Is that really surprising? What would we do if there were enemy tanks on our streets? Are only those resistance fighters who are on our side "freedom fighters" and the rest "terrorists"? . . .

Of course, non-violent resistance in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, would be preferable to violent resistance, even when it is legitimate. In the religious war between the city states of Mecca and Medina, Muhammad's most fascinating victory came when, to the amazement of his enemies in Mecca, he and his followers gathered, unarmed, outside the gates of Mecca and demanded access to the holy sites. Passive resistance born of the power of faith would also make the Iraqi resistance more credible. But for centuries have we not shown the world that only brute force guarantees success?

Thesis 4: Muslims were and are at least as tolerant as Jews and Christians. They have made a major contribution to Western civilization.

It was not Muslims who invented "holy war", joined Crusades under the rallying cry "Deus lo vult" – God wills it (Urban II) and in the process massacred more than four million Muslims and Jews. It was not Muslims who waded "ankle-deep in blood" in Jerusalem before they began "rejoicing and weeping from excess of happiness … came to worship and give thanks at the sepulcher of our savior Jesus," as a contemporary reported. Islam never associates the word "holy" with war. Jihad means "exertion, a struggle on the pathways of God" (Hans Küng), an effort that can involve defensive

war. Nowhere in the Qur'ān does jihad mean "holy war." Wars are never "holy", only peace is holy. "Holy war" is unfortunately a concept from the Old Testament (see Jeremiah 51:27).

Nor was it Muslims who massacred up to 50 million people in the name of colonizing Africa and Asia. It was not Muslims who instigated the First and Second World Wars, in which almost 70 million people perished. And it was not Muslims, but we Germans, who ignominiously murdered six million Jews – fellow citizens, friends and neighbors – in an industrially organized breach of civilization. No other culture has been more violent and bloody over the past centuries as Western civilization. When have so-called "Christian" politicians ever honored Christianity, this wonderful religion of love?

Nobody can deny that the territorial expansion of the Muslim dynasties between the 7th and the 17th centuries – like that of the European powers over the same period – was conducted mainly with the sword. On the Muslim side as well, there were inexcusable massacres. Muslim conquerors did not, however, as a rule, attempt to force Christians or Jews to accept Islam, expel them, or exterminate them. When Saladin won back Jerusalem after a hard-fought battle in 1187, he made a point of not exacting revenge and let the Christians go free in exchange for a ransom. He waived the ransom for poor Christians. Tolerance towards Christians and Jews was the law and the pride of Muslim civilization. Under Muslim rule entire peoples remained Christian or Jewish, while the "Christian" Inquisition burned those who held different beliefs at the stake.

When the Muslim general, Tariq ibn Ziyad, landed on the Iberian peninsula in 711, a period of cultural and scientific flowering began, which was to last for more than seven centuries and contribute enormously to Western civilization. In the most modern state in Europe the coexistence of Muslims, Jews and Christians proved to be an unparalleled success. The Jews fared much better under Muslim rule than under "Christian" hegemony. It was only when the "Christian" King Ferdinand of Aragon completed the Reconquista in 1492 by taking Granada, the last Muslim bastion in Spain that the merciless expulsion of the Jews began. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were forced to leave the country. For centuries, the Jews had been respected, held high office, and lived together in harmony with their Muslim contemporaries. Most fled to Muslim countries around the Mediterranean. The coexistence of Christians, Jews and Muslims in Muslim countries only became troubled with the advent of colonialism and nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Armenian tragedy in Turkey was a result of nationalist, not religious intolerance.

Muslims in the enlightened Andalusian era not only salvaged for us the sunken treasures of Greek and Roman culture and philosophy, they also created new sciences. They pioneered experimental optics, invented the compass, discovered the paths of the planets and crucial elements of modern medicine and pharmacy. Even if we do not want to believe it: We live in a culture that was formed by Judaism, Christianity AND Islam.

Thesis 5: Love of God and love of one's neighbor are the central commandments, not only in the Bible, but also in the Qur'ān.

A comparison of the texts shows that the Qur'ān is at least as tolerant as the Old and New Testaments. God and his prophets do, to be sure, sometimes express themselves in very martial tones in all three scriptures. In the Old Testament Book of Numbers 31:7,15,17, it is written: "They did battle against Midian, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and killed every male. … Moses said to them, 'Have you allowed all the women to live? … Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him'."

In the New Testament, Jesus is quoted in Matthew 10:34 as having said: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." In his Table Talk, the powerfully eloquent Protestant Martin Luther said: "One may give short shrift to heretics. While they perish at the stake, the faithful should destroy the evil by the root and bathe their hands in the blood of the bishops and the pope."

Surah 4:89 of the Qur'ān is no less violent: "They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do . . . Take . . . not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of God (from what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them."

Extremists and preachers of hate in the East and West almost always ignore the historical context of these passages. Moses, Jesus and Muhammad were not born in a historical vacuum but into a belligerent world. At first glance, the Old Testament, especially in its historical passages, might seem to be the bloodiest of the three holy books – much bloodier than the Qur'ān. But anybody who has studied the Old Testament knows that its central commandment – apart from the commandment to love God and justice – is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). For Christians too, love of one's neighbor and justice are the most important commandments after the love of God (Matthew 5:6, 5:10).

The Qur'ān tells Muslims to: "Do good … to neighbors who are near, or neighbors who are strangers" (Surah 4:36). . . . The Qur'ān calls for "more

humanity and more justice" (Hans Küng). The main problem with the Western debate about the Qur'ān is that everybody talks about it but hardly anybody has read it. The bellicose passages in the Qur'ān have to do with "the religious wars of the period between Mecca and Medina and therefore only (have to do with) the people of Mecca and Medina of the period," as the Egyptian minister of religious affairs, Mahmoud Zakzouk, has correctly pointed out.

In Surah 29:46 it is written: "Our God and your God is one," even though God is called Jehovah in Hebrew and Allah in Arabic – by Arab Christians as well. Is it not outrageous blasphemy when Jews, Christians or Muslims misuse the Bible and the Qur'ān as a weapon, in order to hammer home their particular view of this one God?

Terrorism is never religious. To be a terrorist is to adopt the methods of the devil; no terrorist may invoke God. There is no "Islamic" terrorism, just as the terrorism of the IRA in Northern Ireland was never "Christian" or "Catholic." There is merely terrorism that bears an Islamic mask, and it does not lead to paradise, but to hell, as do wars of aggression that bear a Christian or democratic mask. The claim that violence is, above all, a religious problem is an atheist myth. People committed murder before religion existed and have continued to do so ever since. The mass murder of the National Socialists and of the Soviet and Chinese Communists are the sad proof that man is the cruelest creature – with and without religion. . . .

Thesis 6: Western policies towards the Muslim world suffer from a shocking ignorance of even the simplest facts.

One of the favorite sayings of bar-room strategists is: "Whoever demands the right to hear the call of the muezzin in our cities should also demand the right to hear the sound of church bells in Tehran." The reality, however, is that in Tehran the bells ring in 34 churches and that Christian children receive instruction in their own religion. There are seven synagogues in Tehran, and about 4,000 Jewish children go to Jewish schools. There are six kosher butchers, two kosher restaurants and a Jewish hospital, to which the notorious troublemaker, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, recently donated some money.

The 25,000 Jews have a constitutional right to a representative in parliament, as do the Christians. In 1979, shortly after the revolution, Ayatollah Khumaynī even issued a fatwa decreeing that Jews were to be protected. His words are painted on the walls of many Iranian synagogues: "We re-

spect religious minorities. They are part of our people. Islam does not sanction their oppression."

Relations between Jews and Persians have been good since ancient times. It was the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, who in 538 B.C. freed the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. The Bible calls him a "shepherd loved and anointed by God." It is true that, as protected minorities, Jews and Christians in Iran do not enjoy the same political rights and duties as do Muslims. But do we really grant the Muslims the same rights as Christians and Jews in their everyday lives in Europe? Does Israel really grant its Arab fellow-citizens the same rights in daily life as its Jewish citizens?

Ahmadinejad has in fact made vicious "anti-Zionist", anti-Israeli statements. However, his aggressive stance . . . is not to be equated with hatred of the Jews or anti-Semitism. Orthodox Jews, such as the Hasidic Satmar community, also reject an Israeli state "before the advent of the Messiah" and thus also represent an "anti-Zionist" position.

In Iran and other Muslim states, there has never been real anti-Semitism or persecution of the Jews by the state, as was the case in Europe. During the Nazi era many European Jews fled to freedom via Iran. The Jews in Iran are respected citizens. As Ciamak Morsathegh, the Jewish director of the Jewish hospital in Tehran, put it: "Anti-Semitism is not an Islamic phenomenon, but a European phenomenon." . . .

Western ignorance of the Muslim world is also evident in much more banal issues than the Iran conflict – for example, in the view, widely held in Europe, that the Muslim headscarf amounts to a battle cry or is a "symbol of the oppression of women." On this issue, the United States is much more tolerant. The U.S. Department of Justice has stated that the intolerance evident in banning headscarves "is un-American, and is morally despicable."

The German weekly Die Zeit jokingly commented on the crusade to free Europe of the headscarf: "If you ask five Muslim women why they wear a headscarf, you will get five different answers: One covers her head for God; another because the scarf goes well with her fashionable H&M clothes; the third will reveal herself to be an ardent feminist; the fourth cites traditions in her village; while the fifth is defying her ultra-secular mother, who has forbidden her to wear a headscarf." Of course, forcing anyone to wear a headscarf is unacceptable. But is not forcing anyone to take it off just as unacceptable?

The debates about forced marriage, female circumcision, or honor killing are also conducted with a shocking degree of ignorance. There is nothing in the Qur'ān or the Hadith of Muhammad about these completely

unacceptable misogynist practices. They derive from a pre-Islamic patriarchal and heathen era. Some of these practices are several thousand years old – the gruesome "pharaonic" circumcision of women, for example. This brutal mutilation is not only practised in Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Sudan, but also in predominantly Christian countries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya. The victims are Muslims, Christians, Jewish Falashas, as well as members of other religions. So-called honor killings unfortunately also occur among Christians – for example, in such Christian countries as Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela. Most Muslim governments rightly take legal measures to counter these deplorable pre-Islamic and un-Islamic customs and crimes.

In some Muslim countries, the advancement of women has gone much further, in certain respects, than in the West. In Egypt, 30 percent of all professors are women; in Germany the figure is only 10 percent. In Iran, well over 60 percent of students are women, which has prompted some arch-conservatives to reflect on introducing a quota for men. There is also a longer tradition of female heads of government in Muslim countries than in the West. . . .

Nonetheless, a lot still needs to be done if women are to attain full and equal rights in all Muslim countries. . . . However, that is not a problem with Islam. It is a political problem and one that has to do with antiquated patriarchal social structures. The fact that shelters for battered women are bursting at the seams in the West shows that here too violence against women is a grievous social problem that has not yet been resolved. . . .

Whoever wants to see an end to hatred and intolerance should, above all, overcome his own ignorance. Everybody has the right to his own opinions, but definitely not to his own facts. What is to prevent us from traveling to Syria or Iran to form our own opinions on that alien and purportedly so dangerous world? The streets of Damascus and Tehran are much safer than the streets of New York or Detroit. According to United Nations statistics, in 2006, the homicide rate in the United States was 5.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. In Iran the rate was 2.93 and in Syria 1.4. Most Muslim countries are safer than the United States, even safer than Switzerland, where the rate is 2.94 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Why don't we start intercultural dialogue in our own personal environment? Why not expand student exchange programs between Muslim and Christian countries – or even with Israel? Why not get to know some works of wonderful Arabic literature or read the famous Ring Parable in Nathan the Wise by the great German writer of the Enlightenment era, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing? A father (God) bequeathes to each of the three sons he

loves equally (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) an identical ring. One ring is the original; it has the ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and mankind. The other two are replicas. The brothers call on a judge to establish which of them has the original. The judge, with the wisdom of Solomon, explains that the bearer of the authentic ring is he who earns the love of his fellow men.

For German chancellor Angela Merkel, the most beautiful passage in the play is when the Muslim, Saladin, calls out to the Jew, Nathan, "be my friend!" Could we not all learn from this ancient Sephardic Jewish parable and its dream of a peaceful competition among the religions?

Thesis 7: The West must treat the Muslim world just as fairly as it treats Israel. Muslims are worth as much as Jews and Christians.

With a mixture of self-righteousness, ignorance and hatred, many people in the West think Islam is a bloodthirsty religion and that Muslims are potential terrorists who are hostile towards democracy, women, Jews and Christians. The friend and spiritual advisor of U.S. president George W. Bush, Frank Graham, has called Islam "a very evil and wicked religion." Bill O'Reilly, TV idol of American conservatives, has said: "We cannot intervene in the Muslim world ever again. What we can do is bomb the living daylights out of them." The American television commentator, Ann Coulter thinks: "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity." She also says: "Perhaps we could put aside our national, ongoing post-9/11 Muslim butt-kissing contest and get on with the business at hand: Bombing Syria back to the Stone Age and then permanently disarming Iran." The list of such statements could be extended indefinitely.

Just imagine for a moment that Graham, O'Reilly or Coulter had said "Judaism" instead of "Islam" and Israel" instead of "Muslim countries". There would have been a storm of protest, and quite rightly so. Why may one say fascistic things about Muslims and their religion, while any such comments about Christians or Jews would be rejected as entirely unacceptable, and rightly so? We must end this demonization of Islam and Muslims. It is not only shameful, it also harms our interests.

The deepening divide between Orient and Occident also endangers the security of Israel. The strongest long-term guarantee of the survival of Israel and its five million Jews is not the enmity, but the friendship of its 300 million immediate and more distant Arab neighbors. To attain this, the West, but also Israel, must make a fair contribution.

The Jewish people did not attain its moral stature because of its military victories or because of the impressive number of its talented members. It attained its moral uniqueness through its piety, wisdom, humanism and creativity, as well as through its long, brave and often cunning struggle for justice and against oppression. It is understandable that after the Holocaust, Israel has sought to ensure its military strength – and to defend its legitimate interests with great vigor, even severity. But severity without justice is a strategy that is doomed to failure. If all the productive country of Israel does is destroy, it will destroy itself as well. Israel – and the entire Western world – must invest at least as much in justice as in weapons. The treatment of the Palestinians is not compatible with the moral stature and uniqueness of the Jewish people. This is the only conclusion one may come to, especially as an admirer of Jewish culture.

The Palestinians must also change their policies. The West is right to demand that they renounce violence against Israel. But should it not also demand that Israel renounce violence against the Palestinians? According to the Israeli human-rights organization B'Tselem, in 2007, thirteen Israelis were killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while 384 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces.

Reconciliation between Jews and Arabs is just as possible as the miraculous reconciliation between the Germans and the French proved to be. Jews and Arabs have more in common in religious, cultural and historical terms than most people realize.

As Israeli president Shimon Peres put it, they "have the same parents, Abraham and Moses." For centuries both Jews and Arabs were persecuted - and not only during the Crusades and the Reconquista. The Vichy government in France, for example, applied the same racist discriminatory laws to the Jews that had been "successfully" tested on the Algerians (Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison). . . .

The challenge of our era is to help heal the wounds in the Mideast - by means of security guarantees for Israel to which Europe must provide a robust military contribution, but also through helping to establish a viable Palestinian state. We must build bridges, not walls.

A model Palestinian state, that is backed by the West and acknowledges Israel's right to exist within just borders, and that opposes all forms of terrorism really would mark a new start for the Mideast – and for the relationship between the Western world and the Muslim world. We cannot continue on our current path. The "wars on terror" against the Muslim countries Afghanistan and Iraq have already cost $700 billion, which is more than the Vietnam War cost. The United States spends more than $100 bil-

lion on the war in Iraq each year, but less than $5 billion for economic reconstruction there. In light of these figures, can one seriously ask what a successful alternative to the current "anti-terror" policies might look like? We have to turn the ratio around. We have to treat the Muslim world just as fairly and as generously as we – quite rightly – treat Israel. We must ultimately deprive international terrorism of any arguments in its defense.

Thesis 8: The Muslims must champion a tolerant Islam, as did their prophet Muhammad. They must strip terrorism of its religious mask.

Muhammad fought passionately for social change. He stood up for the poor and the weak and – to the annoyance of many of his male followers – for a massive improvement in the rights of women, who in pre-Islamic times in almost all cultures, enjoyed virtually no rights at all. Men who oppress women may not claim to have the backing of Muhammad or the Qur'ān.

Muhammad was – like our Jewish forefathers Abraham, Moses and King Solomon, who according to the Bible had a thousand wives and concubines – married to several women, one of whom was Jewish and another Christian. They both remained true to their religion. Muhammad warned his followers: "Whoever wrongs a Jew or a Christian, will have to face me on the Day of Judgment." Muhammad was neither a fanatic nor an extremist. He wanted to tell the polytheist Arabs of his day about the God of the Jews and the Christians – in authentic, pure form. The Qur'ān is, in part, a wonderful re-telling of the central messages of the Bible: "And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy: And this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue" (Surah 46:12). For Muslims, the Qur'ān is the "Newest Testament."

After the capitulation of Mecca in 628, Muhammad entered the Ka'bah and smashed all the pagan idols – just as Jesus had cleansed the Temple – but out of respect he spared the statue of Jesus and his mother, Mary. Both were, for him, pure and inviolable. Muhammad repeatedly proclaimed that Jesus would rise again before the Last Judgment: "How happy you will be when the son of Mary descends to you." Jesus and Mary are described in the Qur'ān with great love as "signs for all peoples" (Surah 21:91). The Qur'ān also treats the great Jewish prophets, especially Moses, as prophets. "A Muslim who does not believe in Muhammad's precursors Moses and Jesus is not a Muslim" (Mahmoud Zakzouk).

Today's terrorism is an absurd distortion of Muhammad's teachings. It is a crime against Islam. Islam means submission to God and peace. The

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Muslim world may not permit its great and proud religion, with its ethos of humanity and justice, to be sullied by raging hate-filled terrorists. Nobody has caused greater damage to the standing of Islam in the course of its history, which spans almost fourteen centuries, than terrorists pretending to be Muslims. The Muslim world must rip the religious mask from the face of the terrorists. It must smash the idols of terrorism, just as Muhammad smashed the idols of the pre-Islamic era.

Thesis 9: Nothing fosters terrorism more than the West's "war on terror". Muslim countries must resolve their problems with radical Islamism themselves.

We must also unmask the West's warriors of aggression. Wars of aggression are not only the most immoral but also the least intelligent way to combat terrorism. Terrorism in the guise of Islam is an ideology; ideologies cannot be shot down. One has to undermine its foundation and prove it wrong. . . .

Al-Qaeda's attack on New York and Washington was not just an act of revenge but also an attempt to regain the high ground. Through an act of such diabolical boldness and the ensuing media spectacle, the radical Islamists wanted to win back the sympathy of the masses. They wanted to provoke the United States into overreacting, which would in turn give radical Islamism a new impetus. The strategy worked perfectly. The countless bombs that rained down on the heads of Afghan civilians, who had already tired of the Taliban, revived prostrate radical Islamism and helped it back on its feet. The Afghans certainly wanted to be rid of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda – both groups that had been created by the secret services of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan – but they did not see why thousands of Afghan civilians had to be bombed to death to achieve that goal.

None of the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center were from Afghanistan or Iraq. They came from Germany, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. More intelligent methods could have been adopted in order to neutralize their Saudi Arabian ideological leader, Osama Bin Laden, at his retreat in the mountains of the Hindu Kush, than bombing and occupying Kabul.

So the radical Islamists once again had reason to issue a worldwide call-to-arms against the foreign invaders and against their own authoritarian pro-Western governments – just as they had done in 1979 when the Soviets marched in. . . .

The West does not have the right to take military action all over the world against radical Islamist movements – or against leftwing radical or

rightwing radical organizations. It does not have the right to turn the world into a bloody and chaotic battlefield in order to impose its vision of a world order. Western troops have no business fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia. Muslim countries must solve their problems with radical Islamism by themselves. Even where radical Islamism degenerates into terrorism, it is primarily the task of national forces to combat it. Only in extreme and exceptional cases, and with the non-partisan of the United Nations Security Council, should international task forces provide reinforcement.

The damage such interventions cause is almost always greater than the benefit, even when the motives are honest and humanitarian. It is not enough to *want* to do good, rather, one has to actually *do* good. The war on terrorism will not be won by military means – either in the Hindu Kush or in Baghdad. It will be won in the hearts and minds of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims, who live in the East and the West, the North and the South, and who are observing the politics of the West very closely. With every Muslim child killed by a Western bomb, terrorism grows. With each day that passes, we are sinking deeper into the morass of our own policies.

It is above all aerial warfare that has failed miserably as a means of fighting terrorism. Despite continuous aerial bombardment, Bin Laden managed to escape from Tora Bora because there were more journalists than American soldiers surrounding the cave complex where he was believed to be hiding. At about the same time, the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, succeeded in breaking through the thin ranks of U.S forces on a motorbike. Tora Bora is a grotesque symbol of the folly of the anti-terror crusade. Not even Cervantes, the creator of Don Quixote, could have dreamed up a more bizarre slapstick finale.

Thesis 10: What is needed now is the art of statesmanship, not the art of war – in the Iran conflict, the Iraq conflict and the Palestine conflict.

The almost childish refusal of the American president to talk directly to politicians he does not like – a position he maintained for years – such as Arafat, Assad, Saddam or Ahmadinejad, along with the decision – taken after "consultations with God" – to develop strategies to bomb them out of office, are two of the most absurd and wrong-headed decisions of our time. "A statesman who seeks to promote peace must talk to the statesman in the opposing camp" (Helmut Schmidt, former German chancellor). It was only possible to resolve the East-West conflict of the post-war years because

Ronald Reagan never felt squeamish about meeting with the rulers of what he termed the "evil empire."

It is simply not true that in the Iran conflict there is, apart from the strategy of imposing ever tougher sanctions, only the "catastrophic alternative" of an "Iranian bomb or bombing Iran" (Nicolas Sarkozy). The real alternative to the ostracism and demonization of a great nation such as Iran is its reintegration into the community of nations – with all the same rights and obligations as any other member. The main reason Iran is a problem for the West is that by marginalizing it and severing ties – in order to punish it for deposing the pro-Western Shah and his regime – the West has forfeited any influence it might have had on political decision-making processes within Iran. This development is not irreversible. There is a wise saying: "If you cannot beat your enemy, embrace him." . . .

The complex problems facing the Mideast can only be solved by political means. The best way to tackle them would be with a long-term conference for the whole region modeled on the OSCE's forerunner, the CSCE. Besides the UN Security Council, all the major players in the region should be represented – including Syria, Iran, the democratically elected representatives of Palestine, and the leadership of the legitimate Iraqi resistance. A solution to the Iraq conflict will only be found if the United States negotiates – as it did in the Vietnam War – with the leaders of the resistance; though, of course, not with Al-Qaeda. The leaders of the nationalist, Baathist and moderate Islamist resistance are almost all prepared to take part in such talks.

Just as in the East-West conflict of the 1980s, comprehensively tough, but fair, negotiations now present a real alternative to irresponsible wars and equally irresponsible passivity. All parties would benefit from such an approach, as has proven to be the case with the OSCE process. After two years of difficult negotiations, it brought freedom, human rights, democracy and increasing prosperity to Eastern Europe. The CSCE process brought Europe as a whole stability, freedom and disarmament. "Mortal enemies became friends - without a single shot being fired" (Hans-Dietrich Genscher). That should be the goal of a "Mideast CSCE". Perhaps one day, a common economic area or even more will emerge in the region. Who would have thought 60 years ago that there could ever be a united Europe? Politics requires vision, and that holds true for the Mideast as well.

In view of the massive military superiority of the United States, how one can compare such a policy of engagement to the cowardly policy of appeasement before the Second World War, remains a neocon secret. It would not be appeasement if the current U.S leadership stopped inventing more

and more horror stories about Muslim countries, or if it stopped bombing a path to the natural resources it wants, or if it stopped destroying the great values for which so many people once loved America and would love to love America again.

Which Muslim country could hope to attack either the West or Israel with even a remote prospect of success, given the overwhelming nuclear and conventional second-strike capability of the United States and of Israel. Even if Iran had nuclear weapons – and that would certainly not be a desirable state of affairs – the basics of nuclear strategy would still apply: Whoever shoots first, dies second. Whoever attacks the United States or Israel with a nuclear bomb, might as well blow himself up straightaway. In terms of numbers, the United States has the nuclear weaponry to kill 20 billion people. That means it could burn to a cinder all 70 million Iranians three hundred times over. Iran knows that – even its president knows that. His defense budget is just one hundredth of that of the United States. Unlike the major Western powers, Iran has not attacked another country for 150 years, though it has been attacked several times – also with the help of the West. There are 400,000 Iranians who were severely wounded or injured in the war with Iraq, among them 50,000 victims of chemical weapons. We are partly responsible for their suffering.

The Iran problem can be solved. The U.S. leadership must, at long last, change its ways and sit down at the negotiating table with the Iranian leadership – for top-level bilateral talks, or talks within the framework of a Mideast CSCE. It must offer Iran substantive security guarantees – as it did in the case of North Korea and, ultimately, Libya as well – in exchange for substantial concessions on its nuclear program and a verifiable commitment not to meddle in any way in the internal affairs of Iraq.

It is not just Iran's purported nuclear designs but also the very real nuclear weapons of today's nuclear powers that should be relegated to the junkyard of history. All nuclear weapons, including those of the United States, are – as the political hawk Ronald Reagan stated way back in 1986 – "totally irrational, totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilization." In 2007, even Henry Kissinger voiced support for such a "bold vision of a nuclear-free world." The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty calls in unequivocal terms for complete nuclear disarmament. The current nuclear powers are, therefore, all in permanent breach of the treaty.

Appeasement does not represent the greatest danger of our time; it is the patriotic Western armchair strategists who cling obstinately to their narrow-minded view of the world and to their furtive racism, and who are letting

the world slide into the same kind of foolhardy cycle of violence and counter-violence that led to the First World War.

Statesmanship instead of warfare; vigilant, patient and tenacious negotiations – that is the appropriate strategy towards the Muslim world, as it was in the East-West conflict. In a just world order, terrorism will find no sustenance and will fail to thrive. In a nutshell, we must demonstrate both severity and justice. Severity with respect to terrorism, and justice toward the Muslim world.

The objective must be a world order that all states can accept as just; a world in which there is no longer discrimination against Muslims in the West and against Jews and Christians in the Muslim world; a world that no longer conducts mutual demonization of religions and cultures; a world order which decommissions the West's weapons of mass destruction and shuts down its lie machines; a world in which the U.S. is again a symbol of peace and freedom, rather than of war and repression; and finally, a world in which everyone sees the log in his own eye and not only the speck in the eye of his neighbor.

Some Thoughts on the Road to Islamic Solidarity

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Abstract:

Having diagnosed the condition of the Islamic world as one suffering from political divisions, economic disparities, cultural parochialism and sectarianism, the author calls for a return to the Islamic concept of *ta'aruf*—i.e., the mutual familiarity and acceptance of all Muslims within the ummah. Four broad areas to implement *ta'aruf* are explored including education, travel, the *ḥajj* and language. The article concludes with some political and economic recommendations to pave the way for Islamic solidarity.

Keywords: Islamic solidarity, *ta'aruf*, Islamic education, *ḥajj*, Arabic language, Sunni-Shia relations.

Introduction

The first step towards unity is in the diagnosis of the general Islamic condition in the world today. Unfortunately, the diagnosis does not look good. The Islamic world in our time and generation is a world of political divisions, economic disparities, cultural misunderstandings and sectarian schisms. Any attempt to consolidate the Islamic peoples of the world will be futile if these facts are ignored. Therefore, from the outset, we must acknowledge that we, the Muslims from the lands of the Orient to the lands of the Occident are divided, dispersed and segregated, and this is a fact beyond question or apology.

The Islamic world has imposed on itself a network of over sixty nation states. In the past century or so, this meshwork of nation-states has only worked to alienate Muslim peoples from each other. In this regard, the passive acceptance of these nation-states is a main contributor to the overall condition of division among Muslim peoples and societies. The Islamic world also finds itself suffering from a common human problem that relates to class stratification. Within this serious social bifurcation the affluent upper classes in Islamic societies are out of touch with the impoverished lower classes. This contributes to an internal self-inflicted malaise only to feed the centrifugal divisions that tear apart any ordinary human

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society. In addition, the Islamic world is sliced along cultural lines. A particular culture in some regions of Asia or Africa can become so dominant that it assimilates Islam into its own limited paradigm, thereby substituting the cross-cultural tenets of Islam with its own self-centered cultural norms and priorities. In this way, a particular culture more or less becomes "Islam", in the eyes of its own people and constituents, or at least indistinguishable from it. And finally, but not exhaustively, sectarianism is a crucial element of contemporary Islamic disunity. Although Muslims make up approximately two billion of the world's population, this number diminishes when they are labeled "Sunni" or "Shia", and even more so, when the many schools of thought or sub-schools are considered. The same is the case even at the local level when a regional "sheikh" or an "imam" or some "scholar" of sorts assumes the mantle guide, and instead of contributing to an Islamic feeling of integration and consolidation with the larger assembly, congregation or the ummah, embarks on a course of adding yet another splinter to the general adverse divisive state of affairs that the Muslims already find themselves in.

The above political, economic, cultural, and sectarian derelictions have rendered the two billion Muslims in the world consumers of the many divisive strategies and commodities that are presented to them. In the nature of things, this cannot go on for much longer. The past century, to be sure, has visited Muslim peoples with many a military invasion, economic strangulation, cultural alienation, and sectarian tension. That being the case, is there a solution to this state of division? We do not claim to have a magic answer to that, but we can shed some guiding light on a passageway out of this divisive status quo.

Taking a look at the larger picture, we suggest that Muslims everywhere—from whichever nation-state they inhabit, belonging to whichever class of society, identifying with whichever culture, and living within the paradigm of whichever sect—agree on and enhance the concept of *ta'aruf*. This is a Qur'ānic and hence an Islamic concept, which demands that human beings get to know each other. The fuel for division is precisely the lack of knowledge or the misrepresentation of it with regard to other Muslims. If the concept of *ta'aruf* becomes a salient and rooted feature of Islamic societies and peoples worldwide, then one can hope that the justifications for nation-states, class divisions, cultural clashes, and sectarian misunderstandings will diminish—and in the long run, disappear altogether.

It shames us to know that many Muslims are familiar with European and American societies but are largely unfamiliar with Asian and African ones. Many Muslims plan their vacations, tourist activities and marketing

projects within Europe and America. There is no "open-channel" of communication and transportation among the Muslim peoples themselves. An Egyptian Muslim, for example, knows much more about Britain, the United States and France, than he does about Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey or Iran. An Arab Muslim is more aware about the Latino minority in America than he is about the Muslim minority in China. A Turkish Muslim has an extensive understanding of European peoples, for which he is quite pleased with, but does not give much attention to the plight of Muslims in Central Asia or Eastern Asia, even though there are many more reasons for doing so.

Breaking down the psychological and cultural barriers among Muslims would, of course, be much easier if there were no political obstacles in the way. Nevertheless, it is our opinion that if efforts are placed in four keys areas, it will help us move in the right direction. These include: 1) education, 2) travel and tourism, 3) the *ḥajj*, and 4) the Arabic language.

Education

Our proposal is that all schools within Islamic countries remodel and refocus their social science curricula in order to give greater emphasis on the study of the various aspects of the Muslim world. Over time, it is hoped that a sufficient reservoir of information and interesting facts be accumulated regarding the different Islamic countries and their peoples, so that, in the end, an Egyptian Muslim will be thoroughly versed with and aware of all other Muslim countries and peoples the way he knows and is familiar with his own people. Of course, the same applies to all Muslims— Pakistanis, Turks, Persians, Arabs, etc.

For this to succeed, such changes must be applied to all the different levels of education from the elementary stages all the way to post-graduate studies. Government programs, scholarships, grants and research budgets must be allocated to the revamping of the social sciences throughout the Islamic world. No doubt, a program along this line will definitely run into difficulties and opposition from the political and economic elites, as well as from the cultural and sectarian gentries. As they stand, institutions such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) do not seem to have the insight to develop such strategies nor the will to implement them through their member states. As for secular governments, they are most definitely hostile to the above proposal due to its Islamic emphasis. These guardians of the segregationist status-quo in Islamic territories cannot see the syllabi in history, geography, sociology and other social sciences revamped. Never-

theless, the call is to move towards a greater Islamic reality that goes beyond the "nation-state", the economic class, the cultural background, or the sectarian indoctrination that all contribute to the multiple divisions of what is supposed to be one ummah.

Travel and Tourism

Another channel for reintegrating the ummah is to facilitate travel and tourism within the Islamic world. Any Muslim, who still values the social and ethical tenets of his faith, will agree that it is better to travel to the vast and exciting destinations within the Muslim world as part of one's holiday plans instead of going to the "red-light" districts of the casinos and amusement parks in America and Europe where one is often forced to compromise one's own faith and morality. Islamic culture within the Muslim lands is deep, rich, versatile and multifaceted and its territory is geographically vast enough to contain both summer and winter destinations. Moreover, travelling between and within Islamic lands allows Muslims to strengthen the bond of similarities and to discover, first hand, their larger social identity and character.

All this, of course, requires the ease of movement and transportation. A new grid of highways, an increase in air-travel destinations, and an expansion in other routes of navigation are only some of the changes that are required. One can only imagine twelve-lane highways between and among the major Islamic cities of interest, where people will have the freedom to move between these holy cities without restriction, or a reward program offering sincere and hard-working students, professionals and civil servants travel discounts to destinations across the Islamic world. Of course, like the previous step, political will and courage is needed for this to succeed. Governments in Islamic lands will have to drop visa requirements when Muslims want to visit.

No doubt, governments of the type that exist today are not going to favor this free and sizable flow of people from one country to the next. Unfortunately, many of the regimes today much prefer wealthy Western tourists travelling in their lands than their Muslim counterparts. But Muslim minds are going to have to think along such lines in order to put social pressure on these types of administrations.

The Ḥajj

The next channel for *taʿaruf* is the *ḥajj*. This "institution" is one decreed by Allah (*swt*), the Most Gracious, Who designated this annual occasion as

an open-ended meeting for all types of Muslims from the far corners of the earth. Before nationalism, sectarianism and our modern-day corporate culture, the *ḥajj* was the Islamic "melting pot" and the grand occasion of *taʿaruf*. It was an open university for religious, social, economic and political inquest and appeal.

This aim of the *ḥajj* dates back to the time of the Prophet (*ṣ*), the first generation of Muslims, and Muslims who never lost sight of this central Islamic concern. In fact, the Prophet (*ṣ*) used the opportunity of *ḥajj to* deliver his farewell speech (*khutbah al-ḥajjah al-wadāʿ*) during his last *ḥajj* where he elucidated on the teachings and principles of Islam. It was the responsibility of the successors of the Prophet (*ṣ*) to continue the same tradition during this season.

From the beginning, pilgrims would get to know each other and acquaint themselves with their fellow Muslims, no matter what part of the Islamic cultural mosaic they belonged to. But it wasn't just the average Muslims who would gather for the pilgrimage; the *ḥajj* also brought together various individuals in leadership positions. In fact, it was during the *ḥajj* that the Caliph would have the opportunity for personal and face-to-face meetings with other governors of the Islamic empire, with the aim of facilitating *shūrā* (decision-making interaction) and the exchange of administrative opinions that concerned the Islamic public interest. The Islamic government would solicit advice and counsel for future administrative decisions in general from this grand congregation of *ḥajj*.

The *ḥajj* was also a meeting place of ideas, a spectacular arena of opinions, and a university the likes of which the world has never known. Scholars of *ḥadīth* would meet during the *ḥajj* to compare their narration of the *ḥadīth*, while students seized the opportunity to meet with these renowned scholars. The *fuqahā* gathered each year during this time to compare and contrast their "better judgment" with their peers. If there was something called the "socialization of knowledge" it was there and then in the way that people interacted during the *ḥajj*. Pilgrims would not be prohibited from probing the intellectual depths of their own colleagues. In this "break-the-barrier" get-together, we have the example of Abū Ḥanīfah, who after having an intellectual discussion with Mālik during the blessed opportunity of *ḥajj*, would describe him with the words, "*mā raʾaytu asraʿa minhu bi jawābi saḥiḥ*" ("I did not see anyone faster than him in responding correctly"). From that same encounter, Mālik's description of Abū Ḥanīfah is equally complimentary: "*innahu la faqīh*" ("Indeed, he is a scholar"). The *ḥajj* was also where Abū Ḥanīfah would meet Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir

and his son Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and where al-Shāfiʿī would encounter Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.

The long and short of it is that the *ḥajj* was the stimulating and extraordinary public meeting place for open discussion. Unlike today, Islamic *taʿaruf* was an essential component of this pilgrimage. If those first contemporaries combined their rituals with their responsibilities, their devotion with their deeds and their relationship with Allah with their relationship with each other, then surely it can be repeated today.

The reorganization of the *ḥajj* is going to need an Islamic government that will make this possible. Unfortunately, the current laws and policies serve only to alienate the *ḥaramayn* in Mecca and Medina. We have not seen, nor do we expect to see the current government in Arabia interested in bringing together the qualified Islamic scholars who are capable and willing to stimulate and reinitiate the *ḥajj* as it has been elucidated in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah. Mecca, hundreds of years ago, used to be the geographical mind and heart of the Muslim masses. Today, and we say this with regret and sorrow, Mecca has become not only intellectually impoverished but also socially fragmented as pilgrims are driven in and out by royal feat and imperial decree. We may venture further and say that there are probably no governments in the Muslim world who have the courage and wisdom to reinitiate a *ḥajj* of *taʿaruf*—a *ḥajj* that will radiate with Islamic conferences, symposia and the cross-fertilization of *ijtihad*. Mecca—our cradle, our retreat, and our *qiblah*—needs the minds of its sons, the scholars and intellectuals in all fields of knowledge, "that they may witness the benefits for them, and mention Allah's Name during the known days over the livestock He has provided them."[1]

The *ḥajj* is so important and crucial for Islamic familiarity, togetherness and understanding that its meaning and cogency in our social selves must be reconstructed. The first thing we have to realize is that it will take time for us to know each other. We cannot come together in a day or two nor a week or two, during what the administration may officially define as "the *ḥajj* period" and expect an element of *taʿaruf* therein. Perhaps for this reason, as well as others, the *ḥajj* has been defined, according to the Qurʾān as a matter of months:

$$ ٱلْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَٰتٌ $$

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[1] Qurʾān 22:28.

The *ḥajj* is in months well-known.[2]

For how are we to know each other if we are stampeded into and then stampeded out of the *ḥajj*? Who is willing to open up the time-span of the *ḥajj*? Who is willing to challenge the official policies that have chained Mecca and Medina and to replace them with the commands and directives from the Divine Writ and the Impeccable Prophet (ṣ)?

Beyond the *ḥajj*, we have the *ʿumra*. This is the minor *ḥajj* which may be performed by willing and able Muslims at any point throughout the year. The *ʿumra* is a constant contributor to Islamic inter-familiarization and strategic unity of purpose. Year-round, a stream of people travel to Mecca to perform their *ʿumra* rites, numbering in the millions, if not tens of millions. One would hope that the current government does not place any time-restrictions on this movement of the masses of the Muslims.

The *ḥajj* and *ʿumra* in our current times are anemic. It is a sad fact that there are only one or two airports to receive and send-off the flow of people who flock to this sacred sanctity, that there are only four-lane highways to and from Mecca and Medina, instead of fourteen-lane ones, that there are no train transportation routes augmenting the other modes of transportation to and from these holy sites, and that there is only one seaport to process those who travel by sea. This is yet another manifestation of how the cities of Mecca and Medina have become estranged to their own people—the ummah of Muḥammad (ṣ).

Something is fundamentally wrong with us when Muslims become the victims of massacres in countries within Asia, Africa and Europe—sometimes at the hands of other Muslims—and yet we cannot express our solidarity with each other, our love for each other, and our care for each other in our common city and our consolidating *qiblah*!

The Arabic Language

The final channel for solidarity and unity is a common language. We know that there are cultures, ethnicities and sects who are sensitive to this issue, but the task is to look beyond these sensitivities. In saying what we do, we do not speak with any trace of nationalism or loyalty to cultural or ethnic interests; rather, we speak thoroughly our Islamic conscience on this matter, and say, with humility and meekness, that the Arabic language—the language of the Qur'ān—has to serve as the medium for the communication of feelings and ideas amongst the Muslims. Today, for all intents and

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[2] Qur'ān 2:197.

purposes, English has become the lingua franca of the world. Why is it that Arabic is not so for the Muslims? When we say this, we do not mean that other languages should be annihilated. After all, other languages are an expression of Allah's will in as far as His creation is concerned:

$$وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ خَلْقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ$$

$$وَأَلْوَٰنِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّلْعَٰلِمِينَ$$

Among his signs is the creation of the Heavens and the earth, and
the difference of your languages and colors.[3]

The rise of nationalism amongst the Muslims is a byproduct of Western colonialism and imperialism. Never was the Arabic language meant to be a nationalist, ethnic or racial language, and in a sense, the voluntary adoption of the Arabic language is meant to undermine nationalism itself. Those "national" heroes who appropriated the language of the Qur'ān were in the service of colonialism and imperialism as their policies spread the bug of nationalism inside and outside the Arabic speaking realm. All we are saying in simple terms is that the non-Arabic speaking Muslim be given the opportunity to learn the language of the Qur'ān besides his mother tongue. This learning opportunity will serve as a basis for cross-cultural, transnational and inter-Islamic communication and understanding. There are many peoples in the world who speak two or three languages besides their mother-tongue. Why are we Muslims discouraged or prohibited from acquiring the language of the Qur'ān as our second or third language?

It is a sad state of affairs when a Muslim from one part of the world comes across a Muslim from another part, and their common language of communication is English. Ironically, the Hebrew language to a certain extent was rehabilitated and revitalized by reference to the Arabic language, thus giving Zionists their medium of communication, while Muslims have, for all practical purposes, abandoned this common language, and in the process allowed for the usurpers to occupy their lands in Palestine.

The effective and actual consolidation of the Muslims needs a common conversational language, and this must be Arabic. We say this not out of bias or favoritism towards Arabic or of one language over another. The Arabic language is the language of choice here because it is the language of the Qur'ān, the language of the Prophet (ṣ), the language of the Imams (r)

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[3] Qur'ān 30:22.

and the language of our daily prayers—which is in reality our communion with Allah (*swt*). There is no Muslim who can offer his *ṣalāh* without reciting the *Fātiḥah* in Arabic. There is no Muslim who says "*Allahu Akbar*" in a language besides that of the Qur'ān. And there is no Muslim who can recite the Qur'ān, a devotional recitation, in a language other than Arabic. In fact, it can be argued that a total ignorance of Arabic amounts to a partial ignorance of Islam.

The Arabic language is not only the language of Islamic devotion, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah; it is also the language of the Islamic intellectual heritage. All the important Islamic scholars who gained mastery in their respective field of specialization authored their works in Arabic. This is equally true of Islamic exegetes, philosophers and Sufis. Abandoning the Arabic language is tantamount to deserting the Islamic intellectual legacy and to dispense with the likes of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Abu Bakr al-Rāzī and other great personalities. For this and many other reasons, one cannot deny that Arabic is the language of Islam and hence must be the language that will facilitate the process of *taʿāruf*.

Political and Economic Implications

The above is a brief sketch of preliminary ideas that will assist us in closing our ranks and expelling the disturbed thoughts we often have regarding each other. Of course, such a task is not easy due to the many political and social obstacles that prevent *taʿāruf* from becoming a reality. Hence, it becomes the issue of the hour to concentrate on pertinent political issues and developments that have always been a barrier among the Muslims of the world.

From the outset, Muslims must realize that they are duty-bound to have a central Islamic point of reference, a type of political consensus which entails a corresponding economic system. Though we are often eager to join other commonwealths (perhaps due to the less than favorable opinion we have of ourselves), we do not have as of yet an Islamic Commonwealth. The following is a rough outline that will help jump-start an Islamic solidarity movement:

1- Muslims are required by their faith to be independent of other power blocs in the world and to rely on their own potential and power. Never should Muslims depend on their enemies nor refer to them in matters of inter-Islamic disagreements, as the following verse attests to:

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَـٰتِلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن

دِيَـٰرِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓاْ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ إِنَّمَا

يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ قَـٰتَلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَـٰرِكُمْ

وَظَـٰهَرُواْ عَلَىٰٓ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوْهُمْ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُوْلَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ

ٱلظَّـٰلِمُونَ

As for such [of the God-deniers] as do not fight against you on
account of [your] commitment and faith, and neither drive you
forth from your homelands, Allah does not forbid you to show
them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity; verily,
Allah loves those who act equitably. Allah only forbids you to turn
in alliance towards such as fight against you because of [your]
commitment and faith, and drive you forth from your homelands,
or aid [others] in driving you forth; and as for those [from among
you] who turn towards them in alliance, it is they, they who are
truly offenders.[4]

This Qur'ānic "common sense" inhibits and disallows Muslim policy-makers from taking sides with enemies who are guilty of expelling Muslims populations from their countries, or who are guilty of excluding a portion of a Muslim population from their country. They may not ally themselves with allies of such imperialist and Zionist powers. They may not find common purpose with powers who attack Muslims and oppress them. And they may not offer such aggressors and occupiers any of their territories or facilities for such acts of aggression and war.

2- No Islamic head of state may place his confidence in advisers, consultants or experts who have no confidence in Allah and who do not submit to Allah (swt). The Qur'ān is very clear on this issue:

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4 Qur'ān 60:8-9.

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَتَّخِذُوا۟ بِطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ

خَبَالًا وَدُّوا۟ مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ ٱلْبَغْضَآءُ مِنْ أَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِى

صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ ۚ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ ۖ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ هَـٰٓأَنتُمْ

أُو۟لَآءِ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْكِتَـٰبِ كُلِّهِۦ وَإِذَا لَقُوكُمْ

قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا۟ عَضُّوا۟ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ ٱلْغَيْظِ ۚ قُلْ

مُوتُوا۟ بِغَيْظِكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ إِن تَمْسَسْكُمْ حَسَنَةٌ

تَسُؤْهُمْ وَإِن تُصِبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا۟ بِهَا ۖ وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟ لَا

يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْـًٔا ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

O you who are securely committed to Allah! Do not ally your-selves with people who are not your kind. They spare no effort to corrupt you; they would love to see you in distress. Vehement ha-tred has already come into the open from out of their mouths but what their hearts conceal is yet worse. We have indeed made the demonstration [of this fact] clear unto you, if you would but use your reason. Lo! It is you who [are prepared to] love them, but they will not love you, although you are committed to all of the revelation. And when they meet you, they assert, "We believe [as you believe]"; but when they find themselves alone, they gnaw their fingers in rage against you. Say: "Perish in your rage! Behold, Allah has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men]!" If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them; and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it. But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah, their guile cannot harm you at all; verily, Allah encom-passes [with His might] all that they do.[5]

3- Muslims are obligated due to their relationship with Allah to solve their own problems in their own court. A Muslim power-faction should

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[5] Qur'ān 3:118-120.

never be permitted by the general Muslim public to offend and aggress against any other Islamic power bloc. As the Qur'ān says:

$$وَإِن طَآئِفَتَانِ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ٱقْتَتَلُوا۟ فَأَصْلِحُوا۟ بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ فَإِنۢ بَغَتْ$$

$$إِحْدَىٰهُمَا عَلَى ٱلْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَـٰتِلُوا۟ ٱلَّتِى تَبْغِى حَتَّىٰ تَفِىٓءَ إِلَىٰٓ أَمْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ$$

$$فَإِن فَآءَتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا۟ بَيْنَهُمَا بِٱلْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوٓا۟ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ$$

$$ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ ۚ إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا۟ بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ$$

$$وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ$$

> Hence, if two camps of committed Muslims fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two [camps] goes on acting offensively towards the other, fight against the one that acts offensively until it reverts to Allah's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice and deal equitably [with them]; verily, Allah loves those who act equitably. All committed Muslims are but brethren. Hence, [whenever they are at odds] make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of Allah, so that you might be graced with His mercy.[6]

4- Muslims throughout the world should view an attack on any of their lands to be an attack on all of them. In the early days of Islam, the Prophet (ṣ) waged war against the Byzantines because they had killed people who, of their own volition, became Muslims.

5- Muslims, the world over, should act in unison whenever other Muslims are humiliated. There should come into being a united Islamic Front that will wage war, if necessary, to liberate Muslims from humiliation and the systemic loss of their civil rights. Again, the Qur'ān says:

$$وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَـٰتِلُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ$$

$$وَٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلْوِلْدَٰنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَـٰذِهِ ٱلْقَرْيَةِ$$

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6 Qur'ān 49:9-10.

ٱلظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَٱجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيًّا وَٱجْعَل لَّنَا مِن

لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا

And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of Allah and of
the utterly helpless men and women and children who are crying,
"O our Sustainer! Lead us forth [to freedom] out of this land
whose people are oppressors, and raise for us, out of Your grace,
a protector, and raise for us, out of Your grace, one who will bring
us succor."[7]

As far as building a strong economic basis between the Muslim nations,
the following points should be considered:

1- Islamic natural resources and potentials should be accessible to all
Muslims. This applies equally to such natural resources as petroleum as it
does to human resources such as professionals and technology.

2- Islamic companies should be independent and financed exclusively
from Islamic assets and wealth.

3- There should be an Islamic common currency. This does not mean
that local or regional currencies cannot co-exist. In the same way that focus-
ing on a common Arabic language does not diminish other languages, so
too an Islamic currency does not exclude other currencies.

4- All customs and tariff barriers should be done away with.

5- Muslim countries should have commercial priorities over other coun-
tries.

6- Relocation should be a right of all Muslims living anywhere within
the Islamic world.

Of course, implementing these steps and procedures is not an easy task
for there are many powers in the world that will not permit such transi-
tions or transformations to happen peacefully. Nevertheless, it is towards
these ends that we should exert our efforts and be prepared for the inevita-
ble.

May the Almighty guide the feelings in our hearts, the thoughts in our
minds, the transactions in our societies, and the journey towards Him. In
Him do we place our trust, with Him do we proceed and unto Him we will
return.

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[7] Qur'ān 4:75.

Rendering a New Aesthetic:
The Development of Islamic Art and Architecture

Adapted and edited by ʿAlī Sabzāliān from: ʿAlī Wijdān, "The Role of Islamic Art in the Inter-Cultural Dialogue".

Abstract:

Islamic art and architecture developed soon after the advent of Islam and its primary expression was in the sacred design and structure of the mosque. While the construction of initial mosques was influenced by pre-Islamic art forms, it was not long before Islamic architecture developed a unique aesthetic inspired by its own principles. This article traces the development of Islamic art and architecture as seen in the early mosques of the seventh and eighth centuries. It concludes with a discussion on the relation between Islam and Europe, and the role of art in this relationship.

Keywords: Islamic art and architecture, *masjid*, Dome of the Rock, Great Mosque of Damascus, Great Mosque of Samarra, Great Mosque of Cordoba, Relations - Islam and Europe.

Introduction

The incredible pace with which Islam spread throughout the Near East and North Africa remains one of the most astonishing phenomena in world history. In two generations, the new faith conquered a larger territory and a greater numbers of believers than Christianity had in many centuries. How was it possible for a group of "semi-civilized" desert tribes to suddenly burst forth from the Arabian Peninsula and to exert their political and religious dominance on populations far superior to them both in numbers and wealth? And how did Islamic art, which had no explicit scriptural foundations, come to possess its own distinctive character in a short span of time? What began as a "triumph of force" soon turned into a spiritual victory as Islam gained the allegiance of millions of converts. The early Muslims, though few in numbers, were never in danger of being absorbed by the dominant religion or culture of the areas they ruled. Instead, through Divine grace, and the goodwill and benevolence of the Muslims, many of the conquered sub-

jects became the most prominent architects through which the character of the new religion would be sculptured.

Islamic art was born soon after the advent of Islam and concurred with the rapid expansion of Islam into Asia and Africa, which took place within the first 150 years after the death of the Prophet (*s*). Although pre-Islamic Arabia was exposed to Hellenistic, Byzantine, Sassanid, Mesopotamian, Coptic and even Indian and Chinese forms of art – largely through trade – it was only after the early conquests that Muslims found themselves face to face with the artistic legacies of these civilizations. Moreover, as Islam spread into neighbouring territories, Muslims came into contact with other artistic traditions such as those of the Berbers, Africans, Slavs, Turks and Goths. Pre-Islamic Arabia had no monumental architecture itself, and its sculptured icons of local deities fell under Islam's ban against idolatry. Since its outset, Islamic art followed a selective process that favored certain motifs and styles over others. This process was undertaken by the artists themselves, many of whom were converts to the new religion. They drew their inspirations from the spiritual and ethical principles of Islam, thus establishing the aesthetic criteria of this new form of art in a practical manner.

From the outset, Islam laid special emphasis on the worship of God, and hence it is not surprising that the mosque or *masjid* (lit. "place of prostration") became the focus of Islamic art and architecture. During the first fifty years after the death of the Prophet (*s*), the Muslim place of prayer could be an abandoned church, a Persian columned hall, or even a rectangular field surrounded by a fence or a ditch. The one element that these improvised "mosques" had in common was the marking of the *qibla,* the side facing toward Mecca, which had to be emphasized either by a colonnade or by placing the entrance on the opposite side. At the end of seventh century, however, the Muslim rulers, who were now firmly established in the conquered regions, began to erect mosques on a large scale as visible symbols of their power intending to outdo all pre-Islamic structures both in size and splendor. Therefore, it was within the domain of the sacred that Islamic art first expressed its genius for its ability to take pre-existing artistic traditions and adapt them based on its own criteria. For the most part, these early monuments of Muslim architecture have not survived in their original form. What we know of their design and decoration shows that they were produced by craftsmen gathered from Egypt, Syria, Persia, and even Byzantium, who continued to practice the styles in which they had been trained. It was only in the course of the eighth century that a distinctive Islamic artistic and architectural tradition crystallized. The best

examples of the early type of integration are the Dome of the Rock (688-692) in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Great Mosque in Damascus (706-716).

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem

Since the rise of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, Jerusalem has always been an important religious center for both Jews and Christians, housing monuments such as the venerated Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well as other churches and temples. When the Muslims came to Jerusalem, one of their first tasks was to determine the site for their congregational prayers. More specifically, they wanted a mosque that would display the magnificence of Islam – a monument that would testify to the glory of the new faith and witness the start of a new age. Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (685-705) selected a site that had a religious significance for the faithful. A vast congregational mosque, accommodating more than five thousand worshippers, was erected on the noble sanctuary of the Masjid al-Aqṣā where the beloved Prophet (ṣ) is believed to have ascended to Heaven as the following verse attests to:

$$\text{سُبْحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِۦ لَيْلًا مِّنَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ إِلَى}$$

$$\text{ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْأَقْصَا ٱلَّذِى بَٰرَكْنَا حَوْلَهُۥ لِنُرِيَهُۥ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِنَآ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ}$$

$$\text{ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْبَصِيرُ}$$

Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque (Masjid al-Aqṣā), whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our signs; for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).[1]

It is upon this historical sight in Jerusalem (al-Quds) that the first monument in Islam, the Dome of the Rock Mosque, was constructed. It was located on the same precincts as Masjid al-Aqṣā, which was the first *qiblah* and the third holiest shrine after the ones in Mecca and Medina.

The Dome of the Rock brought together elements of Islam's past and charted a course for its future. The mosque, which was built by a diverse group of Byzantine and Muslim architects, was the amalgamation of the region's classical Greek influence and the rising ingenuity and fervor of

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[1] Qur'ān 17:1.

Islamic art. The Byzantine style – favored in Palestine, Jordan and Syria – also drew inspiration from the Persian Sassanid and the Egyptian Coptic styles. The usage of the various artistic traditions in a religious building attests to the tolerance of Islam not only in embracing peoples of diverse cultures within one civilization, but more importantly, in accepting the good within their traditions – whether artistic or otherwise – without diminishing these elements in any way. The very structure of the Dome of the Rock is a physical manifestation of these noble attributes found within Islam. Moreover, in addition to being a symbol of the forbearance of Islam, the Dome of the Rock indicates the beginning of a new cultural age, representing in a most impressive and grand manner, the dawn of an all-encompassing new civilization.

The Great Mosque of Damascus

In the aftermath of Alexander the Great's conquests, Damascus, which had been a geographically strategic location for the Greeks, soon became an important hub that bridged Europe with Asia. After the spread of Islam, the Umayyad Caliph Muʿāwiya ibn Abu Sufyān (661-680) decided to make Damascus the center of his political power, thereby replacing Kufa in Iraq as the political capital of the Islamic world. To demonstrate the power and superiority of Islam, Caliph Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Mālik (705-715) built the Great Mosque of Damascus (706-716) on the site of a church that was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, and whose location was previously a place of worship for Roman and Byzantine pagan gods. To further emphasize the Islamic ingenuity, the Umayyads introduced four new additions to the structure of mosque architecture: the *mihrāb* (niche in the wall indicating the direction of *Qibla*), the *minbar* (pulpit), the *mināra* (minaret) and the *maqsūra* (enclosure near the *mihrāb*).

Influenced by its predecessors, the Umayyads installed Byzantine styled glass mosaics within the Great Mosque of Damascus. When the Byzantium artists, along with Muslim craftsmen, were hired to execute intricate and beautiful mosaic patterns for the Great Umayyad Mosque, a new concept developed in the decorations of the Mosque, whereby architectural forms and the world of plants became the main subject of the composition. The excellent workmanship quality of these early Islamic glass mosaics surpassed any similar Roman, Hellenistic or Byzantine works and is consider among the greatest mosaics to survive. The appearance of calligraphic inscription in the Great Umayyad Mosque for decorative purposes repre-

sented continuity from the Dome of the Rock that was later passed on to all Muslim monuments.

The first two religious monuments – in Jerusalem and Damascus – served as a means of communication intended to propagate the new faith. They were symbols, not only of a willingness to embrace other customs and traditions within the Islamic paradigm, but also of the supremacy of the new faith of Islam. The latter, of course, was also utilized by the ruling elite to exert their authority in their newly acquired territories.

The Great Mosque of Samarra

A striking example of the architectural enterprises of the early caliphs, which were built on an immense scale at incredible speed, is the Great Mosque at Samarra located in Iraq. The mosque was commissioned in 848 and completed within four years by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847-861), who reigned from the city of Samarra itself. The Great Mosque of Samarra was at its time the largest mosque in the world – its minaret, the Malwiya Tower, was a vast snail-shaped cone, 52 meters high and 33 meters wide, with a spiral ramp to the top. The basic features of the plan were typical of the mosques of this period: a rectangular courtyard with its main axis pointing south to Mecca; surrounding it were aisles that extended toward the *qibla*, the center of which was marked by a small niche, the *mihrab*; across it lay the minaret, a tower from which the faithful were summoned to prayer. The floor area of the Great Mosque at Samarra was measured to be almost ten acres, of which five and a half were covered by a wooden roof resting on 464 supports. The mosque had 17 aisles and its walls were paneled with mosaics of dark blue glass (which have disappeared now, along with the mosaics that once covered the walls).

The most spectacular aspect of the building was the minaret, linked with the mosque by a ramp. Its bold and unusual design, with a spiral staircase leading to the platform at the top, reflected the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, such as the famed Tower of Babel.

As the influence of Islam spread from Spain to the Philippines, the newly developed modes of artistic expression were adopted in various parts of the world. The new styles provided a basic aesthetic unity within the Muslim world, without suppressing, prohibiting or undermining regional variations. The meeting of the Muslim-Islamic mind with classical and local traditions spawned new artistic modes and styles in Islamic art. However, this type of kinship did not last long and soon Islamic art shed its borrowed norms to create its own – ones based on its inner paradigms and

principles. With the passage of time, definite patterns and styles developed and distinctive art forms were created. Eventually, all foreign influences were discarded and Islamic art emerged with its own individual characteristics.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba

A hundred and fifty years after the coming of Islam, Islamic art operated under its own aesthetics. For example, the Great Mosque of Cordoba (785) in al-Andalus and the Ibn Tulun Mosque (879) in Egypt no longer represented phases in a tentative evolution, but were in their own right unsurpassable masterpieces, brandishing their very own rules and aesthetics. The Great Mosque of Cordoba was considered a wonder of the medieval world both by Muslims and Christians. Built on a Visigothic site, which was probably the site of an earlier Roman temple, the Great Mosque of Cordoba was begun around 785 during the reign of ʿAbd al-Rahmān I.

The mosque's hypostyle plan (a classical building with a roof resting on a series of columns), which consisted of a rectangular prayer hall and an enclosed courtyard, followed a tradition established in the Umayyad and Abbasid mosques of Syria and Iraq. However, the dramatic articulation of the interior of the prayer hall was unprecedented. The system of columns, used to support the double arcades of piers and arches, was a unique technique to create a striking visual effect, while at the same time, structurally allowing for greater height within the hall. The use of alternating red and white beveled stone arches, which are usually associated with Umayyad monuments such as the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Dome of the Rock, managed to create a stunningly original visual composition.

Despite its diverse cultural expressions, Islam was accepted as a unified religion in Syria, Egypt, Persia and North Africa only within 150 years after its inception. In fact, any nation the Muslims came in contact with, even briefly such as China and India, recognized the superiority of this civilization. The different cultural encounters that were synthesized within the Muslim consciousness left their mark on Islamic art and created its most distinctive trait. The ease of mobility between most Muslim regions was instrumental in the spread of early artistic modes. Architectural techniques such as the Iranian *īwān* (a vaulted hall walled on three sides with one end entirely open) were transported to Syria, Sassanid decorative designs such as the *muqarnaṣ* (three-dimensional architectural designs composed of niche-like elements arranged in tiers) surfaced in North Africa, while the use of stucco became a universal decorative technique. This mobility was sus-

tained in later periods and can be regarded as a first and lasting step towards the universality of Islamic art.

The mobility of people within and outside of the Islamic Empire made the middle classes often geographically transitory, so that the migration of artists and artisans helped in spreading and circulating artistic ideas and styles. Besides the voluntary movement of people, there was also the involuntary migration of refugees, conscripts, craftsmen and artists, who were taken to foreign capitals by coercion. An example was the Mongol Timur (1370-1405) who, during his invasions, took back to his capital in Samarkand the best artists from Iran and elsewhere in the region. Rulers who went into exile also helped in dispersing artistic propensities and norms through their interest in and patronage of the arts. Among such examples were the Umayyad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I (756-788), who took flight from Syria to establish a dynasty in al-Andalus, and the Mughal Emperor Humāyūn (1530-1556), who was exiled from India to Persia.

Widespread commercial activities within the Islamic Empire and travel to Mecca for the *ḥajj* from all over the Muslim world facilitated the widest artistic interaction. It made possible the exchange and introduction of goods, as well as the spread of ideas, styles and techniques belonging to diverse crafts. The Muslim world, over the ensuing centuries, maintained this symbiotic relationship with the cultures preceding or surrounding it. Until the 18th century, the Islam world remained the only major civilization that was in physical contact with nearly every other center of civilization and life in Asia, Africa and Europe, with the intensity of the contacts varying from place to place and century to century. Islamic civilization in general and Islamic art in particular played an important role in advocating Islam and Muslim rulers.

Islam and Europe

If Islamic art was able to act as a means of communication for the Muslims throughout history, why has it not been able to continue this task with the West? To answer such a polemic one has to go back into history.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, when the Muslim centers of Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba were at their apogee, the only intellectual centers in the West were massive bastions, inhabited by semi-barbaric lords who prided themselves on their inability to read. When a few enlightened minds in Europe felt the need to shake off the oppressive mantle of ignorance that weighed down upon them, they referred to the Muslims who were the only erudite masters of their day.

Knowledge in all its branches penetrated into Europe through al-Andalus and Sicily in southern Italy which were all under Muslim jurisdiction. Outside of the Eastern Islamic world and North Africa, the part of Spain occupied by the Muslims was the only place where study was then possible at all. Until the 15th century, it is hard to quote the name of an author whose work consisted of anything but a reformulation of Islamic thought. Roger Bacon, Leonard of Pisa, Arnaud de Villeneuve, Saint Thomas, Albert the Great, Alfonso of Castile and many others were either disciples or copiers of Muslim and Muslim savants. The influence of various Islamic arts in Europe, including innovations in textiles, ceramics, glass, woodwork and metalwork, is too well known to be recounted here. The same is true of Islamic architecture. One has only to look at a Gothic cathedral or go to Venice to realize the effect Islamic architecture had on Europe even before the Renaissance. Yet the question persists: If there was so much intellectual borrowing and so many artistic exchanges, why then the animosity between Western culture and its Islamic counterpart? What is the reason that Islamic arts failed in creating a cultural and intellectual dialogue between the two civilizations?

During the Middle Ages, the Islamic empire was considered by Europeans as a military, cultural and religious threat that endangered not only Europe but also Christendom. Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was ridiculed in the most deleterious manner. Gerald of Wales wrote in the 12th century that the Prophet's teachings were focused solely on lust, thus particularly suitable for Orientals who lived in a naturally hot climate. The spread of such ideas, which was transmitted from one generation to the other, was the result of projecting a negative image on an alien culture due to ignorance of and prejudice against that culture, which was a characteristic feature of medieval Europe at the time.

The first face-to-face encounter between Islam and the West on a grand scale was when the Muslim armies crossed into Spain in 711, fought the Goths and conquered the Iberian Peninsula (al-Andalus). The second grand encounter was during the First Crusade, launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II who declared war against Islam. Their "altruistic" aim was to save Eastern Christendom from the Muslims, but when the Mamluks defeated the Crusaders in 1291, all Eastern Christians came under Muslim rule. Ironically many actually converted to Islam because of the persecutions they had faced at the hand of their fellow Catholic Christians.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, a new phase developed in the relations between the two sides as Islam gradually became more accepted in Europe. The religious wars had ended, trade relations increased between the two

sides (in particular between the Venetians and the Genoese), translations of the Qur'ān appeared for the first time in the West, and with the coming of the Reformation, the Pope replaced Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) as Anti-Christ in the eyes of many Protestants. At the same time, the military power of the Ottoman Empire forced the West to review its attitude towards the Muslims. Though the animosity did not diminish between the two sides, a degree of admiration – born out of fear as well as respect for the feats of the Ottomans – developed within Europe. The attitude of Europe towards the three great empires of the 16th and 17th centuries – that is, the Ottoman (1281-1924), the Safavid (1501-1732) and the Mughal (1526- 1858) empires – was one based on equality where both sides enjoyed peaceful diplomatic and trade relations.

By the 18th century, however, the three empires showed visible signs of decline thus allowing Europe to lose a great deal of its fear and interim respect towards the Muslims and their civilization. The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century marked the rise of Western technological superiority followed by the engulfing wave of colonialism. This superiority brought about the unwavering belief in the supremacy of Western civilization over Islamic civilization. Thus England took on "the white man's burden" and France the "mission civilisatrice" with the belief that they would confer on the East some of the advantages of their civilization. These included the idea of good government and the superiority of Christianity. It was not long before Western powers directly encroached into the East with their armies, missionaries, civil servants, and mining and trading companies.

Having summarized the relations between Islam and the West from a western point of view, one should understand the same relations from the Muslim position. Because of the superiority of Islamic civilization from the 9th to the 16th centuries, the Muslims generally did not deem it worthwhile to study Europe. In fact, in the eyes of the Muslims all Europeans were lumped together as Franks. Even when the Muslims were relatively close to Europe, such as in al-Andalus, and had contacts with them on different levels, they studied Greek and Roman classical thought but not French or German literature. When the Ottomans occupied countries in the Balkans and Central Europe, they transmitted their architecture and art to them but never carried out an extensive cultural study of their new subjects. This indifference cannot be attributed to ignorance on the part of the Muslims but to the inferiority of Western culture. Muslims simply did not find it useful to study its art and literature.

The scene changed in the 18th and 19th centuries, and Western culture began to be imposed onto the East, especially in countries that came under

French rule. In this way, the Islamic world changed places with the West, and instead of being the "producer", ended up on the receiving end. From the point of view of Europe, it was the superior culture, and hence did not deem it worthwhile to get to know better the culture of the peoples under its rule. Hence, when Europe first encroached onto Islamic territory after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, it treated the various forms of Islamic art (with the exception of architecture) as indigenous "folk craft", for the simple reason that it could not accept an art that did not conform to its own criteria and aesthetics. Until today, pieces of Iznik and Nishapur ceramics and other masterpieces are part of the collections of the Folk Art Museum in Frankfurt, the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg, the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade. However, through further exposure to Islamic culture, Islamic art has come to be better appreciated on its own terms and not simply as "folk craft". In fact, today, special wings are designated for Islamic art in institutions such as the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah: A Contemporary Jurisprudent

Abstract:

Despite the many challenges and obstacles during his early life, Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah embarked on the path of Islamic knowledge and rose to become one of the more prominent jurisprudents in Lebanon in the last century. Authoring over sixty books, Shaykh Mughniyyah delved into many fields including the importance of unity amongst the *madhāhib*. To this effect, he also met with other great leaders in the unity movement including Shaykh Shaltūt. This biographical essay surveys his life and thoughts on various key issues including the importance of unity, the need for reviewing the process of *ijtihād* and the task of enhancing the Islamic seminaries.

Keywords: Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah, Lebanese ulama, seminary, unity of the madhāhib, reform, Zionism, *ijtihād*.

Family Background

It is believed that Shaykh Jawād carried his family name "Mughniyyah" owing to the reason that his ancestors arrived in Jabal Āmil in Lebanon in the 8th Islamic century from a region called "Mughniyyah" in Algeria. The Mughniyyah descendants are a famous and respected family in Beirut. A substantial number of prominent religious scholars are from the Mughniyyah family including Allāmah Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Shaykh.

Shaykh Mughniyyah's father, Shaykh Maḥmūd, was among the esteemed personalities in Lebanon during his time. He was born in 1289 H. in the holy city of Najaf in Iraq and later accompanied his parents to Jabal Āmil in south Lebanon. After his primary education he returned to Najaf where he attended the Islamic Seminary under the tutelage of revered scholars of his time such as Ayatullah Naīnī, Ayatullah Iṣfahānī and Ayatullah Āghā Dhiyā al-Dīn ʿIrāqī. He later returned back to his country to reside in Maraka, a village in South Lebanon, where he busied himself in writing books and offering religious guidance to the community.

The author of the book *Takmīlah al-Amal al-Amal* writes that Shaykh Maḥmūd was a researcher in academic issues and that very few Arabs during his time were able to attain his rank in elucidating various issues. He is also known to have composed Islamic poetry in Najaf. Shaykh Maḥmūd passed away at the age of forty-four and left several offspring including Shaykh Aḥmad Mughniyyah, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm Mughniyyah and Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah who is the subject of our article.

Place of Birth and Childhood

Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah was born in the village of Tir Dabba in Ṣūr (Tyre), Lebanon in the year 1324/1904. Ṣūr is a town on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and is one of the cities of ancient Phoenicia which was famous as a commerce centre. During the invasion by Alexander, inhabitants of this town valiantly resisted the invasion.

He was named "Muḥammad Jawād"—a holy and respected name—by his father. The young Muḥammad Jawād lost his mother, who was a descendent of Lady Fatima Zahra (ʿa), the daughter of the Prophet of Islam (ṣ), at the tender age of four. After her passing away, Muḥammad Jawād accompanied his father to Najaf, Iraq where he studied various subjects including mathematics and Persian. After residing in Najaf for four years his father returned to Lebanon following the request of the inhabitants of ʿAbbāsiyya.

Muḥammad Jawād's father was not in a financially stable position despite being among the prominent scholars in the region. He built his residential home with the help of the people in ʿAbbāsiyya and financed it with a loan from Ismāʿīl Saygh, a local blacksmith. Later Muḥammad Jawād's father leased the house to repay the loan. Unfortunately, he passed away in the year 1344 H. before he was able to pay off the loan. Muḥammad Jawād, who was aged twelve at the time, was deeply grieved by the loss of his father. Shortly afterwards Ismāʿīl Saygh took posession of the house to recover his money and distributed the family's portion to the elder brother and the uncle of Muḥammad Jawād. The young Muḥammad Jawād together with his younger brother moved to their elder brothers' home in Tir Dabba.

The change of residence and the loss of both his parents, were the only the beginning of the difficulties Muḥammad Jawād would face. It is said he had no possessions of his own except his bed, which he lost when he moved to his brother's house.[1] Thereafter, he slept on the floor despite the harsh

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[1] Refer to al-Islām Māʿ al-Ḥayāt.

winter conditions, and as result, developed rheumatism.[2] At times he went without food for days. Forced to seek his livelihood, certain records note that he began an enterprise selling traditional sweets (*ḥalwā*) as well as books. It is not clear how successful he was in this venture but there are indications that his material conditions did improve to an extent.

Period of Studies

The will and strong desire to study remained high among Muḥammad Jawād's priorities despite the tribulations and turbulence in his life. He obtained his primary education in Lebanon and studied several books including *Qaṭr al-Nidā'* and *al-Ajrumiyyah*. To further his studies he decided to enroll in the Islamic Seminary of the holy city of Najaf in Iraq to study under the tutelage of prominent scholars in that city. However, not having the financial means to fund his journey as well as being responsible for the outstanding taxes on pieces of land owned by his late father, he was unable to carry out with his decision immediately. Non-payment of taxes meant that he could not obtain official permission to travel abroad.

Nevertheless, Muḥammad Jawād was fervent in his determination. Through seeking intercession of the *Ahlul Bayt* (*‘a*), he was able to overcome these obstacles. He met an Armenian from Alexandria, residing in Lebanon, who was kind enough to transport him to Iraq without travel documents. Later when he began to write his memoirs, Muḥammad Jawād recalled the considerate driver and paid tribute to him with these words: "Since that time, almost 30 years have elapsed. I will never forget him since I consider him the first person I ever met who loved his fellow human being."

After arriving in Iraq, Muḥammad Jawād proceeded to Najaf for his studies. Having completing his elementary subjects, the young student attended the higher-level classes of Ayatullah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Karbalāī, Ayatullah Sayyid Ḥusayn Hamānī and Grand Ayatullah Abu al-Qāsim al-Khū'ī.[3] Muḥammad Jawād was able to continue for 11 years under the tutelage of these great personalities in spite of his financial difficulties. However, when he received the news of the death of his elder brother, he was compelled to leave the holy city of Najaf and return to his home country, Lebanon. After the funeral and burial ceremonies, the community requested Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah, who had become well-versed in Islamic sciences and immersed in piety, to become the prayer

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[2] Refer to Shī‘a wa al-Ḥākimūn.
[3] Refer to Shī‘a wa al-Ḥākimūn.

leader in the place of his brother. Accepting this offer, he busied himself with leading the congregational prayers and teaching Qur'ānic sciences and Islamic studies.

Shaykh Mughniyyah was disturbed by the lack of appropriate cultural traits of the inhabitants of that area. He also was not very pleased to have the community provide his income. Two years after staying in the area, he thanked the community and left in the year 1558 H., moving to the village of Tir Harfa in the Wadi al-Sarwa region. The area was known for its natural beauty and serenity—a highland forest home to many species of birds. Shaykh Mughniyyah considered this the most ideal setting for his studies and research. In the tranquility of the environment, and accompanied with only his writing material, books and kettle of tea, he began to study the works of famous European and Muslim scholars and philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Leo Tolstoy, Maḥmūd Aqqād, Tāhā Ḥusayn and Tawfīq Ḥakīm. Concurrent with these, he also authored several books including, *Kumayt wa Di'bil*, *The Present Status of Jabal Āmil* and *Taḍḥīyy*ah. He resided in that region for almost ten years until 1367 H. when he decided to relocate to Beirut.

Government Posts

Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah accepted important social positions and engaged in many activities when he arrived in Beirut at the age of 43. He was appointed a judge in the Shia Muslim court in Beirut.[4] A year later, he was appointed a senior advisor in the High Court of Lebanon and in 1370 H. he accepted his designation as the head of the Shia court in Lebanon. During his time at the judiciary he offered exemplary services and was responsible for reforming many laws. He continued until 1375 H. when he decided to step back and take on more advisory positions. After three years, he declined all positions and switched his focus on research and writing.

Expeditions

Due to his extensive activities, Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah became well known as a distinguished scholar both among Shia and Sunni scholars. Apart from his study travels, Shaykh Mughniyyah visited many countries, though the details of these journeys are not known. In 1379 H., he traveled to Syria where he met Shaykh Abū Zahrā. In the year 1382 H. he

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[4] Lebanon is a country with a diverse population of Shias, Sunnis and Christians and each of these communities has a separate court that handles legal issues according to their respective laws.

proceeded to Egypt and the following year to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia where he performed the *ḥajj* pilgrimage. In 1385 H., Shaykh Mughniyyah went to Bahrain where it is said that he met and held talks with the senior *'ulamā*. In the year 1390 H. he went to Iran to perform the *ziyārah* of the eighth Shia Imam, Imam Riḍā ('a) in Mashhad, and thereafter proceeded to the holy city of Qum where he resided for two years. Regarding his stay in Iran, Shaykh Mughniyyah recalled: "When I was in the suburbs of Cairo, I considered the possibility of staying in Egypt till the end of my life. But the resulting effects of the Egypt-Israeli war compelled me to return to my country. While in Beirut I was at a loss on what to do with the remainder of my life which was receding day by day. It was during this time that I received an invitation from Ayatullah Shariatmadārī to teach in the Dar al-Tablīgh institute. I performed *istikhara* and the following verse came: *And he said: 'Indeed I am going to my Lord, he will guide me'*. When I arrived at the Dar al-Tablīgh institute in Qum, I was surprised by the high level seminary-academic activities in various religious subjects such as *tafsīr* (exegesis), *Nahj al-Balagha* (Peak of Eloquence) and weekly sessions for the youth."[5] While in Qum, Shaykh Mughniyyah taught tafsir of the Holy Qur'ān and other Islamic sciences and returned to Beirut in 1392.

Activities in Achieving Unity

The most important concern of Shaykh Mughniyyah on the crisis prevalent during his time was the unity of the Islamic Ummah. He was engaged in concerted efforts to bring about Muslim unity and used every opportunity to meet and engage in discourse with Sunni scholars.

In 1960, Shaykh Mughniyyah met with Shaykh Abū Zahrā in Damascus Syria and in 1970 he was visited by Dr. Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd. Shaykh Mughniyyah also met and held talks with Shaykh Tamām and Shaykh Basī who were among the revered scholars of al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. While in Qum, Shaykh Mughniyyah met with Shaykh al-Ḥāsarī.

With the aim of strengthening the proximity of Islamic schools of thought, Shaykh Mughniyyah traveled to Egypt in 1382 H. where he met and held talks with the Imam of the al-Azhar Mosque. He also met the then head of al-Azhar, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1384 H.). Shaykh Shaltūt was among the founders of the movement of proximity of Islamic schools of thought and was in the forefront of calling for unity and solidarity among Muslims. The affection of the Shia ulama towards Shaykh Shaltūt is be-

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[5] Refer to the Introduction of *Falsafa al-Tawḥīd wa al-Wilāya*

cause of his famous fatwa or edict on the permissibility of Sunnis following the Ja'farī Shia fiqh.

The relation between Shaykh Mughniyyah and Shaykh Shaltut dates back to 1368 H. when they exchanged a large number of letters between themselves, an indication of their shared conviction on the issue of Islamic unity. They met face to face in 1382 H. when Shaykh Mughniyyah visited Egypt, and where the two sides discussed extensively on Islamic unity and the ways to achieve it. On this issue, Shaykh Mughniyyah writes:

> I went to Shaltūt's house where he received and welcomed me warmly. When the issue of Shia Islam came up, he told me, 'Shia are the founders of al-Azhar and for a short period, Shia sciences were taught in al-Azhar until that was stopped. Thereafter al-Azhar was denied its illumination and benefits.' I told him, 'Shia Ulama respect you since they are well aware of your services to religion and your intrepid approach in expounding the concepts of justice and truth without fear of reproach from anyone.' I also told him, 'The Shia believe that after the Prophet (ṣ) the right of ascension to the caliphate belonged to 'Alī ('a) but they also believe in refraining from stirring discord which will harm Islam just as Imam 'Alī ('a) refrained from it.' Shaykh Shaltut stood up and told those present, 'Sunnis do not appreciate this'.6

In his endeavor to strengthen the proximity among Islamic schools, Shaykh Mughniyyah did not ignore the importance of informing religious scholars on each other's sect. He took practical steps towards this end. He believed that most of the Sunni Ulama were not conversant with the truth of Shia Islam and based their hostility on prejudice and rumors while the fact is that all Islamic sects have one aim which is virtue and proximity towards Allah. Shaykh Mughniyyah used to reply to the accusations against Shia Islam and with this he laid and reinforced the foundations of proximity. When he wrote books, it became clear that the Shias were nowhere deserving of the accusations which were being leveled against them. He was the first person to have refuted Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb's work entitled *al-Khuṭūṭ al-Arīḍah*, which was the first book against Shias published in Egypt. As a result of authoring a rebuttal to this book, Shaykh Mughniyyah received many threatening letters.

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6 Refer to "Shaykh Jawād Mughniyyah," in *Gulshan Abrār*, Vol. 3.

Views on Zionism and U.S. Imperialism

Through his books and speeches, Shaykh Mughniyyah confronted many of the Zionist beliefs. Due to his understanding of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), he immediately understood the evil nature of the Zionist regime. In his books on the issue of imperialists and global arrogance, he condemned the United States for supporting the Israeli regime.

Shaykh Mughniyyah gained cognizance on the real nature of the Zionists and said, "Generally they are a people with a racist ideology who consider themselves to be the chosen nation of God. Each of them considers himself as having the right to do and seize whatever he wishes, be it in the east or west. In the Jewish book of Talmud it is written that: 'We are the nation chosen by God and we need two kinds of animals: The first kind are the beasts – the four-legged animals and the birds – while the second are the human animals who are other nations in the east and west'."

In another article, Shaykh Mughniyyah mentioned the huge population of Muslims and their possession of an important world resource, namely oil. He criticized them for surrendering to the whims of the Israeli regime. He also harshly criticized the Arab leaders saying that their accommodating attitude towards the Israeli regime was a source of shame and ridicule to the Islamic ummah.[7]

The writings of Shaykh Mughniyyah caused concern among the American officials in Beirut. They requested him to meet and hold talks with the U.S. president Roosevelt. In reply he said, "The U.S. is the fiercest enemy of Islam and the Arab nation. The U.S. brought the Israeli regime into existence and thus its hands are tainted with the blood of Palestinians. Our brothers are being killed by weapons given to Israel by the U.S. With all these, you are inviting me to visit the sixth fleet?"[8] This bold, heroic and honorable move was widely discussed amongst the people to an extent that the *Muḥarrir* newspaper paid a glowing tribute to his action by writing about him, "This is the dear Arab".

Thoughts and Ideas

Among the salient thoughts of Shaykh Jawād Mughniyyah we can mention his ideas on modernizing *ijtihād* (deducing facts from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*), the reform of the Islamic seminaries, the utilization of new methods in propagating religion and the need for an Islamic government. He

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[7] Refer to The Political Thoughts of Mughniyyah.
[8] Refer to "Shaykh Jawād Mughniyyah," in *Gulshan Abrār*, Vol. 3.

arrived at the conclusion that life was in the midst of great changes and that Islam concurred with some of these changes while rejected others.

Regarding Shaykh Mughniyyah's thoughts on *ijtihād*, Martyr Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr commented, "Now, for the first time, the issue of the social understanding of divine texts is being discussed freely. When I read a part of [Shaykh Mughniyyah's] book, *Fiqh al-Imām Ṣādiq*, I see that this great scholar has discussed that issue and elaborated on the Ja'fari sect in an eloquent and understandable manner. I believe the principles laid down by Shaykh Mughniyyah will solve emerging issues."

On the need to reform Islamic seminaries, Shaykh Mughniyyah wrote an article titled, "The Struggle in al-Azhar between Reformists and Conservatives," published in the magazine *Irfān* in 1954. Apart from expressing delight at the spirit of changes and reforms sweeping across al-Azhar University, he recommended a similar movement in Shia seminaries. His audience included all the Islamic seminaries and religious institutions regardless of whether they were Shia or Sunni. Without blame on either sect, he commented on how there were both internal and eternal enemies of the seminaries and religious institutions. For him, the internal enemies were those who, in the name of religion, brought about an atmosphere of hopelessness and disappointment to the young students while the external enemies were those who took advantage of the state of neglect in the seminaries to introduce Western ideas, particularly in the fields of social discourse and the humanities.

Shaykh Mughniyyah believed that the books being used in the seminaries were uni-dimensional and often ignored pertinent academic issues being discussed in society. He also expressed regret that most of the Islamic seminary students were not acquainted with modern sciences. On the Islamic Seminary of Najaf he noted:

> One of the peculiarities of this seminary is that it does not teach the modern sciences and it does not want to abandon the traditional setup. The seminary has remained at a standstill on issues affecting Muslims and other peoples of the world. For instance, it has remained silent in the face of colonial wars and weapons of mass destruction. The seminary is in need of reforms and this issue is now understood by lecturers and students.

Elaborating on the above, Shaykh Mughniyyah noted that in the Islamic seminaries in Qum and Najaf, there were many eminent scholars whose efforts and achievements were no different than those of inventors and scientists in other fields. However, these same scholars did not show much ingenuity in dealing with modern issues. He urged Islamic seminary stu-

dents to read the literature of those hostile to Islam in order to understand and be aware of their conspiracies, noting that there was nothing un-Islamic in this approach. He believed that the seminaries ought to have a wide range of cultural activities in the society. They must produce and distribute magazines and journals for use all over the world. He also called for the incorporation of modern technology within the seminaries. Finally, he urged these institutions to have a more organized approach to education with exams and the like, and to introduce themselves to Islamic communities across the globe.

Shaykh Mughniyyah held the view that the Shia carried invaluable treasures, which would enable their jurisprudents to be very effective in dealing with all the day-to-day issues. He believed that jurisprudents must have the know-how to solve modern and emerging problems of the people within the framework of Islam while issuing fatwas or edicts according to the contemporary times. He urged scholars to refrain from spending much time engaging in discourse on ancient subjects irrelevant to modern times.

To attain his goals, Shaykh Mugniya wrote several books including *Fiqh al-Imām Sādiq* and *Tafsīr al-Kāshif*. He was also profoundly influenced by the thoughts of Imam Khumaynī, about which he wrote a book entitled *al-Khumaynī wa al-Dawlat al-Islāmiyyah* (*Khumaynī and the Islamic Government*). Elsewhere, Shaykh Mughniyyah mentions the Islamic government as the best form of government while criticizing Western democracies. He viewed the Western democracies as a system where the destiny of a country was left in the hands of a select number of capitalists while the masses languished in ignorance and poverty.

Works

Until the end of his life, Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah authored more than sixty books in various fields of study. He also wrote articles in many magazines and journals. His books are used in many universities in and outside of the Islamic world. Some of his books include:

1. The Prophets from an Intellectual Perspective
2. ʿAlī ibn Abi Tālib and the Qurʾān
3. A New Approach to Islam
4. Shia and Rulers
5. Fiqh According to the Five Schools
6. The Fiqh of Imam Sādiq
7. The Philosophy of the Origin and End of the World

8. Imam Ḥusayn and the Qur'ān
9. Together with the Hero of Karbala, Zaynab
10. Tafsīr al-Kāshif
11. Exposition on the Nahj al-Balāgha
12. Exposition on the Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya

Demise

Allamah Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah left this transitory world and ascended to the Divine Mercy on the 19th of Muharram, 1400 H. after 76 years of sincere struggle for the advancement of Islam and the endless efforts towards the proximity of the five schools of Islamic thought. Two years before his demise, he was diagnosed with a heart ailment. The pure body of this righteous scholar was transferred to the holy city of Najaf accompanied by a retinue of ulama and people from various social strata who participated in his funeral. The bazaar of Najaf was entirely closed during his funeral. The prayers for the departed soul were led by Grand Ayatullah Khū'ī after which his body was interred in one section of the holy shrine of Imam ʿAlī *(ʿa)*. May Allah bless his soul and may the path he charted be filled by travelers always.

Majmaʿ al-Bayān: Bridging Enclaves of Knowledge

ʿAbd al-Karīm Bī-Āzār Shīrāzī
Translated by Muwafag Mubareka

Abstract:

Sunnis and Shias have a long history of scholastic exchange as intellectuals of each school of thought have often read and appreciated the works of the other school. The following article deals with Ṭabarsī's Qurʾānic exegeses, particularly the *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, and his manner of *tafsīr* which attempted to include, in a respectful way, the views of all the Islamic schools of thought. As the author mentions, this exegesis, was well-received by Al-Azhar scholars, and in particular by Shaykh Shaltūt, who wrote a foreword to Ṭabarsī's *Majmaʿ* praising its style and content. The author concludes by emphasizing the importance of respect and fairness in the mutual exchange of Islamic knowledge.

Keywords: Sunni-Shia scholastic exchange, *Tafsīr*, Qurʾānic studies, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ṭabarsī**,** Shaykh Shaltūt, Ṭūsī, Zamaksharī.

Before the impact of colonialism in the Islamic world, Muslims lived within their communities in a brotherly and compassionate way. Whenever a dispute would occur among the Muslims, they would end it, for the most part, through peaceful means based on the spirit of unity and solidarity. Moreover, such high Islamic ideals would often find their way to other parts of the world through their regular travels. These ideals first appeared when the noble Prophet (ṣ) unified the Muslims through the dignity of an Islamic brotherhood. Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) continued this ideal, such that in spite of the differences which appeared after the demise of the Prophet (ṣ), he worked hard to reconcile the Muslims and maintain their unity through his undying efforts. These tremendous efforts allowed the Muslims to put aside their differences, stop bloodshed and spread their message to the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, the colonial powers (as is their habit), attempted to put in place a ruthless policy of 'divide and rule' with the aim of instilling disagreements among the Muslims in order to weaken them. Moreover, they fabricated accusations so as to instigate internecine warfare, and by so do-

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ing, had a large role in replacing the brotherly and peaceful coexistence that was their hallmark, with that of animosity and hatred.

Of all Muslim rites, it is the *ḥajj* that provides a golden opportunity to unify the Muslims and to dispel the falsities that give rise to hatred and ill feelings. Among the false accusations directed against Shia Muslims is the claim that they do not pay attention to the current Qur'ān, believing it to have been distorted or changed, and that they are in possession of their own version called the "Qur'ān of Fatima"! However, the truth is that the most renowned Imāmī jurisprudents of the past such as Shaykh al-Mufīd, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, as well as those of the not so past, such as Imām Khumaynī (r), emphatically stated that the Qur'ān was and always will be immune from distortion. If any dissenting and aberrant opinions to the contrary were ever expressed, they were never taken seriously by the scholars—and this includes both Sunni and Shia scholars.

In addition, it is a fact that the Shia exegetes and jurisprudents would make constant use of Sunni *tafāsīr* (exegeses) such as those of Imam 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī and al-Mubaydī, as well as the *al-Mawāhib al-ʿĀliyah* of al-Kāshifī, the *Anwār al-Tanzīl* of al-Bayḍāwī, the *al-Kashshāf of* Zamakhsharī, and many others. These *tafāsīr* of the Qur'ān were, and still are, used as reference works in the libraries of the Shias, right alongside their own works. In addition, the above mentioned Sunni *tafāsir* are used as texts in both public schools as well as religious seminaries. Sayyid Khamenei, the Leader of the Muslims, has translated portions of the *tafsīr* of Sayyid Quṭub, *Fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Qur'ān), into Persian.

On the other side, many Egyptian scholars and professors of Al-Azhar Islamic University have enthusiastically used al-Ṭabarsī's exegesis, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*. The great scholar, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, as well as the the previous Dean of Al-Azhar University who was also a great jurisprudent, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Majīd Salīm, were so impressed with the *tafsīr* that they recommended its publication to the Dār al-Taqrīb located in Cairo. They considered it to be one of the best Qur'ānic exegeses. Fortunately, the book was produced in a magnificent manner with a worthy introduction written by the General Secretary of the Dār al-Taqrīb. It also contained an additional foreword by Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt. The book contained references and useful commentaries written by some Shaykhs of Al-Azhar University.

Although the *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* is brief and concise, its author, al-Ṭabarsī, has managed to include within its contents a host of Qur'ānic sciences, which includes but is not limited to: the styles of Arabic recitation, the circumstances surrounding the revelation of verses, various linguistic aspects, points of grammar, discussions on the order of verses and chapters,

related historical reports and stories, and judgments concerning what is lawful and unlawful. This *tafsīr* enjoys the acceptance and admiration of Sunni and Shia Muslims alike, as it contains balanced and non-sectarian opinions and beliefs of the Shia Muslims with regards to the glorious Book of God.

Professor Shaykh 'Abd al-Majīd Salīm of Al-Azhar said in this regard:

> I do not think I am exaggerating in any way when I say that it is a book poised in the forefront of the other *tafāsīr* as a source of knowledge and research. I have read this book many times and use it as a reference in many situations. It provided me with solutions to certain problems and explained a number of unclear items. I found its author (may Allah bless his soul) to have possessed deep thoughts, to be gifted with great honour, to have authority based on his knowledge, to be strong in his style and expression and to be very concerned about providing people with useful solutions to questions which they may have.

Ṭabarsī wrote in his own foreword to the *Majma' al-Bayān*:

> … I prepared myself to take on hard and serious work, strove with my utmost energy, deprived my eyes from sleep, strained my mind, prolonged my thinking, kept in my mind the various interpretations, and asked Allah the Most Glorious for success and assistance. I proceeded to write a book, which would be brief, succinct and orderly, and collected within it, all the different types of this knowledge and its sub-specialties. This work on the science of Qur'ānic exegesis and its arts contains the gems and the pearls of knowledge which are manifested in the arts of reading, grammar, and linguistic expressions. I investigated its unclear terms and problems, its meanings and its aspects, the reasons behind the revelations and their circumstances, its stories and its effects, its judicial boundaries and judgments, its lawful and unlawful items. The *tafsīr* even contains the opposing opinions of those who disagree with it, and mentions what my colleagues (*r*) had contentions with… It makes note of their opinions regarding the basis and branches of religious knowledge, the intellectual sciences and the narrational ones. All was presented in a sensible and concise tone, more detailed than a summary but less involved than a profuse work, since today's minds would not bear extravagant and detailed explanations of knowledge.

Shaykh Shaltūt, in his own foreword, added:

> Among the characteristics of this book is the breadth of thinking and the desire to bring closer the opinions of the various Islamic schools of thoughts. Their opinions are presented in their true con-

text with sincerity, to the point that the opinions of the other schools of thought are seemingly promoted with regards to certain issues. He [i.e., the author] strove to be trustworthy and concise in reporting the opinions of the other schools and distanced himself from using insults and abusive language or from acting as if he was the guardian of the other schools. On the other hand, some of our Sunni brethren, when they talked about the Shia, accuse them of being *Rāfiḍī* (Refuters), and some of our Shia brethren accuse the Sunni Muslims to be *Nāṣibī*. However, Ṭabarsī always kept in his mind the glorious verse of the Qur'ān which states in the Chapter of the Bee: "and have disputations with them in the best manner."[1] An example of Ṭabarsī following this noble verse is what he writes in his exegesis on the fifth verse of al-Fātiḥa, *Keep us on the right path*. He writes: "The phrase 'the right path' was reported to have various meanings: Firstly, it is *the book of Allah*, as reported by the Prophet (ṣ) and 'Alī (ʿa), as well as Ibn Masʿūd (r). Secondly, it meant *the religion of Islam*, as narrated by Jābir and Ibn ʿAbbās. Thirdly, it is *the religion of Allah* which is the only one acceptable from Allah's servants, as narrated by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya. Fourthly, it meant *the Holy Prophet (ṣ) as well as the Imams (ʿa) who represented him*, and this was reported by our people." Ṭabarsī then goes on to say, "The best manner is to consider this verse to have the general meaning which contains all the above mentioned meanings; hence, 'the right path' represents the religion which Allah commanded us to follow which includes the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, practising justice and giving allegiance to those whom Allah has ordered us to obey." It is a known fact that the last narration quoted is the one most preferred by the Shia and was practised by the Imams as reported in their recorded deeds. However, Ṭabarsī did not give it any greater degree of preference and did not put it ahead of the other opinions and theories. Instead, he set it side by side with the other expressed opinions and took the verse to have a comprehensive meaning.

It is very intelligent of Ṭabarsī to mention: "give allegiance to those whom Allah has ordered to be obeyed" because this phrase would neither upset the Sunnis nor the Shias. Every faithful Muslim believes that there are those to whom Allah has commanded obedience, such as to the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) and to the leaders. The beauty is that Ṭabarsī did not give a judgment about the question of Walāyah (sanctity and spiritual authority) and Imāmah (religious and social authority) here because it is not the place for it. However, he brought forth a phrase which is acceptable by every Muslim and is not offensive to anyone.

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[1] Qur'ān 16:125.

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Historians who reported the biography of Ṭabarsī mention something splendid about him. They say that he authored his present book, *Majma' al-Bayān*, in which he distilled the best points from an earlier work, called *al-Tibyān* by Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Ṭūsī. At that time, Ṭabarsī had not yet read the *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* of Zamakhsharī. After he read it, he wrote another *tafsīr* and titled it *al-Kāf al-Shāf min Kitāb al-kashshāf* (the Sufficient Cure of the Book of Kashshāf). It is obvious from this title that he included in this latter work, some of what he learned from the book authored by Zamakhsharī, and which he had not mentioned in his first book. There is also mention of another work of his called *al-Wasīṭ*, in four volumes, and a third book called *al-Wajīz* in one or two volumes. He wrote all of these volumes about the subject of Qur'ānic exegesis after he completed his main work *Majma' al-Bayān*. Sometimes the last two books mentioned are known by the expression or title, *al-Jawāmi' Jami'* (the Collections of the Collectors) because in them he brought together both the outstanding and unique points from al-Tibyān as well as the extraneous points from the al-Kashshāf.

After having compared the works of Zamakhsharī and Ṭūsī, Shaykh Shaltūt readily gave assent to the depth and breadth of vision demonstrated by Ṭabarsī by saying:

> I felt overwhelmed due to the deed of this Imāmī Shia Scholar because he was not content with what he possessed and with what he had gleaned from the knowledge of the greatest authority and doctor of his school of thought, al-Ṭūsī [the author of *al-Tibyān*]. Then he gave himself wholeheartedly to a new body of knowledge that came to him. This was the knowledge of the author of *al-Kashshāf*. Thereafter he took the old and added the new, not letting sectarian predilections come in the way, lest it lead him towards immoderation and bias. He also did not let the temporal disparity between the old and the new affect him — for it is, indeed, an impediment. Hence, in this way, this great man achieved two additional successes over and beyond his first scholarly success: First, he was victorious against sectarian extremism, and second, he overcame the barrier of time. Such successes might be expected to have caused illusions of grandeur or feelings of scorn and disdain for others, but this was not the case for him; instead, for him it led to obedience, compliance and pliancy! Certainly, the struggle against one's self is indeed the greatest struggle, if only they would know.

Shaykh Shaltūt continued in his introduction to the book, "If I wanted to offer this book to the Muslims of every school and nation, I offer it for these characteristics and their like. They should take heed of the good in its

contents, its strong knowledge, its straightforward way of presentation and high ethics."

Muslims do not belong to different religions and they do not have differing scriptures. They belong to one religion, read one book and have one set of principles; if they differ, it is only due to differences in opinion and narration, and the variance of their methodology. They are all seekers of the truth which comes from the same sources, i.e., the Book of Allah (*swt*) and the Sunnah of His Prophet (*s*). For all of them, wisdom is their lost heritage, which they seek and long for in every horizon.

The first responsibility that bears down on the Muslims, and which is all the more incumbent upon their leaders and scholars, is to engage in an exchange of knowledge and culture and to desist from prejudice, from calling each other derogatory names and from insulting each other with accusations. It is also necessary that they take only the Truth to be their goal and fairness as their *modus vivendi*, and that they make the best of everything.

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ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ ٱلْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُۥٓ ۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمْ أُوْلُوا۟ ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ

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Those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it; those are they whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding.[2]

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[2] Qur'ān 39:18.

Fatwas about Unity
Contemporary *'Ulamā* of the Islamic World

Abstract:

There is no doubt that the Muslim ummah is inflicted with sectarian division and stife. Many Muslims have fallen victim to parochial ideologies that limit Islam to one particular point of view, while discounting the legitimacy of any other. The following piece attempts to counter such insular views by bringing out the verdicts and opinions of many prominent Sunni and Shia personalities regarding the *madhāhib* (schools of thought) in Islam. Many of these prominent scholars affirm the validity of the various *madhāhib* and attest to their falling within the boundaries of Islam. The paper concludes with the views of these scholars regarding congregational prayers led by individuals of differing schools of thought.

Keywords: Islamic schools of thought, *'ulamā, Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, Ja'farī, Zaydī, Ibāḍī, Ẓāhirī, takfīr, fiqh, taqlīd,* congregational prayers.

Part I: Verdicts Pertaining to the Validity of the Islamic Schools of Thought

<u>According to Shaykh ʿAlī Jumʿah[1]:</u>

There are groups out there who are working hard to strain the relations between the Shia and the Sunni and to break the unity between the Muslims so that, in so doing, they can achieve their own goals. For this reason, with the issuance of my verdict, I am declaring permissible the worship according to the Shia *fiqh*.

We must admit that the Shias, in the present state, are quite advanced. For this reason, we can work together with them because so long as the Shias and the Sunnis have one *qiblah* (orientation for prayer), there is no difference between them. From the beginning of our history, the Shias have always been an inseparable part of the Islamic ummah.

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[1] The current Grand Mufti of Egypt since 2003. He is also a signatory of the Amman Message, which gives a broad foundation for defining Muslim orthodoxy.

The followers of the Shia school of thought are remarkably advanced, but there are a few individuals who, with the intention of creating differences, make their (i.e. Shia) books out to be out-dated, and by so doing bring out certain emotionally-charged and divisive topics.

Some political organizations, which are supported and backed by the Wahhabis, are mustering all their forces into hampering the relations between the Shia and Sunni schools of thought.

According to Shaykh Muḥammad Sayyed Ṭanṭāwī[2]:

Question: Is it permissible to include an Islamic school of thought—other than the *Ahl al-Sunnah* schools of thought—as one affiliated to true Islam? In other words, if someone follows one of the Islamic schools of thought—whether they be of the four that belong to the *Ahl al-Sunnah* or whether they be one of the *Ẓāhirī*, the *Ja'farī*, the *Zaydī* and the *Ibāḍī*—and acts according to their own *aḥkām* (laws), can they be considered Muslim?

Answer: True Islam—as it has come to us through the *ḥadīth* of Jibrā'īl (Gabriel) found in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (i.e. *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*)—has been elaborated by the Holy Prophet (ṣ) of Islam in this way: "A Muslim is one who bears witness to *La ilāha illa Allah* (There is no God but Allah) and *Muḥammad ar-Rasūl Allah* (Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah), establishes the prayer, pays the *zakāh* (alms tax), fasts in the month of Ramaḍan and performs the *ḥajj* if he can afford it."

Also in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, it has been narrated from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) stated: "Islam has been founded on five pillars: testifying that there is no God but Allah and that Muḥammad (ṣ) is his messenger, establishing the prayer, performing the *zakāh*, the *ḥajj* and the fasting of Ramaḍan."

Thus every human being—male or female—who testifies to the oneness of Allah (swt) and the messengership of His Prophet (ṣ), who confesses to the pillars of Islam and who does not reject any of its essential principles, is a Muslim. Based on what we know, and from what is apparent in their teachings, the followers of the above-mentioned schools of thought bear withness to the oneness of Allah (swt) and to the messenger of the noble Prophet (ṣ), they accept the five pillars of Islam, and they act according to them. If there are differences between these schools of thought regarding how to carry out the pillars of the faith, such differences relate back to the

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[2] The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque and the Grand Shaykh of Al-Azhar University. He was also the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, a position he held from 1986 to 1996.

subsidiary laws and not the principles. For this reason, we cannot judge the followers of the above-mentioned schools of thought as non-Muslim. Moreover, Islam has instructed its followers to judge people based on what is apparent in them, for it is only Allah (*swt*) Who knows their inner being. In a noble *ḥadīth*, it has been narrated by the Prophet (*ṣ*), "I have been instructed to judge people from what is evident about them, and as for their secrets Allah (*swt*) knows them."

I am inclined to add that in the Faculty of Religious Sciences at the Al-Azhar University, all of these schools of thought are being taught, and their differences are being discussed—with the premise that these differences, as has been previously mentioned, are legitimate ones since they relate to the subsidiary aspects and not the principles.

Question: What are the boundaries of *takfīr* (pronouncing *kufr* or apostacy on someone) in our times? Is it permissible for a Muslim to do *takfīr* on someone who follows the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of one of the traditional Islamic schools of thought?

Answer: *Takfīr*, in the sense of pronouncing *kufr* on an individual, is not permissible except if that individual has denied that which Islam has brought such as the necessity of sincere worship for Allah (*swt*) and the belief in the angels, the heavenly books, the prophets and the Day of Judgement. This is in accordance to what Allah (*swt*) says in the Qur'ān:

$$\text{ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۚ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ}$$

$$\text{وَمَلَـٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِۦ}$$

The apostle believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers; they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His apostle. "We make no difference between any of His apostles."[3]

Another verse reads:

$$\text{إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يُفَرِّقُواْ بَيْنَ ٱللَّهِ}$$

$$\text{وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن}$$

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[3] Qur'ān 2:185.

يَتَّخِذُواْ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلاً ۚ أُوْلَـٰئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ حَقًّا ۚ وَأَعْتَدْنَا

لِلْكَـٰفِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا

Surely those who disbelieve in Allah and His apostles and (those
who) desire to make a distinction between Allah and His apostles
and say, "We believe in some and disbelieve in others," and desire
to take a course between (this and) that, these it is that are truly
unbelievers. We have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful
chastisement.[4]

It is not permissible for anyone to associate *kufr* to any of these Islamic
schools of thought. All of these schools of thought are of the same view
when it comes to the necessity of worshiping Allah sincerely and of the be-
lief in the angels, the books, the prophets and the Day of Judgement.
Moreover, they agree on the necessity of carrying out the acts of worship
that Allah (*swt*) has commanded us to perform such as the *ṣalāh*, the *zakāh*,
the fast and the *ḥajj* for those who are able, as well as the necessity of adorn-
ing oneself with ethical virtues such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, chas-
tity, enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil.

The Holy Prophet (*ṣ*) has emphatically warned against proclaiming *kufr*
on other Muslims. It has been narrated through Ibn ʿUmar in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*,
"Each time a man calls his brother 'infidel,' one of the two of them will
become that. If this label is accurate, then the one who is called it will suffer
the punishment; but if it is not accurate, then the label will return to the
one who gave it." Also, it has been narrated through ʿAbd Allah ibn
Masʿūd in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, "Vilifying a Muslim is sinful and killing a Muslim
is *kufr*." And finally, in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Abu Dhar has narrated, "Any person
who associates infidility to another man or calls him 'the enemy of God,'
and if this is not the case, this association will return back to him."

<u>According to the late Shaykh Aḥmad Kaftārū[5]:</u>

Question: Are the *Zaydī*, *Jaʿfarī* and *Ibāḍī* acceptable schools of thought
in Islam, and if so, on what basis?

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[4] Qurʾān 4:150-151.
[5] The former Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, a position he held since 1964. He was also one
of the founding members of the League of Muslim Scholars and the head of the Supreme Council of
Fatwā.

Answer: If we limit the *fiqh* to the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, we have not given Islam its due nor have we accounted for the support that it shows to the changes that occur in the lives of the Muslims. In so doing, we have constrained the broad vision of Islam and lowered its goals in such a way that it can no longer respond to the questions raised by man in his various life circumstances.

The truth, however, is that the pleasure of Allah (*swt*) lies in finding that which is advantageous; hence, the jurisprudencial schools of thought have developed in order to accomplish and fulfill that which is best for the community. Moreover, even though the point of contention between the various schools of thought pertains to the subsidiary jurisprudential matters, all of these schools are developing *within* the parameters of the essential and unchanging principles of religion.

The above-mentioned jurisprudential differences in the subsidiary matters have no goal other than to make life easier for the people, to remove difficulties and to bring them tranquility. For this reason, following any of the schools of thought is permissible even if it leads to a type of eclecticism when circumstances dictate it, such as in times of need or weakness or some other occasion. In fact, according to the *Mālikī* and a group from the *Ḥanafīs*—which is a correct view in our opinion—such a type of eclecticism is permissible. Thus, it is permissible to choose verdicts from the schools of thought which are the easiest to follow or to search for "religious liberties" in cases where it becomes necessary or there is a greater advantage. The principle behind this is that Islam is meant to be an easy religion and not a difficult one.

Allah (*swt*) says,

$$يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُمُ ٱلۡيُسۡرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ ٱلۡعُسۡرَ$$

Allah intends for You ease, and He does not want to make things
difficult for you.[6]

For this reason, in our opinion, the *Zaydī* school of thought is a valid school like the other Islamic schools of thought. One comes to this conclusion, particularly when ones reads their chief encylopeadic book, *al-Baḥr al-Zakhkhār al-Jāmiʿ li Madhāhib ʿUlamāʾ al-Amṣār* (*The Comprehensive Abounding Sea for the Schools of Thought of the Great Scholars*) by Imam Yaḥyā ibn Murtaḍā. Apart from it comprising contemporary jurisprudential matters, one finds that its jurisprudence is very similar to that of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*,

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[6] Qurʾān 2:185.

and the points of difference are not only known but also limited such as the impermissibility of performing the *mash* (wiping) on the shoes, the prohibition of consuming meat slaughtered by non-Muslims, and other such subsidiary matters.

The same can be said for the jurisprudence of the *Imāmiyyah* (Shia) school, whose jurisprudence is closest to that of the *Shāfiʿī*. In fact, in the common practices, other than approximately seventeen differences, their jurisprudence is quite close to that of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

As for the *Ibāḍī* school, they are the closest school to the majority of the Muslims in terms of their thoughts and beliefs. Moreover, their sources of jurisprudence include the Qurʾān, the Sunah, *Ijmāh* (consensus) and *Qiyās* (deduction).

It it pertinent for us not to be dismayed with regard to these secondary jurisprudential differences since the religion, the law and the truth are one; they are not different. Moreover, the source of the laws is one and the same in all of the schools of thought, and that is revelation. The idea that the differences of the schools of thought, which pertain to the realm of jurisprudence, should lead to struggle and armed conflict between the followers of those schools has never been heard of before. The reason for this is because such differences are subsidiary and are traced back to the *ijtihādāt* of knowledge, jurisprudence and civil matters. Each jurisprudent is rewarded in his attempt to derive laws based on his own intellectual efforts, just as the Holy Prophet (ṣ) has said, "Each time a jurist derives a law and reaches the truth, he is compensated twice; and if he makes a mistake in his law, then he is compensated once."

Hence, any speech [about the schools of thought] which is outside of the above-mentioned parameters of Islam is not permitted. Moreover, all of the schools of thought are Islamic and their jurisprudence is respected and must be safeguarded from objection.

<u>According to Shaykh al-Akbar Maḥmūd Shaltūt[7]:</u>

Question: Some individuals state that the worship and transactions of a Muslim is only correct if he belongs to one of the four known schools of

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[7] Head of the Al-Azhar University in Egypt from 1958 to 1963. He is known for introducing the teaching of the *fiqh* of *Zaydī* and Shia Islam to the university alongside the fiqh of the four Sunni *madhāhib*. The following fatwa was announced on July 6, 1959, and was subsequently published in many periodicals in the Middle East such as the Egyptian *al-Shaʾāb Newspaper* [Issue of July 7, 1959] as well as the Lebanese *al-Kifāh Newspaper* [Issue of July 8, 1959]. The following segment can also be found in Chirri, Muhammad Jawad, *Inquiries about Islam* (Detroit: 1986).

thought, and this does not include the Shia *Imāmiyyah* or the *Zaydī* schools of thought. What is your opinion regarding this matter?

Answer: Certainly, Islam does not require a Muslim to follow any one particular school of thought. Rather, it says that every Muslim, from the outset, has the right to follow one of the schools of thought which has been correctly narrated and its verdicts have been compiled in particular books. Moreover, every follower of any of these schools of thought is permitted to follow another school without there being any sin on him for doing so.

As for the Ja'farī school of thought, which is also known as Shia *Imāmi-yyah Ithna–Asharī* (The Twelver Imami Shias), it is permissible to follow it just as one would follow the other Sunni schools of thought.

Muslims must know this matter and must refrain from unjust prejudice to any particular school of thought. The religion of Allah and the Islamic shari'ah was never restricted to a particular school of thought. Hence all jurists, as well as their actions, will be accepted by Allah (*swt*), and anyone who is not an expert or jurist, can follow a jurist and act according to their jurisprudential views. In this matter, there is no difference between the laws pertaining to worship and the laws pertaining to transactions.

<u>According to Ayatollah al-'Uẓmā Khamenei[8]:</u>

Question: Considering the various compelling reasons to necessitate unity amongst the Muslims, what is the opinion of your Excellency regarding including the followers of the various Islamic schools of thought—such as the four-fold schools of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, the *Zaydī*, *Ẓāhrī*, *Ibaḍī* and others who believe in the clear principles of religion—within the Islamic Ummah? Is it permissible to ascribe *kufr* to the above-mentioned schools or not? Moreover, what ae the limits of *takfīr* during our day and age?

Answer: All of the Islamic schools of thought are included in the Islamic Ummah and have access to all of the advantageous granted by Islam. Morever, the schisms amongst the Muslim parties, are not only contrary to the teachings of the Noble Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet of Islam (ṣ), but they also lead to the weakening of the Muslims and to the handing over of their affairs to the enemies of Islam. Hence, such divisions are not permitted for any reason.

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[8] The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as one of the *Marja' Taqlīd* (Supreme Religious Authority) for the community of Shias.

According to Ayatollah Seyyed ʿAli Sīstānī[9]:

Question: Can we consider as Muslim anyone who pronounces the *Shahādatayn* (the two-fold testimonies of faith), performs his prayer facing the *qiblah*, and follows one of the eightfold Islamic schools of thought which include the *Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, Jaʿfarī, Zaydī, Ibāḍī* and *Ẓāhirī*? Also, as for his blood, dignity and property, are they to be respected?

Answer: Anyone who pronounces the *Shahadatayn* and does not outwardly perform any act contrary to it, and moreover, does not have enmity to the Ahlul Bayt (*ʿa*) is a Muslim.

Question: Is it permissible for someone who does not have the capacity or qualifications that the scholars have enumerated, to be in charge of issuing *fatwā* (verdicts)?

Answer: The issuance of *fatwā* is only permitted by an actual jurisprudent who has *all* the *taqlīdī* conditions that have been mentioned in the explanatory texts on religious injunctions.

According to Ayatollah Seyyed Faḍl Allah[10]:

Islam, with all the theological necessities that are found in the Noble Qurʾān, can be summarized in the *shahādatayn*. Every individual who accepts the *shahādatayn* is a Muslim. He is entitled to all of the rights that is due on any Muslim, and he is obliged to perform all the Muslim duties. Moreover, the rejection of the essential aspects of religion does not make one an apostate except if the individual knows that the consequence of his rejection is to deny the Prophet (*ṣ*) of Allah (*swt*)—which, because of the topic being clear, is usually the case.

However, differences of opinion in theoretical matters that most of the *ʿulamā* have—which may be due to a difference of opinion regarding the reliability of a narrator, or the meaning of a *ḥadīth*, or some other commotion-causing matter that becomes the basis of their difference—does not lead to apostasy.

In light of this view, we are of the opinion that all Muslims and the followers of the schools of the thought are included within the Islamic Ummah. Hence, it is not permissible to proclaim *kufr* on them for any reason.

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[9] One of the Shia *Marjaʿ Taqlīd* (Supreme Religious Authority) and the current highest ranking Shia religious scholar in Iraq.

[10] One of the prominent Shia *Marjaʿ Taqlīd* (Supreme Religious Authority) in Lebanon.

Moreover, any differences between them must be resolved wisely through intellectual and logical discussions and through the guidance of the Noble Qurʾān.

$$\text{فَإِن تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِى شَىْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ}$$

If you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and his Messenger[11]

Part II: Issues Pertaining to Congregational Prayers

According to Dr. Naṣr Farīd Wāsil[12]:

Question: Is it permissible to follow an Imam in congregational prayers who belongs to the Shia of the *Ahl al-Bayt*?

Answer: It should be stated that any Muslim who believes in Allah (*swt*), testifies to His waḥdāniyyah (unity) and to the messengership of the Holy Prophet (*ṣ*), does not deny the religious necessities, and is completely aware of the pillars of Islam such as the daily prayers and its terms, is eligible to become the Imam (leader) of congregational prayers of the followers of the other Islamic schools of thought despite the minor *fiqhī* differences between the Imam and the followers.

This principle is applicable to the Shia of *Ahl al-Bayt* (*ʿa*) as well since we share the same belief with regard to Allah (*swt*), His messenger (*ṣ*), the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*ʿa*) and the *Saḥābah* (companions). There is no difference between us with regard to the principles and foundations of the Islamic sharīʿah as well as the necessities of the religion.

When Allah (*swt*) granted us the opportunity to visit Tehran and Qom in the Islamic Republic of Iran, not only did we lead the congregation prayers of which they took part, but we also followed them in their own congregational prayers.

Thus we ask Allah (*swt*) to bring about unity within the Islamic ummah, to eradicate the hostility, strife and divergences that exist within it, and to remove the differences between us that pertain to the jurisprudence and religious subsidiaries.

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[11] Qurʾān 4:59.
[12] Professor in Al-Azhar University and former Grand Mufti of Egypt, a position he held from 1996 to 2002. The following statement was dated 12.1.2001.

According to the Shia *Marāja'* (Supreme Authorities)[13]:

Question: What is the ruling of performing one's daily prayers in congregation with the *Ahl al-Sunnah*? Does it suffice or must one repeat one's prayers?

Imam Khumaynī, Ayatullah Arāki, Ayatullah Khamenei, Ayatullah Fāḍil, Ayatullah Sanā'ī and Ayatuallah Makārim: Congregational prayers with the *Ahl al-Sunnah* suffices.

Ayatullah Gulpaygāni: There is no harm in performing prayer with the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. Although it is good to participate in their congregational prayer, it should be performed completely in compliance with the Shia conditions.

Ayatullah Bahjat: There is no harm in taking part in their congregational prayer.

Ayatullah Tabrīzī and Khū'ī: If in the congregational prayers, one recites the essential parts of the prayer, it suffices.

Ayatullah Zanjānī: It is indispensable to take part in the congregational prayer of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* but as a matter of caution, the prayer should be repeated.

Ayatullah Sistānī: It is permissible to follow the Imams of the other Islamic schools of thought in performing the daily prayers but one should recite the *surahs* of *Ḥamd* and *Tawḥīd* on one's own.[14]

Ayatullah Sāfī: There is no harm if one participates in the congregational prayers of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. If one is participating in order to create brotherhood among the hearts of the Shias and Sunnis and to remove the accusation against the Shias, it is not necessary to repeat the prayers.

Question: Are the rulings regarding congregational prayers with the *Ahl al-Sunnah* limited to *Masjid al-Ḥarām* and *Masjid an-Nabī* or do they apply to any mosque?

Imam Khumaynī, Ayatullah Arāki and Ayatullah Khamenei: It applies to all mosques.

Ayatullah Fāḍil: It is not particular to those two mosques.

Ayatullah Sanā'ī: It also applies to the other mosques.

Ayatuallah Makārim: There is no difference between *Masjid al-Ḥarām* and *Masjid an-Nabī* and the other mosques in this matter.

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[13] Source: the *Istiftās* of the various *Marja'* in connection with *Ḥajj*

[14] Ayatullah Sistāni, Ayatullah Khū'ī and Ayatullah Tabrīzī further point out that the noon prayers should be repeated after congregational Friday prayers with the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

Ayatullah Gulpaygāni: It is not particular to the Sacred Mosques but applies to all mosques. It is recommended and preferable.

Ayatullah Bahjat: There is no difference.

Ayatullah Zanjānī: Both cases are the same.

Ayatullah Sistānī: In responding to the previous question, there is no difference between *Masjid al-Ḥarām* and *Masjid an-Nabī* and the other mosques.

Ayatullah Sāfī: The commandment is the same as the answer which has been given to the previous question and applies to all mosques.

According to the *Ahl al-Sunnah* authorities[15]:

Ibn Taymiyyah: All Muslims are in agreement concerning the permissibility of following the Imams of one another during the congregational obligatory prayers, as this was done by the companions of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) as well as the infallible Imams. If someone denies this, he is an innovator and is against the Holy Qurʾān, the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and the consensus of the Muslims.

Professor Wahbah Zuhaylī[16]: Following the congregational prayer leaders of other Islamic schools of thought during the obligatory prayers is appropriate and is not *makruh* (undesirable). The companions of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) as well as those who came after them used to follow the Imams of one another constantly with consensus, even though there were differences in the subsidiary rules of religion. Ibn Masʿūd followed the caliph Othmān when he was leading prayers in order to remove the differences that could lead to sedition.

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[15] Source: Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "The Viewpoints of the Contemporary Jurisprudents," Vol.1.

[16] A prominent Islamic scholar, specializing in Islamic law and legal philosophy in Syria. He is chairman of Islamic jurisprudence in the College of Sharia at Damascus University. He is also one of the signatories to the Amman Message.

The Muslim Presence in America

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Abstract:

Although Muslims began migrating to America in large numbers only in the nineteenth and particularly, the twentieth centuries, there are sources suggesting that the Muslim presence on the continent even predates Columbus' famous voyage to the "New World." This article looks at the community of Muslims in America from a demographic, historical, organizational and soci-economic point of view. The author traces the different migration patterns of the Muslims to America as well as their ethnic composition. He surveys some of the important Islamic organizations and their mandates. He touches on the Shīʿā presence as well as the African American communities in the United States. The article concludes with a discussion on the socio-economic status of the Muslims residing in America.

Keywords: Muslims in America, Muslim immigration to the United States, African American Muslims, Shīʿā Muslims in America, Islamic organizations in America, Socio-economic status of Muslims in America.

Statistical Survey

In the early 1900's, Western sociologists and political analysts never reckoned that within a century, Islam would emerge as a formidable force in international politics. For this reason, very few studies on the political, economic, cultural and regional influences affecting the Muslim world were conducted. In North America, and in particular, in the United States, Muslims were always marginalized and their activities came under scrutiny. However, during the past three decades, and particularly in the aftermath of the glorious victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, previously held assumptions and theories became invalidated and were replaced with newer analyses and interpretations about the status of the Muslim world and the religion of Islam.

Since religion and beliefs are not accounted for in the U.S. National census—a census conducted once every decade—it is difficult to ascertain

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the precise population of Muslims in America using these records. Nevertheless, they do identify the ethnic origins of its citizens as well as the former nationalities of its immigrants, and using this data, researches have been able to estimate the number of Muslims in America.

Based on U.S. administration statistics, the population of immigrants from Islamic countries to the United States from its earliest records till 1965 has been relatively low when compared to the number of immigrants from non-Islamic countries. In the period between 1820 and 1965, only 517,367 citizens immigrated from areas which had sizeable Muslim populations, including the Balkans, the former Ottoman Empire (present day Turkey) and the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). However, from 1966 to 1980, the number of immigrants from Islamic countries increased significantly to 865,472. During the 1980's, the number of immigrants from the Muslim world to the United States reached 921,100, and between 1990 and 1997, it increased to 997,000.

Of course, not all of these immigrants were Muslims. In fact, between 1820 and 1960, Muslims composed only thirty percent of the Indian immigrants who migrated to the United States. Also, between 1980 and 1990, only one third of the immigrants from Lebanon were Muslims. Similarly, a large number of Iranian migrants to the United States, particularly in the period 1980-1990, were Jews, Christians and members of other non-Islamic ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, when one looks at the total number of people emigrating from Muslim countries to the United States from the early nineteenth century till the present, the majority of them are Muslims. Based on the official U.S. statistics from the year 1820 to 1997, this amounts to 3.3 million immigrants—a mere five percent of the sixty-four million immigrants to America during the same period. Accounting for birth and conversion, the number of Muslims in America today is estimated to be between six and nine million.

The largest number of immigrants to the United States has been from the Arab countries, and is followed by (in descending order): Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Tunisia, North Africa and Europe (particularly from the Balkan countries including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the former Yugoslavia republics). Immigrants from other parts of Africa and Asia, such as the Central Asian republics, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa, rank next respectively. There has been a significant number of Afghani immigrants to the United States—30,000 between 1980 and 1990, and 13,600 during the following decade.

History of Muslims in America

Muslims not only accompanied and assisted the Italian-Spanish sailor, Christopher Columbus, during his epic voyage to the American continent in 1492, they also accompanied other Europeans who crossed the Atlantic and set foot on what became known as the "New World". In fact, Columbus' "historic discovery" took place precisely a few years after the downfall of the last Islamic rule in the Spanish Peninsula, and there is an authentic hypothesis suggesting that Muslims residing in the Iberian peninsula two centuries prior to Columbus' voyage had already dispatched sailors to that part of the world and had even established friendly ties with the original inhabitants in the land (later named "Red Indians" by the Europeans). In 1474, by sowing internal discord among the Muslim rulers in Southern Europe, Isabella of Seville and Ferdinand of Aragón, managed to establish their monarchy and began the eventual expulsion of the Muslims from the peninsula. In 1492, the same year that Columbus began his voyage towards the West, the last Muslim fortress of resistance in Granada fell.

Since the expulsion of the Muslims from Spain and Portugal, the role of European Muslims in the voyages to the American continent was hardly mentioned in Western literature. Yet the accumulated knowledge worked on and refined by Muslim scientists during the peak of their civilization—especially in the fields of geography, history, astronomy and mathematics, as well as their broad contribution to the naval sciences—was all transferred to the Christian West and inherited by the Spanish and Portugese explorers.

The "discovery" of America by the Europeans took place simultaneously with two other historic events in the Islamic World: 1) the invasion of the Mongols and 2) the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. The coming to power of the Mongols in East Asia was a terrible catastrophe for the Islamic governments of the Iranian Plateau, the Arab countries and Central Asia. As for the emergence of the Turkish Muslims and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the focus within the Muslim world was shifted away from Western Europe towards the eastern part of the Mediterranean. With the conquest of Constantinople and the defeat of the Byzantine Empire, Islamic influence was localized around Eastern Europe.

While the Ottoman Empire was politically and militarialy occupied with Eastern Europe on one side and the Safavid dynasty in Iran on the other, Western imperial powers, particularly Spain, France and England, were engaged in occupying and colonizing different parts of the American continent. With the weakening of the Islamic empire over the ensuing cen-

turies, not only in Western Europe, but also on the Indian subcontinent and in Africa, the control of the high seas fell to the Western world, and in particular to Spain, Portugal, England, France and the Netherlands.

In the nineteenth century, contact between the Muslims—and more broadly speaking, the Islamic World—and the American continent was quite limited though still existent. The actual migration as well as occasional visits of the Muslims from around the globe to America, took place in various phases.

In the nineteenth century, visits and immigration by the Muslims took place on the basis of invitations and employment opportunities available for top experts of the Islamic world. For instance, in 1856, the U.S. army employed a Muslim man by the name of Ḥājī ʿAlī to breed camels for the army in Arizona and California. ʿAlī was thus invited to America, where he later became a U.S. citizen and permanent resident.

The first groups of immigrants from Islamic countries entered the United States after the American Civil War from 1875 till about 1912 before the outbreak of World War I. The majority of them were Christians from Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon who had studied at missionary schools in the Middle East and had migrated to America mainly due to economic and religious reasons. Yet there were also Muslims among them, not only from the mainstream Sunni and Shia branches, but also from the ʿAlawī community in Syria as well as the Druze in Lebanon.

The second wave of migrations from the Islamic world to America took place after the end of World War I, and concurred with the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Due to restrictions in numbers imposed by U.S. Immigration laws—which favoured immigrants primarily from Eropean countries—the population of Muslims entering America remained small in that period.

The third wave of migrations began in the 1930's. According to the new U.S. immigration laws, Muslims residing in the United State were permitted to sponsor their family members and relatives to become permanent residents. The fourth wave, during which a large and significant number of Muslims, particularly from the Middle East, immigrated to America began at the end of World War II and continued till the 1960's. The majority of them were merchants, university students, tradesmen and technicians in various fields, and their reasons for immigrating varied from economic to socio-cultural to academic.

With new amendments in U.S. immigration laws in 1965, race and nationality lost their predominance as criteria in the immigration selection process; instead what was considered was the country's need for different

technical skills and managerial expertise, as well as its economic and developmental requirements. Such amendments provided an opportunity for skilled Muslims around the world to immigrate to the United States.

This led to the fifth and final phase of Muslim immigration to America, beginning in the mid 1960's until the present, where the greatest wave of Muslims from the Islamic world migrated to the United States, particularly from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, the Arab countries, Palestine, Turkey and parts of North Africa. It was not only the economic opportunities available in America that encouraged many Muslims to move, but also the internal developments within the Muslim world itself. The wars between the Arab countries and Israel in 1967 and 1973, the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s, and the occupation of various Islamic countries by European powers, such as the occupation of Afghanistan by the Red Army of the former Soviet Union, played a major role in accelerating the trend of Muslims migrating to America.

More recently, other world events have had an impact on Muslim migration patterns including Israel's invasions of Lebanon and Palestine and its occupation of those two countries, the two recent wars in Iraq, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the sudden independence of the former Soviet Republics from the hegemony of Kremlin, and the political developments in Africa, particularly in Morocco. For instance, in the mid 1970's, and before the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the number of Iranians that lived in America for various reasons was no more than 70,000 out of which over 50,000 were university students. During the three decades that has passed since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the number of Iranians living in the United States has reached some one million, only a small fraction of which are Iranian Jews.

Other factors, including the rapid growth of tele-communication and transportation means as well as the growing job market in the academic and university sectors have also contributed to the large numbers of Muslims moving to America, despite the negative aftermath of the tragic events of 9-11.

The Shīʿā Presence in America

It is estimated that twenty percent of the Muslim population of America belong to the Shīʿā *Ithna-Asherī* school of thought. The majority of these are Iranians, whose numbers are estimated at one million. Others are from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Azerbaijan, Taji-

kistan, Turkmenistan and Syria, while a small fraction are from other Islamic countries.

The population of Shīʿās in America drastically increased between 1950 and 1970 due the the large numbers of university students from Iran, Lebanon and Iraq. However, it was only after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran that their presence as a separate entity within the folds of Islam was noted. Of course, the success of the Islamic Revolution also created an awakenng within the Muslim world and played an important role in furthering the Islamic revival movement in other parts of the world. During this period, the Shīʿās in America were politically active and groups such as the Association of Muslim Students, headed largely by Iranian immigrants, played a very important role in mobilizing the Muslims and in enlightening the U.S. public during the course of the Islamic Revolution.

Islam within the Afro-American Communities

The history of Muslim Africans in America dates back to the early seventeenth century, when Africans would be forcibly uprooted from their homeland and shipped to the American colonies in what became known as the "Atlantic Slave Trade." Many of them were originally Muslims, but were forced to hide their faith or convert to Christianity, adopting a new name in the process. Alex Haley, in his famous novel *Roots*, traces the story of an African Muslim slave named Kunta Kinte and his forced relocation from Gambia to America. The strenuous and heart-rending journeys of other Muslim slaves, such as Muḥammad Yeylani, are documented and preserved in various libraries including the Central Library of Georgia State University. Due to their conversions and the Christianization of their names, their Islamic heritage is often forgotten.

It is only in the early twentieth century that Islam as a social phenomenon among the Afro-American population entered the public arena when it was coupled with ideas of "Black nationalism" and the civil-rights movement in America. This was perhaps first publicized by Wallace Fard Muhammad in 1930 who established an organization for Afro-American Muslims in Detroit, Michigan called 'the Nation of Islam' (NOI). From 1935 to 1975, the NOI was led by Elijah Muhammad who was responsible for turning it into a national organization with 75 different centers across the country. Although initially part of the movement, Malcolm X (an initial chosen by him to refer to the fact that most Afro-Americans were unaware of their own heritage) later separated himself from NOI after a trip to Saudi Arabia to perform the *ḥajj* where he realized that the "Black separatist" vi-

sion and theology of the Nation of Islam was quite different from that of mainstream Sunni Islam. Instead, he formed the Afro-American Unity Organzation but was assisinated soon after in 1965.

As for the NOI, it continued until Elijah Muhammad's own death in 1975, whereupon his son, Warith Deen Muhammad, attempted to steer it away from his father's theology and black separatist views and renamed the organization 'Muslim American Society'. In 1978, Louis Farrakhan revived a reconstituted Nation of Islam based on the original theology of Wallace Fard Muhammad and his own mentor, Elijah Muhammad and has been its leader since. Due to his views and some of his comments about various groups, Farrakhan has become a controversial figure in the media. Nevertheless, he has associated himself with other prominent African American leaders and was responsible for organizing the Million Man March in 1995 as well as the Million More Movement in 2005, in which he was able to mobilize large numbers of Afro-Americans. He has been a critic of American society, its foreign policy and its blind support of the Zionist Israeli regime. In fact, his harsh stance against Isreal has often put him at odds with the Zionist lobby in the United States.

The Nation of Islam has become highly publicized through the media, a fact which has given rise to the popular assumption that most African Americans are members of the Nation of Islam. However, estimates suggest that out of the 2.5 million African American Muslims living in the United States, only between 30,000 and 70,000 belong to the Nation of Islam. The majority of the Afro-American community belong to one of the mainstream Sunni schools of thought, while a portion of them to the mainstream Shī'ā school.

In recent decades, the influence of Islam among the Afro-American community has been far more intense than the influence of any other religion and faith. A study conducted in 2005 suggests that of the 20,000 non-Muslim Americans who become interested in Islam, 63% are of African heritage while 27% are of Caucasian descent. The Islamic identity of many African Americans is easily identified by their names, and today one can find many a prominent figure in sports, entertainment, politics and other spheres who are Muslims of African heritage.

Muslim Organizations in America

The political, social, cultural, vocational and economic organizations and administrative bodies of Muslim Americans can be broadly categorized into two types. The first type includes organizations that are meant to sat-

isfy the needs of a particular ethnic group of Muslims and are often funded and subsidized by Islamic governments or other foreign institutions. An example is the Arab Society Center for Economic and Social Services. Within this category one can also mention the local organizations that cater to a specific schools of thought within Islam, such as the *Ḥanafī*, *Mālikī*, *Shāfiʿī*, *Ḥanbalī*, *Shīʿā Ithna-ʿAsharī*, as well as all other smaller Islamic sects, such as the *Ismāʿīlī* and the *Aḥmadiyyah*, each of which have their own particular centers and engage in their own socio-cultural activities.

The first mosques in the United States were built during the first two decades of the twentieth century and include the one built by Albanian Muslims in Minnesota in 1915. As the population of Muslims grew in the United States, so too did the number of mosques, such that by the early twenty-first century, more than 1,200 mosques have been erected in the various U.S. cities. The number of part-time and full-time primary and high schools in which the Qurʾān is taught, is increasing, and today there are over 1,000 such academic centers throughout the United States. In addition to mosques and schools, there are more than several hundred active Islamic charity funds and endowment foundations that play important roles in offering social, health, family and academic services to the Muslims in America.

The second type of administrative bodies include organizations that are more ethnically inclusive yet have a specific mandate or goal that is common to all Muslims regardless of their cultural background. The Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is an example of this. A particular feature of the Muslim experience in America is that they are often forced to interact with Muslims of other ethnicities. This often leads to a sense of cooperation and mutual understanding, as well as a shared notion of being Muslim in a largely non-Muslim environment.

The Muslim Ring of North America is another Islamic association that was founded by a group of South Asian Muslims during the 1970's and has had some social activities in recent years. One of their periodicals, the *International Message*, is distributed throughout the United States and Canada, and it aims to propagate the Islamic identity of American Muslims, to facilitate the achievement of Islamic ideals, and to debate the issues of mutual concern for Muslims internationaly. Similarly, the U.S. Muslims' Society, which was initially established by Arab students and graduates of American universities, has launched broad-scale activities in recent decades including their publication, the *U.S. Muslims' Magazine*.

The Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) was established in 1994 and its main goal and major activities are focused on broadening the level of public awareness about the realities of Muslims in America. They are also involved in highlighting the rights of Muslims in the United States as well as advocating and seeking justice on behalf of Muslims who have been discriminated against in one form or another.

Other Islamic organizations, working parallel with CAIR, include the Council for General Islamic Affairs and the Union of U.S. Muslims, whose activities attempt to promote Islamic solidarity and to improve public awareness regarding the Muslims in America. They also encourage Muslims to take part in public and regional elections and to participate and cooperate in the political, social and cultural spheres of America.

In terms of academic activities, the International Institue of Islamic Thought, established a few decades ago by the Palestinian Ismāʿīl al-Farūqī in Washington D.C., is an example of the scientific-cultural activities pursued by Muslims in the United States. The institute has, so far, published numerous works on Islamic culture, Islamic history and Muslims society in America. Today, one of the objectives of the institute is to present an Islamic version of the social sciences.

Another active Islamic organization in the United States is the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) which initially evolved from the Association of Muslim Students. Its branches include the Islamic Association of Scientists and Engineers, the Islamic Association of Medical Doctors and Physicians, and the Islamic Association of Social Scientists. One of the major activities of ISNA is sponsoring an annual conference, which is attended by some 30,000 Muslims.

Socio-Economic Condition of American Muslims

Comparative studies conducted on social and economic aspects of the Muslim community in America and that of other minorities shows that the average level of a Muslim's academic studies is 14 years, which is higher than the level of academic studies of other minorities. In general, the average Muslim in the United States will complete at least two years of university.

The income level of a Muslim family in the United States is higher than the average income of a Spanish- or Caucasian- American family. Interestingly, the average annual income level of Iranians in the United States is over $65,000 which is higher compared to other ethnic communities in the United States. Generally speaking, the level of academic studies, income

and employment among the Muslim communities is, on the whole, higher than comparative indexes of other immigrant minorities living in America. It should be noted that these statistics exclude the status of the U.S. Jewish society whose members immigrated to America long ago.

The statistics also show that the income, property ownership and academic level of the Muslims have been increasing in recent years. For instance, in 1995, the average income level of a Muslim residing in the United States was $51,966; today this amount has increased to $55,958. An average of 5.59% of Muslims residing in the United States today own houses, an increase of a full percent from a decade ago. It is also noteworthy that Muslims reside in districts and neighbourhoods where the academic level is considered high.

In this respect, the situation of Iranian Muslims residing in America is noteworthy for they seem to fare better than other ethnic Muslim communities in the U.S. The average income level of the residents of districts where the Iranians reside is well over $70,000. Moreover, 63% of American Iranians are house-owners and 46% of them are university graduates. There are no precise and reliable statistics about the percentage of Iranians that have migrated to America or those that have become U.S. residents. For instance, U.S. Census records of 2000 estimated the population of Iranians at 370,000. However, this figure is much lower than a comparative statistic published in the same year by other national organizations, which estimated the population of Iranians residing in the United States to be between 800,000 and 1,100,000. A large percent of Iranians – between 300,000 and 600,000 – live in Southern California. In 2006, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Interests Section had some 400,000 dossiers on the status of the Iranian families living in the United States, and according to these reports, the population of the Iranians residing in the United States is over one million strong. The vast majority of the Iranian Muslims belong to the *Shī'ā Ithna-'Asharī* school.

Despite the pressure imposed against Muslim immigrants residing in the United States, particularly after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the political activities of Muslims in the country have increased noticeably in the past four years. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Zogby Institute, a vast majority of Muslims believe the current situation provides the best opportunity for spreading awareness about Islam in the United States. As for the "Fight against Terror" campaign, the same opinion polls show that many Muslims in the country (at least thirty-three percent) believe that the United States is leading a campaign against the Islamic world and not just terrorism. Another conclusion from the Zogby polls is that there is a strong

tendency among Muslims to strive towards Islamic unity, and the actual establishment of broader Islamic political, social and cultural organizations seems to attest to the veracity of these conclusions.

Various other opinion polls, conducted by the Zogby Institute in recent years, show that as many as three-fourths of Muslims in America participate in philanthrophic activities, pay alms, and allocate a certain amount of their monthly and annual incomes to support charity funds. Forty-five percent of American Muslims have stated that they are voluntarily contributing to the social development affairs of Muslims. Based on the same polls, as many as ninety-five percent of American Muslim citizens support the U.S. Public Welfare Plan, which includes a national health project for all American citizens. Of course, the United States is the only major industrialized country in which there is no national public health service in effect for all its citizens. Ninety-five percent of American Muslims also believe that all types of racial discrimination in America must be eliminated while fifty-nine percent agree that environmental protection laws and directives must be ratified. Almost all American Muslims believe the government should support the deprived and poor social classes.

In terms of mosque attendance, the polls are not as encouraging. Twenty-nine percent of American Muslims take part in Friday Prayers, congregate in mosques and visit the Islamic centers in their neighborhoods. Only twenty-five percent of them participate in congregations at mosques and Islamic centers more than once a week.

Construction of mosques and Islamic centers, however, is on the rise. On August 1, 2005, the *Washington Post* published a cover story on Islamic centers in Virginia, Maryland. According to it, the number of large mosques in that state – mosques with a construction budget of at least two million dollars – has increased over the years. Over 300,000 Muslims live in the suburbs of Washington, where most of the mosques are large enough to accommodate a congregation of a thousand Muslims at a time. In the United States, just as in Europe, not only is the population of Muslims increasing, rather, the inclination of the followers of other religions to convert to Islam is much greater than their inclination to accept any other religious or non-religious doctrines.

Presently Muslims make up 5% of the population of Europe, and according to a report published in the July 15th issue of the *Financial Times*, the population of Muslims in Europe would double within two decades. According to the same report, 5% of the population of Germany, 3% of the population of Denmark, 4% of the population of Sweden, 5.5% of the population of the Netherlands, over 8% of the population of France and

5% of the population of Switzerland are Muslims. Other European countries, too, have Muslim minorities, in addition to 50% of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina and a vast majority of the Albanians that are Muslims.

"Towards new frontiers" was a motto chanted by the United States in their endeavor to expand their geographical, political, cultural and economic hegemony throughout the world. Today it is the Muslims who, through immigration, are conquering new frontiers and spreading the influence of Islam outside of the Muslim world. Very few American intellectuals would have contemplated a few decades ago that America would become an appropriate cradle for nurturing Islamic activities and culture. The various developments on the international scene, the rapid growth of information technology, transportation and telecommunications, the economic and political developments within the Islamic world, and the ever-increasing awareness of Islam have come together to place American Muslims at a historic crossroad. The significant growth of the Muslim population in the United States provides a good opportunity for the Islamic community there to think twice about the challenges which they are grappling with in the contemporary world and about the role that Islam can play inside the largest military and economic power of the world.

التقريب

التوجّه التقريبي في مجمع البيان

الاستاذ عبد الكريم بي آزار شيرازي

الطبرسي في تفسيره بمجمع البيان صنع نموذجاً مثالياً للمدرسة الدينية. المقال تناول موضوع التوازن والشمولية لهذا التفسير ممّا جعله لا لان يكون موضع قبول واستخدام علماء الاسلام من المذاهب كافة بل عملياً أصبح نموذجاً لهم. ومع الاشارة الى مسؤولية كبار علماء حول العالم دعى الى الاستلهام من هذا الاثر والاستعانة به لاجل لمّ شمل الامة نحو القران وسنة.

الكلمات الرئيسة: التفسير، الوحدة الاسلامية، أثر يتجاوز الطائفية، علماء الوحدة، الحوار بين الشيعة والسنة.

التواجد الاسلامي في امريكا

حميد مولانا استاذ جامعة واشنطن

الخلاصة: برغم أنّ هجرة المسلمين بنحو واسع الى امريكا بدأت في القرن التاسع عشر وبالخصوص في القرن العشرين الاّ أنّ هناك بعض المصادر ترجّح تواجد المسلمين في هذه القارة قبل رحلة كولومبوس المشهورة باتجاه العالم الجديد. المقال ينظر الى المجتمع الاسلامي في امريكا من وجهة نظر ديموغرافية وتاريخية وتنظيمية واجتماعية واقتصادية، وحاول دراسة عينات وموارد مختلفة من هجرة المسلمين الى امريكا وتركيبتهم الاثنية، وتناول بالبحث عدة منظمات اسلامية مهمة. كما وضع اللمسات على التواجد الشيعي مضافاً الى المجتمعات الافريقية في الولايات المتحدة. ثم انتهى الى مناقشة الوضع الاجتماعي الاقتصادي للمسلمين المقيمين في امريكا.

الكلمات الرئيسة: المسلمون في امريكا، الهجرة الى الولايات المتحدة، المسلمون الافريقيون في امريكا، الشيعة المسلمون في امريكا، المؤسسات الاسلامية في امريكا، وضع المسلمين الاجتماعي الاقتصادي في امريكا.

المترجم: الشيخ تحسين البدري

خلاصة المقالات

الاندماج وجمالية الحلية المعمارية الجديدة: تطوّر فن العمارة الاسلامي

اعداد وتقويم: علي سبزعليان، اقتباس من مقال لوجدان علي تحت عنـــوان: (دور الفـــن الاسلامي في الحوار بين الثقافات)

الخلاصة: تطوّر فن العمارة الاسلامي بعد حلول الاسلام مباشرة، وكـــان البنـــاء المقـــدّس للمسجد هو أوّل تجلّيات هذا الفن، وبرغم أنّ بناء المسجد كان متأثراً بفن البنـــاء مـــا قبـــل الاسلام الاّ أنّه سرعان ما تبلور فن يعتمد مبادئه الذاتية وبجمالية فريدة موحـــاة مـــن تلـــك المبادىء. هذا المقال يعرض قضية تطور فن العمارة الاسلامي كما هو مشـــهود في المســـاجد القديمة التي يعود تاريخها الى القرن السابع والثامن. ثم ينتهي الى نتائج حول موضوع العلاقة بين الاسلام واوربا والدور الذي يمكن أن يلعبه هذا الفن.

الكلمات الرئيسة: الفن الاسلامي، فن العمارة الاسلامي، المسجد، قبة الصـــخرة، مســـجد دمشق الكبير، مسجد سامراء الكبير، مسجد قرطبة الكبير، العلاقة بين الاسلام وأوربا.

محمد جواد مغنية فقيه معاصر

الخلاصة: برغم التحديات والموانع التي واجهت الشيخ محمد جواد مغنية ووقفت أمام طريقـــه نحو تعلّم العلوم الدينية استطاع أن يبرز في هذا المجال ليصبح الفقيه البارز في لبنان خلال القرن الاخير. دوّن أكثر من ستين كتاباً وفي مجالات مختلفة، منها: أهمية الوحدة بين المذاهب. والمقال عبارة عن سرد لسيرة الشيخ وأفكاره.

الكلمات الرئيسة: محمد جواد مغنية، العلماء اللبنانيون، الحوزة، وحدة المذاهب، الاصـــلاح، الصهيونية.

التقريب

العالم في عيون المسلمين

اعداد: يورغن تودنهوفر (عشر نظريات في لماذا انت تقتل يا زيد؟)

الخلاصة: تلقّى المسلمون خلال المائتي عام الماضية غاية أشكال التعسّف والظلـــم مـــن قبـــل الاستعمار. حطّ من شأنهم واسيئت سمعتهم في وسائل الاعلام. المقال مقتطف مـــن كتــاب ليورغن تودنهوفر تحت عنوان (لماذا تقتل يا زيد؟) سعى فيه لعرض العالم من وجهة نظر مسلم. يسرد صاحب المقال عشرة رؤى ونظريات أملاً منه في تحدي بعض ما علق في أذهان العمـــوم من تصورات عن المسلمين، من قبيل الربط بين الاسلام والارهاب. وينتهي صـــاحب المقـــال بدعوة الحكومات الغربية للتركيز على فنون الدبلوماسية والحكمة بدلاً عن فنون الحـــــرب في تصنيف السياسة الخارجية. كما أمل الكاتب من خلال هذه الرؤى العشرة أن تفتح نافذة تطل على طريق آخر ينظر من خلاله الى المسلمين.

الكلمات الرئيسة: العالم الاسلامي، الاستعمار، الاسلام والغرب، العلاقة الامريكية الايرانية، الحرب العراقية، الارهاب، التسامح في الاسلام.

أفكار حول الطريق نحو التضامن الاسلامي

محمد العاص امام جمعة مسجد واشنطن

الخلاصة: من المسلّم به أنّ العالم الاسلامي يعاني من الانقســـامات السياســـية والاقتصـــادية والتفاوت الاقتصادي والثقافي وآفاق التفكير الثقافية الضيّقة والطائفية، والكاتب في هذا المقال يدعو الى الرجوع الى فكرة التعارف الاسلامي في هذه الامة. وحدّد أربعة مجـــالات لتطبيـــق فكرة التعارف هي: التعليم والسفر والحج واللغة. وانتهى بنصائح سياسية واقتصادية كتمهيـــد للتضامن الاسلامي.

الكلمات الرئيسة: التضامن الاسلامي، التعارف، التعليم الاسلامي، الحج، اللغة العربية.

خلاصة المقالات

المصلحة الاسلامية ووحدة المسلمين في منهج الامام علي(ع)

الاستاذ الدكتور شهاب الدين الحسيني

الخلاصة: بعد رحيل الرسول الاكرم(ص) حلّت بالامة الاسلامية ظـــروف تســودها عــدم الاستقرار بسبب مسألة الخلافة. ووسط مختلف الاداعاءات المتناقضة حول هذه القضية ومـــا تضمّه هكذا خلافات من قابلية للتفجّر يحضى المنهج السامي الذي التزمه الامـــام علـــي(ع) بدرجة عالية من الاهمية والصلاح. فبرغم ادّعائه الحق في الخلافة جاهد للحفاظ علـــى رفعـــة الاسلام، وكان واعياً حقاً والى أقصى مستوى لاهمية المصالح الاسلامية العليا والعامة وتقديمها على أي مصلحة اخرى. وعليه ينبغي تفسير عدم ولاء الامام علي للخليفـــة الاول في البدايـــة وتأخر ابداء الولاية له في هذا المضمار. والمقال قسم من دراسة مفصّلة حول حـــوادث تلـــك البرهة المضطربة، موضحاً الملابسات والسياسات والمباديء التي رسّمت الحـــوادث مضـــافاً الى الدور المحوري للامام علي(ع) في هذا المجال.

الكلمات الرئيسة: خليفة، الامام علي، الخلفاء، وحدة المسلمين، المصالح الاسلامية، أصحاب الرسول، الوحدة بين الشيعة والسنة، التعاون بين الشيعة والسنة، الجدل الشيعي السني.

الاتحاد والتضامن الاسلامي

حميد آدامس

الخلاصة: الاسلام دين موحّد تسمو به الحضارة الفريدة، وبرغم وجود عدة مذاهب تبلـــورت بدوافع سياسية وايديولوجية أو فقهية الاّ أنّ الحاجة الى التضامن بين المسلمين اليـــوم في غايـــة الاهمية. المقال يسعى لمناقشة بعض الاختلافات والمشتركات بين المذاهب ويشـــجع المســـلمين للبحث عن أرضية مشتركة بينهم. كما يدعو العلماء من المدارس كافة لبلورة تصوّر ديني لحل المشاكل العالقة، وفي هذا المجال يدعو الجمهورية الاسلامية والمنظمات الاسلامية مثـــل مجمـــع التقريب بين المذاهب للمساعدة في سبيل ايجاد الوحدة المطلوبة.

الكلمات الرئيسة: الوحدة الاسلامية، العلاقات الشيعية السنية، أباضي، زيدي، مذاهب، فقه، حديث، القيادة الاسلامية، الثورة الاسلامية في ايران.

خلاصة المقالات

ميتافيزيقة الحوار بين الاديان: التصوّر الصوفي لعالمية الرسالة القرانية
رضا شاهكاظمي

الخلاصة: يركّز المقال على القرآن كمصدر لوحي الحوار بين أتباع العقائد المختلفة. القـرآن ظاهرة فريدة قياساً للكتب السماوية الاخرى، وخلافاً لغيره من هذه الكتب يدعو بصـــراحة للحوار ليس بين المجتمعات وأتباع المعتقدات فحسب بل يعتبر التنوّع الديني والعقائــدي مــن الامور المقدّرة. وفي النتيجة يرى الصحة ـ ولو النسبية ـ للسبل و الشــرائع المختلفــة الــتي عرضت في البحث القراني كجوه مختلفة للواحد المطلق والدين الذي نجد وحيه حاصلاً لــدى كل البشرية. المقال عرض للايات الاساسية ذات الصلة بالموضوع من وجهة نظر محددة. وهذا ممّا قبله الراسخون في العقيدة من علماء الاسلام (العرفاء).

الكلمات الرئيسة: حوار بين الاديان، التفسير الصوفي، تأويل القرآن، الوحدة المتعالية للاديان، عالمية الدين، الاسلام العالمي.

أصناف الوحدة في القرآن والعوامل الاساسية للفرقة
الاستاذ محمد واعظ زادة الخراساني الامين العام السابق لمجمع التقريب بين المذاهب.

الخلاصة: من الواجب على المسلمين أن يناضلوا من أجل الامة الواحدة بنفس المستوى الــذي يجب عليهم أن يناضلوا من أجل التوحيد وعبادة الله الواحد. ولا يتحقّق هذا الاّ عندما تتّبــع جميع الفرق منهجاً سياسياً واجتماعياً وايديولوجياً موحداً ويعملون جميعاً تحت مظلـــة نظـــام اقتصادي وسياسي موحّد. وعبء تأسيس هكذا اُمة ملقى على عاتق جميع المسلمين. والعوامل الاساسية للتفرّق هي: السياسة المحفوفة بالمخاطر واستغلال المذاهب والقومية.

الكلمات الرئيسة: الوحدة الاسلامية، السياسة، الفرق الاسلامية، التمذّهب الاسلامي، تاريخ المذاهب الاسلامية.

التقريب

رسالة متخصصة تعنى بقضايا التقريب بين المذاهب و

وحدة الامة الإسلامية