



CONTEMPORARY
APPROACHES TO
THE QUR'AN
AND SUNNAH

Edited by MAHMOUD AYOUB



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FOREWORD

Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Sunnah is a collection of specially selected papers presented at the 2008 Summer Institute for Scholars convened at the IIIT headquarters in Herndon, Virginia, USA July 15 to August 15, 2008. The essays making up the collection are not random but focused discussions, divided into four parts, and comprised of diverse writings on various significant subjects relating to the Qur'an and Sunnah, of common and intellectual interest as well as relevancy.

Inaugurated in 2008 and now in its fourth year, the purpose of the Summer Institute is to bring together and engage senior and young scholars with a particular interest or expertise in Qur'anic Studies or the Sunnah in focused, organized discussions of topics related to a contemporary understanding and articulation of issues involving the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The specific objectives of the Summer Institute are to:

- Develop methods or approaches of understanding the Qur'an and Sunnah that are both authentic and relevant to contemporary realities and sensibilities in the West and the Muslim world.
- Suggest means and instruments of engaging the scholarly community, the religious community, the media and the public at large in learning processes, debates or experiences that make intelligible the wisdom of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and their relevance to contemporary human affairs.
- Broaden the scope of conversations on issues pertaining to the Qur'an and Sunnah through the inclusion of social and physical scientists beside the scholars of the traditional Islamic disciplines.

Foreword

We hope that both general and specialist readers benefit from the perspectives offered and the overall issues examined in the book.

Where dates are cited according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) they are labelled AH. Otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and labelled CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered modern. English translations taken from Arabic references are those of the author.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. The Institute's programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last thirty years have resulted in the publication of more than four hundred titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into other major languages.

We express our thanks and gratitude to the contributors for their cooperation throughout the various stages of production. We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the IIIT London Office and all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book including, Shiraz Khan, Dr. Maryam Mahmood, Tahira Hadi, Sara Mirza and Salma Mirza. May God reward them for all their efforts.

IIIT LONDON OFFICE
January 2012

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH are the two primary sources of Muslim faith, life, law and morality. They are as well the framework of the Islamic worldview and civilization. The Qur'an is believed by all faithful Muslims to be literally the Book of God, and the Sunnah, or life-example of the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS),* is the key to the understanding and interiorization of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is for Muslims the foundation of their faith and the Sunnah is the framework of their morality. Together they constitute the two sources of the law (Shari'ah) of God, which is humanity's guide to prosperity and happiness in this life and to the bliss of the hereafter. Both the Qur'an and Sunnah were revealed by God. The Qur'an, being the divine communication or revelation (*wahy*), was sent down to the Prophet through Gabriel, the angel of revelation. The Sunnah, being divine inspiration (*ilhām*), was taught and instituted by the Prophet Muhammad. God says, "He it is who sent a messenger to the unlettered people from among themselves to recite to them His revelations, purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom..." (62:2). The Qur'an is the Book (*Kitāb*) and the Sunnah is the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) with which Muhammad, the last prophet of God was sent to guide humankind to the straight way (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), which leads to God.

After the Prophet's death, 'Ā'ishah, the "mother of the faithful" was asked to describe the Prophet's character, or moral conduct (*khulq*). She replied, "His character was the Qur'an." During his life, the Prophet Muhammad was the living embodiment of the Qur'an. After his death, his Sunnah continued and will continue to live in the life of the Muslim Ummah till the day of Resurrection.

*ṢAAS – *Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*: May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

Although the Qur'an and Sunnah are materially and formally two independent sources, they are inextricably bound in a dynamic relationship. The rulings and precepts (*ahkām*) of the Qur'an constitute the law (*sharʿ*) of God. They were supplemented by the precepts of the Sunnah, which possess equal authority with the precepts of the Qur'an. The authority of the Prophet's Sunnah is legislated in the Qur'an, as God says: "He who obeys the Messenger would in fact obey God..." (4:80). Even more emphatically God commands all Muslims, "Whatever the Messenger gives you, that you must take, and whatever he forbids you, you must desist therefrom...." (59:7).

In answer to this divine command, and realizing the need to remind others of it, the IIIT resolved to convene an annual Summer Institute for scholars and students to study the Book of God and Sunnah of His Prophet. To date, the Summer Institute has met twice: in July and August of 2008 and 2009. The eleven papers included in this volume constitute some of the proceedings of the first Summer Institute, 2008. Proceedings of future colloquiums will also be published. We hope that these annual volumes will serve as a reminder to Muslims and non-Muslims of the place of the Qur'an and Sunnah in the life of Muslim societies around the world, despite their cultural, racial and linguistic diversity.

The eleven papers comprising this volume deal with a variety of subjects. While most of them treat in one way or another the Qur'an and Sunnah, one as we shall see, in reality is not related to the main subject of this book. Yet included for reasons that will be explained below.

Since there is no clear continuity among the articles under discussion, I arranged them in terms of their specific approach or subject. I therefore placed the first two papers which concentrate on a Qur'anic science or concept together. The next five papers deal with the Qur'an in relation to non-Qur'anic disciplines. These are followed by three papers specifically dealing with the Sunnah and its juridical application, and one unrelated final paper which closes this volume.

Therefore, this book comprises four parts. The first part consists of two papers: Israr Ahmad Khan's essay examining the important issue of abrogation (*naskh*) in the Qur'an, and Aisha Musa's dealing with issues of just war, jihad, and fighting (*qitāl*) in the Qur'an.

The next five papers forming part two deal with the Qur'an in relation to other disciplines, such as theology, broadly speaking, inter-scriptural relations and natural and social sciences: "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an" by the editor of this work; Dr. Khaled Troudi's examination of the relationship of the Qur'an with the earlier Abrahamic Scriptures; Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer's, "Exegesis, Social Science and the Place of the Jews in the Qur'an" in which he relies on both classical Qur'an commentaries and contemporary non-exegetical sources; Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad's "Qur'an and Science," in which he studies in some depth the relationship of the Qur'an to science; and finally Daoud Nassimi's study of the English translations of certain Qur'anic verses containing particular rulings and injunctions. The themes he analyzes are the Friday prayer and the veil or *ḥijāb*.

The next two papers forming part three constitute a somewhat coherent unit. Sami Catovic examines the significance of the actual text (*matn*) analysis of the Prophetic Hadith traditions, and Mohamad Adam El Sheikh discusses the social and juridical status of divorced women and their right to "Post-Divorce Financial Support."

The last paper of this volume by Khaleel Mohammed forming part four is simply an independent study of an important subject. It is an appeal to Muslim scholars to evolve a coherent Muslim approach to western studies of Islam. Our reason for including it is not dependent on its subjects or themes, but on the fact that in its own right, it is a good contribution to Islamic studies. Moreover, it touches on the Qur'an from the perspectives of western Orientalist and modern scholars. Finally, in its own way, it also touches on interfaith dialogue, whose significance to the life of Muslims in the West is undeniable.

The Qur'an is an inexhaustible source of study and it is clear that our relationship with the Book, meaning its message, should always be one of depth and wise discernment, carefully observed and constantly maintained. The Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad, is not in essence a body of religious literature, but a living and dynamic force which all Muslims ought to use as the model for their own lives. Prophet Muhammad was a loving father, a just and loving husband, a political leader, but above all "the Messenger of God to all of humankind..." (7:158). He is the Imam and role model for all Muslims. Following his

Editor's Introduction

noble example, or Sunnah, is the Islamic quest for achieving prophetic existence. We offer this humble effort as a little candle to illuminate our way to this noble quest.

MAHMOUD AYOUB

December 20th, 2009

PART I

Arguments for Abrogation in the Qur'an: A Critique

ISRAR AHMAD KHAN

INTRODUCTION

THE Qur'an is perhaps the most widely consulted scripture in the world, and also perhaps the most manipulated with regards to source of law. *Fuqahā'* and *mufasssirūn* have provocatively subjected the Qur'an to progressively more complex interpretative and legislative contemplation. One group of scholars uses the Qur'an to substantiate its own set of views and rebut others whilst another uses the Qur'an to authenticate its particular thoughts and condemn the approach of rivals. Theological and legislative debates revolving around the Qur'an have caused the once united Muslim Ummah to divide into various camps which most of the time have been at odds with each other over most issues.

One such issue related to the Qur'an is that of abrogation. Muslim scholars in general, and *fuqahā'* and *mufasssirūn* in particular, have been fairly aggressive and hostile towards one another over the question of abrogation in the Qur'an. The opinion of the '*ulamā'*' can be predominantly divided into two camps, those favoring abrogation and those negating it, with both insisting upon the validity of their own respective opinion on the subject. Fifteen hundred years later (that is since the revelation of the Qur'an) the dispute over the issue of abrogation is as fresh as it might have been during its early stage.

Logically speaking, only two probabilities can exist concerning the claim of the two groups: either both groups of scholars have mistaken the issue of abrogation or only one of them stands for the truth. In no

way can both be right. Innumerable books have been written on this subject. Yet, the matter remains unsettled. The basic factor for this lies in the traditional approach of scholars who almost abhor a rational and critical approach on anything pertaining to the Qur'an. This study takes a rational and critical look at the arguments for or against the doctrine of abrogation in the Qur'an.

ABROGATION IN THE QUR'AN: DEFINITION

The original Arabic term for abrogation is *al-naskh*. In defining this term, Muslim scholars have stated so many things, leaving the term undefined in a categorical manner. Anyone who reads the works of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224 AH), al-Naḥḥās (d. 377 AH), Makkī (d. 437 AH), Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543 AH), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH), al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), and al-Dehlawī (d. 1176 AH) on the issue of abrogation issue will be left confused regarding its definition.

Ibn al-Jawzī, to some extent, may be considered the first to offer a clear definition of abrogation in the Qur'an:

Al-naskh literally signifies two things: (1) removal and lifting up; for example, the sun removes (carries *naskh*) the shadow because with the light of the sunrise the shadow recedes; one such example is also in the Qur'an – 'Allah removes (applies *naskh*) what Satan casts in' and (2) copying a document in another place, for example, they say that the book was copied; a Qur'anic example of this import is 'We had been documenting what you had been doing.' As for the application of *al-naskh* in Shari'ah (Islamic law), it signifies in the first sense because the lifting up of a command which was initially obligatory for the people denotes its removal with or without its replacement.¹

Al-Zurqānī was uncomfortable with the complicated approach of scholars in defining *al-naskh*. He found discussions on its meaning in sources of various nature (i.e. *tafsīr*, works on *al-naskh* etc.), and hence saw no wisdom in referring to them. He coined a definition of abrogation that he claimed more reasonable and closer to reality: "Removal of an Islamic command by a legally valid argument" (*raf' al-ḥukm al-shar'ī bi dalīl shar'ī*).² Subhi Salih deemed this definition the most

precise, and was not content with the controversies of Muslim scholars over the definition of abrogation.³

Ibn al-Jawzī has suggested five conditions for the occurrence of abrogation. First, the ruling in the abrogating verse and the abrogated verse should contradict each other. Second, the abrogated ruling should chronologically precede its abrogating ruling. This could be known either through divine statement or through historical information. Third, the abrogated ruling should have been initially part of Islamic law. Fourth, the abrogating ruling should also be a confirmed part of Islamic law. Fifth, the justification for an abrogating ruling should be either as strong as that of its abrogated ruling or stronger than that of the abrogated one. Where the strength of the abrogating in comparison to the abrogated one is tenuous, the abrogation will not occur.⁴

ARGUMENTS FOR ABROGATION IN THE QUR'AN

The proponents of abrogation do not seem to be very clear as to the arguments confirming the theory of abrogation in the Qur'an. The reason is very simple. A controversial approach to abrogation makes the proposed arguments controversial hence not altogether valid. Arguments advanced for abrogation are numerous due to the classification of abrogation into various categories. All these arguments are of two kinds, those strengthening the concept of abrogation in general, and those reinforcing the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur'an itself.

Regarding the validity of abrogation in normal life and in Islamic law, there is actually no controversy among Muslim scholars. Ironically, the advocates of abrogation focus more and more on this dimension of the issue, stressing the message that the Qur'an is not excepted from this general rule. This category of arguments is not within the purview of this study. The scope of this study is confined to the arguments for abrogation in the Qur'an. Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Zurqānī have both categorically mentioned all the probable arguments for abrogation in the Qur'an based on the Qur'anic verses, the opinions of the *Ṣaḥābah*, the views of the *Tābi'ūn*, and the claim of consensus.⁵

ARGUMENTS BASED ON QUR'ANIC VERSES

The verses quoted to corroborate the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur'an are (2:106), (2:269), (3:7), (4:160), (5:48), (13:39), (16:101), (17: 86), and (22:53). (2:106) reads: "We do not abrogate any verse or cause it to be forgotten but We bring another verse either similar to it or better than that...." This verse clearly states the occurrence or possibility of abrogation effected by God Himself. Undoubtedly, this verse forms a substantial evidence for abrogation. However, the question is whether this statement talks about abrogation within the Qur'an.

Does the word "*āyah*" invariably connote a verse of the Qur'an? To the defenders of abrogation, "*āyah*" does signify a verse of the Qur'an. The answer to this question is found in the Qur'an. In Qur'anic usage the word "*āyah*," its dual variant, and its plural form "*āyāt*" have been used 86 times, only once, and 296 times respectively. These usages do not signify just the simple meaning of "verse" of the Qur'an. The Qur'an uses "*ayah*" in the following shades of meaning: message of Allah (SWT),* (2:129), (2:252); mark (3:97); symptom (19:10); masterpiece (30:21), (36:33); lesson (10:92); miracle (20:22), (23:50); Qur'anic statement (3:7); revelation in the previous Scriptures (3:113); and irrefutable proof (30:22).

Verse 2:115 states, "And God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's Countenance...." Maintaining that the Prophet's facing toward Jerusalem in his prayers was in the light of this revelation seems a far-fetched idea. Ibn 'Abbās (RAA)** believed the verse came in response to the Jewish objection to the change of direction in prayer from Jerusalem to Makkah.⁶ The Prophet faced Jerusalem not only for around two years in Madinah but also in Makkah, right from the beginning of his mission, whereas (2:115) is a *Madanī* revelation.

*SWT – *Subhānahu wa Ta'ālā*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to God.

**RAA – *Raḍiyā Allāhu 'anhu* (May God be pleased with him).

(2:269) reads, “He who was granted wisdom was granted indeed an overflowing good....” This verse is used as argument for abrogation in the Qur'an based on Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation of it as follows: “Wisdom (*hikmah*) here signifies the understanding of the Qur'an's abrogating and abrogated rulings, that of its clear (*muḥkam*) and unclear (*mutashābih*) verses, that of its beginning and its ends, that of its lawful and unlawful, and its parables.”⁷ The report through which this statement is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās contains a defective chain of reporters. The narrator who reports from Ibn 'Abbās is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah who never met Ibn 'Abbās. A weak report cannot be used as an argument. It should be checked whether *hikmah* denotes knowledge of abrogation in the Qur'an. *Hikmah* literally connotes practical and methodological understanding of knowledge.

The Qur'an articulates the duties of the Last Prophet. One of his various tasks was to teach the Book and wisdom. If, as Ibn 'Abbās interprets, *hikmah* refers to, among other things, knowledge of abrogation in the Qur'an, the Prophet must have taught his followers which verses of the Qur'an were abrogating and which ones were abrogated. However, all the sources lack any such information on the Prophet's teaching his Companions about abrogated and abrogating verses in the Qur'an.

To attain the import of the word *hikmah* in the verse just cited (2:269), one has to read the entire context spread across verses (2:267–283). In these seventeen verses, three main messages are apparent: charity work is of great benefit for believers; usury-based monetary transaction is baneful for man; and monetary loans are to be properly documented and reliably testified. All these matters are financial. (2:269) is a part of that context. This particular verse communicates that understanding the objectives and advantages of these wealth-related acts is wisdom; one who understands it is ever prepared to be generous for the sake of Allah.

If those scholars who claim to have knowledge of abrogated verses in the Qur'an are indeed blessed with wisdom, they should have irrefutable arguments at their disposal. Conversely, proponents of abrogation in the Qur'an stand confused over how to surely identify and then justify abrogation in the Qur'an.

(3:7) reads, “He it is who bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, containing *āyāt muḥkamāt* that are the essence of the divine writ, and others that are *mutashābihāt*...” This verse refers to the two categories of the Qur’anic verses, *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. Aside from the original and allegorical imports of these two terms, Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Ḍaḥḥāk Ibn Muzāḥim, and others insist that the word *mutashābihāt* signifies abrogated *āyāt* in the Qur’an.⁸

This suggestion is difficult to accept and results in several problems. Allah makes clear that these two categories of *āyāt* are of a permanent nature; the *muḥkamāt* will forever remain *muḥkamāt* and the *mutashābihāt* will not change at any stage of time into non-*mutashābihāt*. Yet here in the abrogation system, the scholars keep changing their stand on the abrogated verses of the Qur’an. Does it, then, mean that *mutashābihāt* will keep changing its position to *muḥkamāt*? Is it fair to supersede the statement of Allah? An example may suffice to illustrate the point.

According to Ibn ‘Abbās, the following command in (2:180) is abrogated: “It is ordained for you, when death approaches any of you and he is leaving behind much wealth, to make bequests in favor of his parents and near of kin in accordance with what is fair: this is binding on all who are conscious of God.” Hence, this statement of the Qur’an must be considered as *mutashābih*. Yet to ‘Alī, ‘Ā’ishah, al-Sha‘bī, and al-Nakha‘ī, the same command (2:180) is not abrogated and hence is *muḥkam*.⁹ One should not refer to the same verse as *muḥkam* as well as *mutashābih*.

What is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās concerning the meaning of *mutashābihāt* as abrogated verses of the Qur’an is doubtful. Al-Ṭabarī has recorded Ibn ‘Abbās’s view through four chains of narrators (*sanad*). Two of these chains contain anonymous reporters and hence, these reports are weak. The two other chains are also defective due to the availability of weak reporters therein. In one chain the reporter reporting the view of Ibn ‘Abbās is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, who did not learn anything from Ibn ‘Abbās. Therefore, his report from Ibn ‘Abbās may not be considered reliable. The other chain has two unreliable reporters, Asbāṭ ibn Naṣr and Ismā‘īl al-Suddī. The view ascribed to al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim is also not based on reliable chains. Al-Ṭabarī has used five chains. All of them are weak due to the names of

Juwaybir, Salmah ibn Nubayt, Juwaybir, al-Ḥuṣayn ibn al-Farj, and Salmah ibn Nubayt respectively.

The word *mutashābihāt* means illustrative. In the Qur'an one finds mention of the life hereafter and many other things unseen to man. To describe such unseen elements God has used metaphoric language to bring the picture of the unseen close to human perception. All places in the Qur'an where unseen items, creations, and phenomena have been mentioned constitute *mutashābihāt*.¹⁰

(4:160) reads: "For the iniquity of [the Israelites] We made unlawful for them certain good things which had been lawful for them...." None but al-Zurqānī claims this verse speaks about the existence of abrogation in the Qur'an. He takes this position based on the phrase "which had been made lawful for them." For al-Zurqānī, the making of lawful into unlawful signifies abrogation.¹¹ It is certainly an occurrence of abrogation. But where did it occur, in the Qur'an or the Torah? There should not be any confusion over the meaning of verse (4:160). It indicates how the Israelites were punished due to their belligerent approach to their religion. In one such punishment, they were barred from utilizing certain things already lawful. Ibn 'Abbās states this verse (4:160) reminds us of the fact that the Israelites carried out some changes in the Torah, making certain things unlawful on their own.

The part in question of verse (5:48) reads: "...For every one of you We made a law and a way...." Does this verse in any way indicate the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur'an? For a vivid picture of this divine statement it is desirable to read not only the whole verse but also its preceding and succeeding verses. The translation of the whole verse is as follows:

And We revealed to you the Book with truth which confirms the Book before it and serves as its guardian: so judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires diverging from the truth that has come to you. For every one of you We made a law and a way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people but [His plan is] to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He who will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute.

This verse relays three main messages: the Qur'an represents the truth; the Qur'an is the only source of law for the people; and decision of any dispute is to be made in the light of the Qur'an, and not based on what exists in the previous scriptures. The occurrence of the word "truth" as the attribute of the Qur'an in the verse sends a message beyond any doubt that the Qur'an contains truth from every angle and in every single verse. To say that certain verses of the Qur'an are abrogated as to their practicability is tantamount to not accepting the Qur'an as the truth. This verse (5:48) and its preceding and succeeding verses give a repeated call to reject the stand of the Jews on the scriptures of God and to follow the last revealed scripture of Allah. The above clause of the verse, "For every one of you We made a law and a way" rather confirms that the previous laws revealed in the previous scriptures are no longer valid; and that the laws revealed in the Qur'an are the only valid provisions of law. Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib stressed that this verse refers to the abrogation of the previous prophets' laws and not to the laws in the Qur'an.¹²

(13:39) reads, "Allah annuls or confirms whatever He wills, for with Him is the source of all revelation," and is used as an argument for abrogation on the basis of a statement attributed to Ibn 'Abbās: "Allah replaces in the Qur'an whatever He wills to abrogate and retains whatever He wills not to abrogate. Both the abrogated and the abrogating are in the mother of the Book. All that are replaced as well as retained are in the Book."¹³ Qatādah ibn Di'āmah claims this verse conveys the same idea as (2:106) and talks about abrogation in the Qur'an, and that (13:39) also substantiates the theory of abrogation in the Qur'an.¹⁴ The chain through which Ibn 'Abbās's view has been reported seems to be defective due to the inclusion of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, who never benefited from Ibn 'Abbās. Qatādah probably based his opinion on Ibn 'Abbās's statement. This verse uses the word *maḥū*, which means effacement and total removal; wherever the *maḥū* takes place, nothing remains in place. Abrogation theory emphasizes that both the abrogating and the abrogated verse remain in the Qur'an. In that case, (13:39) should not speak about abrogation in the Qur'an.

If we read the whole of *Sūrah al-Ra'd* (13), we can see that the surah consoles the Prophet and his followers, and also rebuts various

suppositions developed by the opponents; i.e., the Quraysh. The above verse (13:39) forms an answer to the objection raised by the Quraysh that due to the presence of previous divine scriptures revealed to previous prophets, there did not arise any need for the new scripture. In answer it was stressed that God willed to efface the previous scriptures as the sources of law and send a new scripture, that is the Qur'an.¹⁵

"...Every fixed term (*ajal*) has had its *Kitāb*," is the last statement of the preceding verse (13:38). The statement in (13:39) connects to the previous one. In this way, (13:39) is not advocating the theory of abrogation but rather the prerogative of God to annul previous scripture and replace it with the Qur'an. Apart from this, the verse is a *Makkī* revelation; it is, then, wonderfully strange to suggest that this verse alludes to abrogation theory. The concept of abrogation surfaced only in Madinah where a new society based on Islamic laws was being developed.

(16:101) reads: "And when We substitute one revelation for another – and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages) – they say: 'You are but a forger': Nay, but most of them do not understand it!" This verse is taken as an argument for the progression in the commands of Allah through revelation in the Qur'an. This stand is untenable. This verse is a *Makkī* revelation. In *Makkī* revelations one may not find such progression in the laws. (16:101) itself refers to the observation of the Quraysh that Muhammad himself fabricated the messages in different ways and presented them in stages in the name of God. The Quraysh could not have raised the question of abrogation of laws in Makkah. This verse reminded the Quraysh that it was not Muhammad who revealed the Qur'an in stages but God Who knew very well what to reveal where and when in the Qur'an. Seyyed Mawdudi, while interpreting (16:101), observed that in *Makkī* revelations one could see the same message in different styles and arguments scattered at various places in the Qur'an. It was this revelation in stages which made the Quraysh assume that the Qur'an was Muhammad's own work; had it been from God, it would have been revealed all at once. He maintained that the *Makkī* revelations do not have the progression in Islamic laws.¹⁶

(17:86) reads: “If it were Our will, We could take away that which We have revealed to you: then would you find none to plead your case against Us.” Undoubtedly, this verse refers to the power of God to remove His own command, but it does not prove that God sent a revelation in the Qur’an and then lifted it away. The verse after it, “Except for mercy from your Lord; for His bounty on you is great” (17:87), reasserts that Allah out of His bounty on the Last Prophet would never take away what He had revealed to him. This verse speaks only of the possibility of abrogation and not the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur’an. In fact (17:86) forms part of an answer to a question raised by the Quraysh on behalf of the Jews in Madinah concerning the meaning of the “spirit.” The answer begins from verse (17:85): “They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: ‘The Spirit is of the command of my Lord. And you were not granted of this knowledge but very little,’” and ends with (17:87). The Spirit is actually revelation entirely at the discretion of Allah as to where, when, what, and to whom to send it down to. Makkī used (17:86) as the basis to claim that God had erased certain revelations of the Qur’an from the hearts and documents,¹⁷ which is gross speculation, and speculation or “conjecture can never be a substitute for truth” (10:36).

(22:52) reads: “Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before you, but, when he framed a desire, Satan cast something into his desire: but Allah cancels what Satan casts in, and He confirms His messages. Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.” It is obvious, even to a layman, that this verse refers to abrogation of something cast in the hearts of prophets by Satan, and not the abrogation of Qur’anic verses. Nevertheless, certain *mufassirūn*, while interpreting this verse, decided to do so in light of a story widely considered a forgery concerning the infamous satanic verses (which mentions Satan having put into the mouth of the Prophet some of his own verses admiring the Makkan gods of the Quraysh) as proof of how God had deleted these satanic insertions into revelation. These *Mufassirūn* it would seem forgot the assurance of God in verse 15:9 that, “We [without doubt] sent the Message to you step by step and We are responsible to safeguard it.” God’s promise to protect the Qur’an does not merely signify after it had been revealed but also before and during its revelation. In other

words to claim that Satan had somehow managed to interfere in the process of the revelation of *Sūrah al-Najm* (53) is to falsify the divine guarantee made in (15:9) that the revelation would be safe from any corruption whatsoever.

ARGUMENTS BASED ON THE VIEWS OF
THE *ṢAHĀBAH* AND *TĀBI'ŪN* SCHOLARS

While discussing the significance of abrogation in the Qur'an, advocates of abrogation quote the following three statements attributed to three *Ṣahābah*: 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās.

Statement 1: 'Umar said, "Ubay ibn Ka'b is the most knowledgeable among us on abrogation."¹⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī did not give the chain of narrators of this report, so its reliability cannot be ascertained. Apart from the problem of its authenticity, one need not construe into 'Umar's statement a reference to abrogation in the Qur'an. He simply praises Ubay's knowledge on the issue of abrogation but crucially does not state that Ubay was the most knowledgeable concerning abrogation *in the Qur'an*. Ubay ibn Ka'b in fact had knowledge of previous scriptures, and hence knew very well which commands of the Torah had been annulled by the Qur'an.

Statement 2: 'Alī's view is advanced in the form of a dialogue between him and a storyteller. 'Alī asks the latter whether he was aware of the abrogating (*al-nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*al-mansūkh*). When he answers in the negative, 'Alī warns him: "You destroyed yourself as well as others."¹⁹ In what way does this report constitute an argument in favor of abrogation in the Qur'an? Was the storyteller a teacher of the Qur'an whom 'Alī warned of the serious consequences of his ignorance of abrogation in the Qur'an? Was there any reference in 'Alī's question to abrogation in the Qur'an? Indeed, the storyteller was not a teacher of the Qur'an but, as his title 'storyteller' conveys, very clearly just that, a storyteller. Had he been a teacher of the Qur'an, he would never have been mentioned as a storyteller. It seems from the report that the storyteller would narrate stories of all sorts, including stories of previous people and prophets based on his understanding of

previous scriptures. When ‘Alī asks him with regards to his knowledge of the abrogating and the abrogated, he might have been asking him about the abrogating revelations in the Qur’an and the abrogated verses in previous scriptures.

Statement 3: Ibn ‘Abbās’s view has been discussed above. His interpretation of verses such as (2:106), (3:7), etc. confirms his view on abrogation in the Qur’an. These verses have been discussed thoroughly as to their import. They do not speak about abrogation in the Qur’an but about abrogation by the Qur’an of the previous scriptures. The name of Ibn ‘Abbās has been misused and abused by those with vested interests. If all the reports attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās are critically checked, they might prove either their weakness or unreliability. For instance, the *tafsīr* work *Tanwīr al-Miqbās* is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās. Yet, scholars have proven beyond any doubt that the two reporters who report the *tafsīr* views of Ibn ‘Abbās are liars and hence unreliable. Ibn ‘Abbās should not be blamed, but rather the reporters who attribute the statements to him are to be condemned as unreliable.

Among *tābi‘ūn* scholars, the most prominent supporters of abrogation are Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab, Mujāhid ibn Jabr, Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah, and al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim. One can find their declaration of this or that verse as abrogated in the sources. Since they consider certain verses of the Qur’an abrogated, the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an is taken as justified. There is no doubt that they declared certain verses as abrogated, but we have to investigate what they meant by declaring a verse abrogated. Some examples may suffice to crystallize the matter.

First, when Anas ibn Mālīk grew old and unable to fast in the month of Ramadan, he would feed the poor instead, everyday as compensation for the missed fasts. This he used to do in light of the concession granted in the Qur’an: “...and [in such cases] it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person....” (2:184).²⁰ Anas ibn Mālīk, like others, also considered that facility as abrogated. Why did he then practice it? To him, abrogation of a ruling in the Qur’an never signified permanent invalidity of the Qur’anic command. Second, Ibn ‘Abbās decreed that after a woman gave birth she was allowed to pay ransom in place of fasting.²¹ Ibn ‘Abbās said

time and again that the permission to pay ransom for fasting (2:184) was abrogated. If he meant permanent abrogation of the verse, why did he, then, allow women to do this? Certainly, to him, abrogation in the Qur'an meant impracticability of certain rulings of the Qur'an in certain given situations. Third, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar was once asked about the position of a pregnant woman who fasted in Ramadan but suffered from dehydration. He advised the woman to break the fasting and pay the ransom every day.²² He did consider that concession abrogated for healthy, normal women and men, but for the pregnant and the sick, he did not find the ruling abrogated. Fourth, Abū al-ʿĀliyah did not fast in the month of Ramadan in his old age, and paid the ransom instead.²³

ARGUMENT BASED ON THE EXISTENCE OF
ABROGATED RULINGS IN THE QUR'AN

Al-Zurqānī advanced an argument in favor of abrogation in the Qur'an, stating there existed certain verses in the Qur'an that can never be practiced.²⁴ Are we to take this as an argument? Where is the evidence? Who decided this or that verse was abrogated? Did God clearly indicate the abrogated revelation in the Qur'an? Certainly, there is no statement in the Qur'an referring to the abrogated rulings. Did, then, the Prophet identify the practically invalid commands in the Qur'an? There is no such tradition in the hadīth literature. Al-Zurqānī's statement is simply supposition, meaning that he and others from the community of Muslim scholars invented suppositions on their own that some verses of the Qur'an were practically invalid forever. Ironically, the identification of abrogated rulings in the Qur'an was in the past and still is an act of personally motivated manipulation of the Qur'an.

Scholars of abrogation, *fuqahā'* and *mufasssīrūn*, have miserably failed to refine the principles of abrogation so as to give them universal shape. Different scholars developed their own standards of abrogation in the Qur'an, which is why they could not unanimously agree as to which verses are abrogated.

Behind this declaration there is a hypothesis that the number of abrogated verses might be reduced further. Probably, Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dehlawī took up this challenge and decreased the number of abrogated verses from twenty-one to only five. This narrowing down of the abrogated verses took place based on interpretation of the verses concerned. According to al-Dehlawī, the only abrogated verses in the Qur'an are (2:180), (2:240), (8:65), (33:52), and (58:12).²⁵ Interestingly, these five verses have been declared by others from the proponents of abrogation as non-abrogated.²⁶ Therefore, no verse of the Qur'an stands abrogated. In this case, the stance of al-Zurqānī regarding the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur'an turns out to be untenable.

ARGUMENT BASED ON THE CLAIM OF CONSENSUS

Some commentators of the Qur'an and scholars of Qur'anic studies claim there is a consensus amongst the Muslim Ummah over abrogation in the Qur'an. Ibn al-Jawzī states that '*ulamā'*' have consensus over the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur'an but some did not agree to it.²⁷ Al-Naḥḥās states that some people rejected the existence of abrogating and abrogated verses in the Qur'an; their approach is not reasonable because they oppose the consensus of the Muslim Ummah and also the Qur'anic stipulation on the matter.²⁸ Al-Suyūṭī claims that there exists consensus amongst Muslims concerning abrogation in the Qur'an.²⁹ Al-Zurqānī slightly changes his statement: "Early generations of Muslim scholars (*salaf al-ummah*) had consensus of opinion over the fact that there occurred abrogation in the Islamic law."³⁰

In the statements of al-Naḥḥās and Ibn al-Jawzī there is a very clear recognition of controversy among scholars over abrogation in the Qur'an. Both accept the existence of some who rejected the abrogation theory. Does this situation refer to consensus? They have themselves disputed their own stance. Consensus occurs only when all the scholars, without any exception, agree to the issue concerned; even the dissent of one single scholar makes the matter controversial. Al-Suyūṭī avoided mention of the difference of opinion on abrogation, although he knew

very well the nature of the situation. He frequently borrowed ideas and information from al-Zarkashī's work, *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. This being the case why did he not, then, also take from al-Zarkashī the statement concerning Muslim scholars' controversy over the issue of abrogation?

Al-Zarkashī referred to the views of some other scholars who considered the Qur'an as abrogator of the previous scriptures, and not of its own revelations. Al-Zarkashī seems to have supported the idea of the Qur'an being protected from all kinds of contradictions. To substantiate his understanding, he quotes (15:9): "Verily, We sent the Message (Qur'an) down step by step and We shall safeguard it."³¹ Al-Zurqānī suggests Muslim scholars' consensus over abrogation in Islamic law and describes disagreement of other scholars from early to modern times.³²

There is actually no consensus on abrogation in the Qur'an among Muslim scholars; scholars are divided into groups, one supporting it and the other negating it. In addition, the claim of consensus controverts the reality in history today. Al-Rāzī stated that a consensus amongst Muslim scholars is not a sufficient basis to cancel the practical validity of Qur'anic rulings.³³

ĀYAT AL-SAYF AND ĀYAT AL-QITĀL VERSUS GENEROSITY AND JUSTICE TOWARDS NON-MUSLIMS

A number of verses in the Qur'an exhort believers to uphold justice and treat non-believers generously. For example, (4:90): "So if they [non-Muslim fighters] withdraw from you, and fight not against you, and offer peace to you, then Allah has opened no way for you (to war against them)." Part of (5:2) reads: "And let not the hatred of some people in shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression. Help you one another in righteousness and piety, but help you not one another in sin and rancor." The starting phrase of (20:130) reads: "So be patient with what they (non-believers) say," while (33:48) reads: "And obey not the unbelievers and hypocrites, and disregard their insolence; but put your trust in Allah, for enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs."

These verses and many others advise the Prophet and his followers to be patient with the insolent approach of the enemies, to be generous towards non-believers, and to be just towards non-Muslims. Yet the staunch supporters of abrogation have dared to declare all such commands of the Most Merciful to be null and void, based on two statements: (9:5) “Kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush;...” and (9:29) “Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the people of scripture, until they pay the *jizyah* with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.” These two verses are known in legal terminology as *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*.

Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah observed: “Everything in the Qur’an advising avoidance of conflict with the disbelievers stands abrogated by the *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*.”³⁴ As per the calculation of Ibn al-Jawzī, around one hundred and ten verses that promote leniency, kindness, patience, and generosity towards non-believers are considered abrogated by *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*. He did not agree with this number but supported the abrogation of only twelve of them. *Āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl* were revealed in connection with the situation of war. When the situation is normal (that is, not one of war), these two verses remain unexecuted. The Prophet’s agreements with the Jews and Arabs, particularly the Quraysh, and other warring parties for peace serve as enough evidence for the peaceful coexistence policy of Islam. It seems that the image of Muslims in the West as terrorists is consequent upon the abrogation of generosity towards non-Muslims.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ABROGATION IN THE QUR’AN

At the forefront of the movement against abrogation theory was Abū Muslim al-Aṣḥānī. His arguments to rebut the claim of abrogation in the Qur’an are of two kinds: the statement of the Qur’an; and the interpretation of the Qur’an.

According to al-Aṣḥānī, the statement of the Qur’an that negates the existence of abrogation in the Qur’an is, “No falsehood can

approach it from before or behind it: it is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise” (41:42). He declared abrogation theory a falsehood (*bāṭil*).³⁵ Is his stance correct? Al-Zurqānī rebuts al-Aṣḥāhānī’s observation with his conviction that abrogation in the Qur’an is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and not falsehood (*bāṭil*). Yet, al-Zurqānī provides no evidence to substantiate his claim other than verse (2:106), which as we have seen earlier states that God carries out abrogation, not in the Qur’an but in previous scriptures by the Qur’an. It is difficult to accept the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an as being the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) because abrogation insists on the existence of conflict (*ta’ārud* and *tanāqud*). The notion of conflict between one revelation of the Qur’an and another is false. Al-Zurqānī maintained that abrogation denotes permanent suspension of the practical validity of a verse but retains the position of the verse concerned as being a Qur’anic revelation.³⁶

Al-Zurqānī forgets that to recite a Qur’anic verse and to believe in its authenticity as part of the Qur’an necessitates its imperativeness. Every command of the Qur’an represents the truth from every possible angle: it is a revelation from on high; it is a part of the Qur’an; it is to be believed as the most sacred; it is to be recited as a command of God; and it is to be acted upon wherever it is relevant. Yet abrogation theory throws aside the verse’s validity in terms of practical purpose. This is certainly tantamount to considering it invalid. Invalidity of a Qur’anic command renders it false. The argument of al-Aṣḥāhānī therefore seems to be logical.

Al-Aṣḥāhānī proposed that the Qur’anic verses should be interpreted rather than abrogated. Supporters of abrogation, for instance, declare (2:180) to be abrogated: “It is prescribed for you, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves wealth, that he makes bequest to parents and next of kin according to reasonable usage. This is a duty upon the pious.” Al-Aṣḥāhānī interpreted it to remain practically valid, saying that the bequest, as the verse suggests, should be as per a reasonable manner (*bi al-ma’rūf*). He explained that *al-ma’rūf* here meant in accordance with the command of God as stated in the inheritance verses (*āyat al-mīrāth*) (4:7-14). *Al-ma’rūf* certainly does not mean according to the prevalent custom in the society, but means “what is

good.” Furthermore, the good is only what God declares as good. There is nothing wrong in this interpretative approach of al-Aṣḥānī, his suggestion seems quite rational. With this method of interpreting the Qur’an, the practical validity of the so-called abrogated verses can be traced. The stance of Abū Muslim is sufficiently substantiated by the Qur’an. Verses such as (2:185), (4:82), (5:3), (11:1), (17:82), (36:2), and (39:28) unequivocally spell out that the Qur’an in its entirety is ever relevant in human life.

(2:185) reads: “Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur’an as a guide to mankind, and as clear proofs for guidance, and as the criterion (for right and wrong)....” This verse speaks about three attributes of the Qur’an: a source of guidance, proofs of guidance, and a standard for right and wrong. These three qualities apply to the entire Qur’an. If abrogation in the Qur’an is taken for granted, then this means that a certain part of the scripture is deprived of these attributes. Abrogation has created confusion and irreconcilable controversy among *‘ulamā’* and the Muslim masses. This is not a situation of guidance. Thus, anything curtailing the position of the Qur’an as guidance is not sustainable.

(4:82) reads: “Do they not ponder on the Qur’an? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many discrepancies.” According to this statement, the Qur’an is free from any kind of discrepancy, yet the supporters of abrogation theory insist that there are legal rulings that are contradictory to each other. Now, we have a matter of choice between the two statements, one from Allah and the other from man. Of course the right choice is that of Allah’s declaration because belief in abrogation theory amounts to the existence of contradiction among verses of the Qur’an. If there exists no conflict between the commands of Allah, as (4:82) informs us, then we can conclude there is no abrogation in the Qur’an at all.

(5:3) highlights the lawful and unlawful for the believers: “...This day have I perfected your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your way of life....” With the revelation of this message, the Prophet and his followers were assured of the perfection of the Qur’an. Abrogation theory negates this and thrusts by force an idea that the Qur’an is still imperfect.

(11:1) reads: “*Alif Lām Rā'*. This is a Book the verses whereof were perfected (*uḥkimat*) and then explained in detail from One Who is All-Wise, Well-Aware.” The message of this verse is very clear. Both the categories of verses in the Qur'an – *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* – are full of wisdom. No lacuna remains in either of the two kinds of verses whereby imperfection of any nature can penetrate into the Qur'an. This verse refers to two qualities of Qur'anic verses: perfected and explained in detail. Do these two attributes of Qur'anic revelations give way to abrogation? Abrogation lies in stark contrast to these two features of the Qur'an.

(17:82) reads: “We send down of the Qur'an that which is a cure and mercy for the believers....” Whatever has been revealed in the Qur'an serves as a cure for the suffering of man in this life. By regarding some Qur'anic revelations as poison for practical life abrogation in effect prevents believers from benefiting from some of this Qur'anic panacea. In other words, the Qur'an is remedy in its entirety but abrogation theory renders some part thereof as malady. Every piece of the Qur'an is indisputably a cure, as opposed to what the champions of abrogation would proclaim.

(36:2) reads: “By the Qur'an, full of wisdom.” This verse refers to the Qur'an as *ḥakīm* (wise). This is also one of the attributes of Allah. The Qur'an is wise because it originates from the Wise. This attribute of the Qur'an speaks volumes of its great position: each and every single command of Allah is relevant. If any verse of the Qur'an is relegated as irrelevant for man, the Qur'an, then, cannot remain as wise. Abrogation theory serves as the antithesis of this Qur'anic position.

(39:28) reads: “This is a Qur'an in Arabic without any crookedness therein....” Yet, abrogation theorists indirectly and in effect utter the opposite: “Beware, there is crookedness in some places in the Qur'an.” Is abrogation theory anything other than crookedness itself? Abrogation theory and the declaration in (39:28) stand in direct contradiction to each other. Which one is, then, to be accepted and which one to be rejected? Naturally, the information conveyed in (39:28) represents the truth.

ABROGATION IN THE QUR'AN AND THE PROPHET

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet. He was also granted by Allah the *bayān* (explanation) of the Qur'an. Since he taught the Qur'an to his followers, he must have given them all that which was necessary for them. One does not find any direct statement of the Prophet indicating any verse of the Qur'an to be practically invalid. If he remained silent over this matter, this means no verse has been abrogated. Abrogation theory adversely affects the integrity of the Qur'an. Anything causing the Qur'an to lose its original position stands logically rejected.

CONCLUSION

The arguments for abrogation in the Qur'an are based on some Qur'anic verses, views of early generations of scholars, claims about the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur'an, and claims of consensus. In most cases, the Qur'anic verses used as arguments in favor of abrogation theory are misquoted. They are read either outside of their context or are advanced only in part. When reading those verses in full and also in context, a totally different message emerges. Reading the Qur'an halfheartedly is manipulation and not interpretation. The concept of abrogation in the eyes of early generations of scholars was not what was construed later. To them, abrogation never denoted permanent suspension of the Qur'anic commands. Claims of consensus are a misrepresentation of the situation. There has always been controversy over this matter. To claim that some verses of the Qur'an are abrogated is to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Qur'an.

Neither God nor His Prophet ever guided man in a categorical manner stating this verse or that verse to be practically invalid. There are many verses in the Qur'an that spell out various attributes of the Qur'an (e.g., a guide, wise, a cure, etc), which necessitate the practical relevance of the Qur'an in its entirety. There is no authentic statement of the Prophet referring to the abrogated verses of the Qur'an. The only viable way to resolve the abrogation-related controversy is to endeavor to interpret the verses concerned. Sincere effort to understand the practical relevance of the verses in dispute will certainly bring results.

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NOTES

- 1 (22:52) and (45:29); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), p.20.
- 2 Al-Zurqani, Muhammad Abd Azim, *Manāhil al-‘Ifān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār Ihya’ al-‘Arabī, 1998), vol. 2, p.460.
- 3 Subhi Salih, *Mabāhiith fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 2000), pp.260-261.
- 4 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, pp.23-24.
- 5 Ibid., pp.17-19; al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil*, vol. 2, pp.468-472.
- 6 Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997), vol. 1, p.549, report no.1835.
- 7 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, p.32.
- 8 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘*, vol. 3, pp.172-173.
- 9 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, p.58; Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār-al-Ma‘rifah, 1994), vol. 2, pp.221-222.
- 10 Seyyed Mawdudi, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* (Lahore: Idara Tarjuman al-Qur’an, 1997), vol. 1, p.234; Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Tadabbur-al-Qur’ān* (Delhi: Taj Company, 1997), vol. 2, pp.27-28.
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- 12 Makkī, Ibn Abī Ṭalīb, *Al-‘Idāh li Nāsikh al-Qur’ān wa Mansūkihi* (Jeddah: Dār al-Manārah, 1986), p.63.
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- 15 Seyyed Mawdudi, *Tafhīm*, vol. 2, p.465.
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- 17 Makkī, *Al-‘Idāh*, p.64.
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- 20 Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām, *Al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh fī al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 1990), p.55.
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Towards a Qur'anically-Based Articulation of the Concept of "Just War"

AISHA Y. MUSA

*Fight in the way of God those who fight you, but
do not commit aggression (QUR'AN 2:190)*

INTRODUCTION

TODAY, the word jihad has become a very conspicuous part of the English lexicon. A search of the word "jihad" on Amazon.com in the category of "Islam" finds more than 1,000 books listed, ranging from scholarly and academic works to vitriolic anti-Muslim propaganda. In the process of entering popular English usage, however, there are connotations being imposed on the word that Qur'anic usage does not support. The most insidious of these is the common rendition of the word jihad as "holy war." Both Muslims and non-Muslims now often translate the word jihad as "holy war." Often people take verses or parts of verses from the Qur'an, ignoring context and related verses, to make Islam appear warlike and violent, or to justify hostility and aggression.

Among non-Muslims, this stems both from widespread, general ignorance about Islam and a tendency to view the violent behavior of groups and individuals who identify themselves as Muslims and claim an Islamic agenda as generally representative of Islam. The popular conception of jihad as "holy war" is also fostered by a rising tide of anti-Islam propaganda from a variety of pseudo-scholars.¹

Unfortunately, misunderstanding of this issue is not found only among non-Muslims. Some who identify themselves as Muslims help perpetuate this misunderstanding by actively encouraging acts of

terrorism and violence in the name of Islam. The former and the latter stimulate and benefit from each other's propaganda, and each provides the other with arguments and justifications for their beliefs and behavior. The propagandists portray Islam as inherently violent, and the militants react with violence to what they see as attacks against Islam. What gets lost between the deeds of militants and the words of propagandists is any sense of the Qur'anic usage of the word jihad and how it may or may not relate to armed conflict. The challenge facing us today is to derive an authentic Qur'an-based understanding of jihad and determine how that understanding governs its relationship to armed conflict, in order to articulate Qur'an-based principles of what may be called 'just war.' The principles fall into two categories: justification for war (*jus ad bellum*), and just conduct in war (*jus in bello*).

This paper proposes a literal and holistic analysis of the text from a contemporary perspective and applying the exegetical principle of *tafsīr al-qur'ān bi al-qur'ān* (explaining the Qur'an with the Qur'an)² and the jurisprudential principle *al-aṣl fī al-kalām al-ḥaqīqah* (the fundamental rule of speech is literalness),³ without refracting that Qur'anic usage through the lens of history and tradition. This paper will analyze the Qur'an's usage of the word jihad together with related words of the same root (*j-h-d*) and other words that bear on an understanding of that usage, such as *qitāl* (fighting) and *ḥarb* (war), in order to discover an understanding of the Qur'an's articulation of principles of "just war" that is both contemporary and authentic. A holistic reading is a reading in which the text is read as an integral whole whose verses are understood in light of each other. A literal and holistic reading is one that proceeds from the literal meaning of the Arabic text and considers the semantic field of the root and the various morphological and syntactic aspects that contribute to meaning, together with the ways in which words of the root are used throughout the Qur'an and the context in which specific words are used. The proposed approach begins from the assumption that there is, as Fazlur Rahman has shown, an underlying unity in the Qur'an and that its words and verses should not be understood in isolation.⁴

The examination will begin by identifying each of the instances where these words and related terms from the same Arabic root are

used in the Qur'an. Once all the relevant terms have been identified, the context in which they are used will be scrutinized.

Why is it important to seek a Qur'anic perspective on the question of jihad? First, because Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Book of God and the ultimate authority that defines the beliefs and practices of Islam. All other sources are informed by it and are subordinate to it. Whether or not something is "Islamic" or "un-Islamic" is first asked of the Qur'an. Generally after consulting the text, Muslims turn to other sources of authority for clarification and elaboration. Interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an, therefore, begins with the Qur'an itself, proceeding from the idea that some parts of the Qur'an explain others (*yufassiru al-Qur'ān baḍḍuhu baḍḍan*), or of explaining the Qur'an with the Qur'an (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*). Principles elaborated through such a holistic analysis can be used in conjunction with information from other sources such as the prophetic traditions (hadith) and biographical literature (*sīrah*) to formulate viable Islamic responses to contemporary situations.

TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO WAR IN THE QUR'AN

Perhaps no subject is as misunderstood and misconstrued as the Qur'an's position on fighting and warfare. In order to examine the text to determine its position on this, or any issue, one must begin by examining terminology. Exactly what does the text say, and how does it say it? When the Qur'an addresses fighting, it does not use the word jihad. It uses the word *qitāl*. There is no concept of holy war (*al-ḥarb al-muqaddasah*) in the Qur'an. Although the term jihad is often understood to refer to war, the Qur'an always uses it in a much broader context. When the Qur'an refers directly to war, the term it uses most often is *qitāl*. Let us now examine the Qur'an's use of each of these terms, applying the principle of *yufassiru al-Qur'ān baḍḍuhu baḍḍan*.

JIHAD

The noun jihad occurs only four times in the Qur'an. The verb *jāhada* (to struggle, strive) in various forms appears 31 times.⁵ None of these

refer directly to fighting, let alone specifically to military action. In 14 of the 31 occurrences the verb *jāhada* appears in the Qur'an, striving in the cause of God is used in a very general context as a quality of those who believe. Many of these verses have nearly identical wording: *alladhīna āmanū wa alladhīna hājarū wa jāhadū fī sabīli Allāh* (those who believe and emigrate and strive in the cause of God with their wealth and their selves).⁶ Two instances tell how hypocrites hate to strive in God's cause and try to avoid it.⁷ Where the Qur'an specifically commands striving, there is no reference to warfare.⁸ Verses (29:8) and (31:15) give believers permission to disobey parents who strive (*jāhada*) to make them associate partners with God. Even under such circumstances, the believer is ordered to be considerate and just toward the parents. Taken together, these verses show us that believers must be willing to exert great efforts in the cause of God, using our wealth and ourselves. These efforts (jihad) may or may not include fighting.

The broad, general usage of *jāhada* in the Qur'an led classical Muslim jurists to recognize four kinds of jihad: jihad of the heart, jihad of the tongue, jihad of the hand, and jihad of the sword. The first of these, the effort to purify one's heart from the influences of the devil, is considered the greater jihad. Jihad of the tongue and hand are understood to refer to persuasive missionary efforts and doing good deeds, and jihad of the sword refers specifically to the use of just and necessary violence.⁹

Like the classical scholars before them, modern Muslim scholars also recognize the generality and breadth of the term jihad. The late Egyptian scholar, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, writes in his *Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an*:

Jihad in our time encompasses a whole range of activities including inventiveness, development, and construction on land, in the sea, and in outer space. It implies research in all fields to gain wider and deeper understanding of the world and all of the phenomena associated with it.¹⁰

Thus, while the use of just and necessary violence is one particular form of jihad, the term jihad is not synonymous with fighting. Fighting

that is carried out according to Islamic values and ideals is only one of the ways in which individuals and the community can struggle with their properties and persons in the cause of God. Such fighting is one of the recognized types of jihad. However, when the Qur'an addresses fighting, the word *qitāl*, rather than jihad, is used.

QITĀL IN THE QUR'AN

Like the word jihad, the word *qitāl*, is a form III verbal noun. Its root is *q-t-l*, which carries the basic meaning of "to cause death/kill."¹¹ Form III adds the meaning of "to attempt." Hence, "to attempt to cause death/kill" is "to fight" (*qātala/yaqātilu*).¹² While the Qur'an's usage of jihad and its affiliated terms is quite general, its usage of *qitāl* is far more specific. The amount of attention the Qur'an gives to the topic is an indication of just how serious the taking, or potential taking, of life is in Islam.

The root *q-t-l* appears 170 times in 122 verses of the Qur'an.¹³ Of these occurrences, the word *qitāl* (fighting), itself, appears 13 times in 10 verses, while its corresponding noun *qātala/yaqātilu* appears 52 times. The word *qātala* (kill) in its various conjugations and together with its verbal noun (*qatl*) appears 98 times in 77 verses. In some verses both words occur. The frequency with which the root occurs in the Qur'an is a measure of the seriousness of taking or attempting to take human life. The general Qur'anic ruling about killing is articulated in (17:33): "And do not take any human being's life - [the life] which God has willed to be, sacred - otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice. Hence, if anyone has been slain wrongfully, We have empowered the defender of his rights [guardian] [to exact a just retribution]; but even so, let him not exceed the bounds of equity in [retributive] killing. [And as for him who has been slain wrongfully -] behold, he is indeed succoured [by God]!"

The extreme seriousness of taking human life is further emphasized in (5:32), which describes God's response to the first murder committed by a human being, Cain's killing of Abel:

Because of this did We ordain unto the children of Israel that if anyone

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slays a human being—unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth—it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind. And, indeed, there came unto them Our apostles with all evidence of the truth: yet, behold, notwithstanding all this, many of them go on committing all manner of excesses on earth.

By equating the unjust taking of a single human life with killing all of humanity and the saving of a single life with saving all of humanity, this verse leaves no uncertainty about the value of human life. It also indicates the conditions that justify taking of a human life: murder or the commission of heinous crimes in the land. Taking a single life, in the absence of one of these conditions, is morally equal to killing the human race in its entirety, according to the Qur'an. This idea has extremely serious implications for warfare and fighting.

Let us now turn to the Qur'anic discussion of fighting. The Qur'an indicates that fighting is called for under certain circumstances: "Fighting is prescribed for you while it is hateful to you. It is possible that you hate a thing that is good for you, and that you love a thing that is bad for you. God knows and you do not know" (2:216).

The Qur'an also specifies when, where, why, how, and with whom fighting is allowed:

Fight in the way of God those who fight you. But do not commit aggression. Certainly, God does not love the aggressors. And kill them wherever you encounter them. And expel them from where they expelled you; for sedition (*fitnah*) is more grievous than killing. Do not fight them at the sacred mosque, unless they fight you therein. But if they fight you, kill them. Such is the reward of the disbelievers. (2:190-191)

(8:30) offers more specific information about the behaviors that justify fighting an enemy: "the unbelievers plot to disable you, or kill you or, expel you...." Verse 56 of the same chapter adds breaking treaties to the list of behaviors "they are those with whom you made a treaty, but they break their treaty every time": 22:39-40 offers further elucidation:

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

Together, these verses establish an overall principle of fighting in response to aggression, together with a clear prohibition of aggression on the part of Muslims: *yūqātīlūnakum wa lā taʿtadū inna Allāha lā yuḥibbu al-muʿtadīna* (But do not commit aggression. Certainly, God does not love the aggressors). This is supported by the verses immediately following: "But if they desist, God is Forgiving, Merciful; and fight them until there is no more unrest and oppression and religion is for God. But if they desist, let there be no hostility except against oppressors" (2:192-193).

Fighting is not limited to self-defense, however, but also includes defense of others, as indicated in (4:75): "Why would you not fight in the way of God and the weak and oppressed among men, women, and children, who say, "Our Lord save us from this place whose people are oppressors, and give us from You, a protector, and give us from You, a helper?"

Thus, the Qur'an indicates whom to fight and details specific behaviors in which they engage that justify fighting them. These same conditions are reiterated throughout the Qur'an in all its discussions of *qitāl*. These verses clearly demonstrate that the purpose of fighting, from a Qur'anic perspective, is not to conquer and convert people, but to defend the Muslim community against aggression on the part of others who attack first and, when they enter treaties, violate them and attack Muslims because of their religion. This understanding is further supported by (60:9), which states: "God only forbids you from allying with those who fight you on account of religion and expel you or support expelling you. Whoever allies with them, these are the unjust."

Taken together, the verses discussed so far lay the foundation for a principled view of war in which violence is only used in response to

aggression or oppression, and hostilities are ended as soon as the aggression or oppression ends: "fight them until there is no more unrest and oppression, and religion is for God..." "But if they lean toward peace, you lean toward peace and trust in God. He is the Hearer, the Knower."¹⁴ A popular argument against such a reading of the text is based on the claim that verses such as (22:39-40) and (2:190) have been abrogated by the so-called "verse of the sword," (9:5). Proponents of this argument generally cite the portion of the verse, which says, "then kill the polytheists wherever you find them," claiming that this abrogates any previous verses that seem to restrict fighting and killing non-Muslims. However, this argument is problematic for two very important reasons.

First, as John Burton has clearly demonstrated, there is no agreement among Muslim scholars, past or present, on the nature of abrogation, or on the specifics of the abrogating and the abrogated.¹⁵ More important to the present discussion, however, is the fact that a literal reading of (9:5) in the surrounding context demonstrates that its message is the same as that found throughout the Qur'an.

Chapter 9 opens with an extended discussion of fighting and treaties. The first verse gives notice to the polytheists of dissolution of their treaties with the Muslims: "a notice of dissolution from God and His messenger to those among the polytheists with whom you made a covenant" (9:1). Verse 4, however, clarifies that the dissolution does not apply to all those polytheists who had treaties with the Muslims: "Except those among the polytheists with whom you have made a treaty and who have not failed you in anything or aided anyone against you, fulfill their treaty to their fullest extent. Certainly, God loves the God-fearing" (9:4).

The above is the verse that immediately precedes the so-called "verse of the sword," which some claim has abrogated other verses and calls on Muslims to kill all disbelievers wherever they may be. The dissolution of treaties mentioned in the first verse of chapter 9 may seem to support such a claim. However, verse 4 makes a clear exception. Treaties are not dissolved with the polytheists who have not failed to uphold their treaties. Verse 6 also throws doubt on the claims made about the import of the so-called "verse of the sword."

Verse 6 commands: “If one of the polytheists seeks asylum with you, give him asylum until he has heard the word of God, and after that escort him to his place of safety” (9:6). Thus, both the verse immediately preceding and the verse immediately following the verse that allegedly abrogates any moderation of fighting and killing disbelievers suggest something entirely different. Moreover, these are not the end of the discussion. Verse 7 returns to the topic of keeping treaties: “as long as they stand true to you, you stand true to them; certainly God loves the God-fearing” (9:7). The real issue is made clear in (9:12–13): If they violate their treaties after making them, fight the leaders of disbelief; certainly they have no treaties. Perhaps they will desist (9:12). Will you not fight people who violated their treaties, plotted to expel the messenger, and started the war in the first place? (9:13)

These verses reiterate and elaborate on the sentiments expressed in (2:190): “Fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression. Certainly, God does not love the aggressors.” Therefore, rather than being abrogated, this concept is confirmed and elaborated in chapter 9, as well as elsewhere throughout the text.

Using some parts of the Qur’an to explain others on the question of struggle (jihad) and fighting (*qitāl*), four general principles become clear. The first is that fighting is sometimes necessary, even though human beings may dislike it (2:216). While fighting is necessary, it is also strictly regulated. This leads to the second principle: that aggression is intolerable. The command to fight those who fight you in (2:190) is followed immediately by the command not to aggress; the importance of non-aggression is further emphasized by the declaration that God does not love the aggressors.

In addition to the unambiguous prohibition of aggression on the part of Muslims, the Qur’an also stipulates specific actions that justify the use of violence by Muslims. These are elaborated and reiterated throughout the text, from the earliest verses believed to have been revealed on the issue of fighting in chapter 22 to the last believed to have been revealed in chapter 9, and they form the basis of the third principle: that violence is justified as a response to specific acts of

injustice such as people being attacked and persecuted because of their faith, the breaking of treaties, and the eviction of people from

their homes without just cause. Verses 4:74-75 also indicates that Muslims may fight not only on their own behalf, but also on behalf of others who seek assistance against injustice and persecution. A fourth key principle is that when those who have committed acts of aggression and injustice stop doing so and seek peace, fighting against them is to cease.¹⁶

The four key principles outlined that:

- i) fighting is sometimes necessary,
- ii) aggression is forbidden,
- iii) fighting is a response to specific types of aggression and injustice,
- iv) fighting ceases when the causes cease and the aggressors seek peace.

These principles would form a Qur'an-based framework in which Muslim scholars can elaborate a detailed theory of justifications for war and just conduct of war in the contemporary period, which takes into account details from the prophetic Sunnah as well as contemporary political and social realities.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Andrew Bostom's, ed., *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008); and Robert Spencer's, *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Washington: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2003).
- 2 Muhammad Ali al-Sabuni, *Mukhtaṣar Taḥsīl Ibn Kathīr*, 1, 28, Al-Muhaddith Program. 11.36 available at <http://www.muhammadith.org/quran.html#Download>.
- 3 Ibn Nujaym, *al-Baḥr al-Rā'iq*, v.1.02, Al-Muhaddith Program. 11.36 (CD).
- 4 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp.2-3.
- 5 *The Holy Qur'an* (CD) (Harf Information Technology, 2002), ver. 8.0. Qur'an search on j-h-d.
- 6 (2:218); (3:142); (5:54); (8:72, 74, 75); (9:16, 20, 44, 88); (16:110); (29:6, 69); and (49:15).
- 7 (9:81, 86).
- 8 (5:35); (9:41, 73); (22:78); (25:52); and (66:9).
- 9 Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), pp.56-57.
- 10 Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute for Islamic Thought, 2000), p.263.
- 11 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry *qātala*, available, at <http://www.alwaraq.net/Core/AlwaraqSrv/LisanSrchOneUtf8>.
- 12 W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1996), vol. 1, p.32D.
- 13 *The Holy Qur'an* (Harf Information Technology). Qur'an search on the root q-t-l.
- 14 (8:39, 61).
- 15 John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1990).
- 16 (2:193); and (8:61).

PART II

Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an

MAHMOUD AYOUB¹

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

RELIGIOUS diversity is as old as human history. From ancient cave dwellers to the societies of the great empires of China, India, Iran, Egypt and Babylon, religion as the human quest for the divine manifested itself in a variety of languages, devotional practices, myths and rituals. In reality, in these and myriad other cultures, religion has been the fountainhead of civilization.²

Religion may also be regarded, at least in its literary, artistic and philosophical manifestations, as the product of culture. Thus the plurality and diversity of religions is a reflection of the plurality and diversity of cultures and civilizations. In this paper, I will first define pluralism religiously and philosophically. I will then attempt to contextualize it within the history of the civilizations of the Middle East. I will finally discuss religious pluralism in the Qur'an. I am convinced that the Qur'anic worldview, with its emphasis on the diversity of human racial and cultural identities and man's innate capacity to know and have faith in God, recognizes the diverse religions of humankind as divinely preordained ways to this ultimate goal.³

WHAT IS PLURALISM?

In its lexical usage, pluralism signifies plurality, as opposed to singularity. Plurality, moreover, implies difference, and hence diversity. Theologically, the expression religious pluralism must be distinguished from

religious exclusivism on the one hand, and religious inclusivism on the other. While the proponents of these two rival ideologies to religious pluralism affirm it as a religious phenomenon, they in fact negate, or at least, seek to render it theologically meaningless.

Exclusivism denotes the view that the truth, and consequently the way to salvation, is only one. It is furthermore limited to only one true religion, and is the prerogative of one, and only one, faith-community. Exclusivism has moral, theological and philosophical implications. Philosophically, it confines the truth to one belief and value system; while morally and theologically, it ultimately condemns all other faith-communities to manifest error in this world and to perdition in the world to come.

In the three Middle Eastern, or so-called Abrahamic religious traditions, exclusivism, in one form or another, remains a fundamental tenet. In the Jewish tradition it is expressed in the doctrine of the chosen people, with its moral, political and theological implications. To be sure, ancient prophets spoke against an exclusivist nationalism that abhorred other nations and condemned them to a state of total insignificance in the sight of God. Jewish exclusivism has remained largely an exclusivism of indifference to what may be termed gentile religions and belief-systems.

The well-known exclusivist Christian doctrine formulated by the North African theologian Cyprian in the third century, “*salus extra ecclesiam non est*” (outside the Church there is no salvation)⁴ characterized the theology of the Catholic Church at least until the Second Vatican Council. However, the Vatican Council adopted an inclusivist theology which denied real validity to religions other than Christianity, as we shall presently see.

The Qur’anic assertion, “Anyone who desires a faith other than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he shall be among the losers,” (3:85)⁵ expresses an exclusivist view of religion, but only if the term Islam is taken narrowly to refer to Islam as an institutionalized religion. If, however, it is taken to signify a human attitude of total submission (Islam) to God, then we are talking not about religious institutions, but about an ideal relationship between God and human beings that transcends all religions, including Islam.⁶

The opposite of exclusivism is inclusivism. Inclusivism is a modern and mainly western humanistic Christian theological concept which takes many forms. One of these forms is the belief that even though my religion is the only way to salvation, moral women and men of good conscience, even if they be atheists, will attain salvation by being anonymous members of my faith-community.

The well-known German theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) coined the term “anonymous Christians” to formulate a theology of Christian inclusivist salvation.⁷ He echoed in this the Second Vatican Council declarations *Nostra aetate* and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*lumen gentium*). The Constitution states:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictate of conscience.⁸

Rahner argued for the validity of his theology of universal salvation through the atoning death of Christ on the ground that it is in virtual agreement with the theology of Vatican II. But while Vatican II presupposes faith in God, however erroneous such faith may be, Rahner made everlasting salvation available to all decent men and women of good conscience, even if they are atheists. It must be observed that his theology of salvation ultimately goes against the Christian doctrine of original sin and the need for redemption and atonement through faith in the cross of Christ.

Religious pluralism, as has already been observed, is the recognition of the multiplicity and diversity of religions as a natural or divinely willed phenomenon. Yet if religious pluralism is to serve as a meaningful framework of constructive dialogue among the followers of the various religions, all religions, or at least all theistic religions, must be recognized as legitimate ways to the truth or ultimate reality. It must be further agreed that the followers of every religion have the right to regard their own faith as the true one for them. Since, moreover, the need for everlasting salvation in some form is common to at least all the major religions, no one way should be privileged as the only way to salvation.

It may be argued that acceptance of the equal validity of all the major religions would ultimately lead to religious relativism, or the relativity of the truth. Some have therefore posited a super-religion as a unifying spiritual vision of all religions. This view is, in the final analysis, another form of inclusivism, which reduces all religions to one imaginary ideal faith.⁹ That God spoke to every community or nation in its own language, through a long list of prophets and sages, is frequently asserted in the Qur'an and the New Testament.¹⁰ All the major religions hold that the truth is one, and it transcends human understanding. Yet since the goal of all religions is to seek the truth, they must all be ways to that goal, for "...to God do we belong, and to Him we shall return." (2:156).

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ANCIENT IRAN AND THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

The period from the eighth to the third century BC can be regarded as the axial age in religious and philosophical creativity in greatly separated areas around the then known world.¹¹ It witnessed the rise of Chinese philosophy in its Taoist, Confucianist and other forms. In India, during this period of spiritual growth, the great sages of the Upanishads formulated an enduring mystical monistic philosophy which supplanted the somewhat crude Vedic religion. In India too the Buddha "set the wheel of dharma turning" with his moral philosophy of suffering and salvation, and challenged the vast Hindu pantheon with its authoritarian priesthood.

Ancient Israel saw the rise of the prophetic movement with its messianic hopes and ideas of universal salvation. Voices like those of Amos, Mica, Jeremiah and others called for social justice and the worship of YHWH as the sovereign Lord of all nations.

The first man of authority to recognize and promote religious pluralism was Cyrus the great, founder of the Persian empire in the fifth century BC. Cyrus founded an empire that stretched from Iran to Central Asia to Egypt, Iraq, Syria-Palestine, and even into Europe. This great imperial domain was unrivaled until the rise of the Muslim empire following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and especially after the phenomenal expansion of 711 CE.

Cyrus sought to honor all the deities of his realm. He allowed his foreign subjects to return to their lands, worship their gods and pray for his success and prosperity. He thus gave permission to the Judean exiles to return to Judea and rebuild the Jerusalem Temple of YHWH their God. This earned him the honor of being called YHWH's servant or messiah by the author of Isaiah II.¹²

The next empire builder was Alexander the Great (356–323 BC). Alexander was not only a great conqueror, but also a philosopher. According to classical Islamic hagiography, he was even a prophet.^{13*}

Alexander may be regarded as the father of the classical civilizations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. With Alexander we witness a conscious attempt to impose a single civilization framework on at least the Mediterranean basin, including western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. This was the Hellenistic civilization, with its rich religious and philosophical heritage, in particular its Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical and scientific worldview.

Within this Hellenistic framework, the Mithraic mystery cult, as well as the inherently dualistic worldview of the religions of ancient Iran, which was expressed in the eternal struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, became a powerful gnostic movement which threatened and deeply influenced early Christianity. The influence of these gnostic philosophies on all three monotheistic religions of the Middle East is undeniable. Less significant in the long run were the mysteries of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, and the Delphic and other Greek mysteries which flourished during this culturally and religiously formative period of western civilization.

It may be argued that the axial age, mentioned above, culminated with Alexander the Great. With Alexander we see the beginning of a

* PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The issue of the identity of *dhū al-qarnayn* remains shrouded in mystery. Islamic exegesis has also severely criticized attempts to hypothesize *dhū al-qarnayn*'s equivalence to Alexander. It is clear that Alexander the Great was not a monotheist. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, as well as other sources, towards the end of his life Alexander "seems to have become convinced of the reality of his own divinity and to have required its acceptance by others... a symptom of growing megalomania," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (USA: 1989), 15th edn., vol. 13, p. 247.

civilizational synthesis which began with the rise of Christianity and Manichaeism and culminated with Islam. Therefore, the period from Alexander to Muhammad may be viewed as another seminal epoch in the formative history of the civilizations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Jesus and Paul rejected the particularistic Jewish faith to which they both belonged. The new universalistic faith which they founded constituted a sharp contrast with the traditional narrow Jewish view of religion and culture. From the beginning, moreover, Christianity challenged, and soon supplanted, Greek wisdom and Egyptian religiosity.

Christianity did not eliminate Greek philosophy, but absorbed it as the framework of its own theology. As for Hellenized Egyptian and other mystery cults, they survived in Christian hagiography and popular piety. Both Egypt and the East, most likely Iran, are represented in the account of the nativity of Jesus. For instance, the wise men of the East who came seeking the divine child, the new king, are believed to have been Magian or Zoroastrian priests. This account was meant to affirm that the humble child, placed in a lowly manger, was Christ the King.¹⁴

Religion has always been associated with power and humility. In Christ the King who was laid in a humble manger, the reconciliation was finally achieved between the two warring Egyptian gods Horus and Seth, represented by the ox and the donkey respectively. Through this Hellenistic synthesis, moreover, Christianity rendered the universalistic vision of the ancient Hebrew prophets a message of salvation for all humankind.

It is noteworthy that the first post-Christian religious authority to recognize the plurality and unity of religions was another Iranian, Mani the Babylonian prophet. Mani, who presented yet another vision of the unity of all religions in the third century CE, failed to actualize this vision in a new religious system. He failed because Manichaeism, which was yet another Iranian dualistic faith, denied the unity of the creation under one sovereign, all-powerful and wise God. This unity of creation under a supreme divine being was essentially the message of Zarathustra, the prophet of ancient Zoroastrianism, of

which Manichaeism was a later corruption. This message was also propagated by many Greek sages, particularly Plotinus. It may in fact be argued from an Islamic point of view that Plotinus, with his mystical faith in the one divine source of being, was the prophet between Jesus and Muhammad. This is not to say, however, that Mani's explanation of good and evil was quickly forgotten. On the contrary, Manichaeism exerted a deep and lasting influence on the religious thought and piety of Europe and the Middle East.

Mani proclaimed a universal religion of light and salvation. He sought to present himself as the final messenger of God and his religion as a synthesis of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity. Yet ironically this great religious genius had a tragic end, and his religion came to be regarded as a great heresy by both Christian and Muslim theologians and heresiographers.¹⁵

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE QUR'AN

Among all the scriptures of the theistic religions the Qur'an is unique in that it sets its worldview within the context of divine oneness and human diversity, including the plurality of religions. Furthermore, it regards religious diversity as one of the signs (*āyāt*) of God, second in importance to the "creation of the heavens and earth."¹⁶ The Qur'an does not directly and categorically deny the validity and truth of any religion. Rather it is concerned with individuals and nations and their faith (*imān*), or rejection of faith (*kufī*) in God, witnessing (*shahādah*) to His oneness (*tawhīd*) and acceptance of humankind's accountability before Him on the Day of Judgment.

The Qur'an presents its view of religious pluralism in a somewhat progressive manner. In a preliminary statement it simply enumerates the religions known to the Prophet's listeners and leaves the question of their truth for God to judge on the Day of Resurrection. It states: "Surely those who have accepted faith [that is the Muslims], those who are Jews, the Sabaeans, the Christians, the Magians and those who have associated other gods with God, verily God will judge among them on the Day of Resurrection. God is witness over all things" (22:17). It should be observed that the verse under consideration first lists the

legitimate religions and then mentions those who associate other beings or things with the worship of God alone as people without a legitimate religion.

The Qur'an lays down four basic principles, which are necessary for the truth-claim of any religion. The first is that a true religion must be enshrined in a divinely revealed scripture or sacred law (Shari'ah). Secondly, it must affirm God's absolute Oneness (*tawhīd*). Thirdly, it must profess active faith in God and the last day. Finally, it should foster righteous living (*ihsān*). On the basis of these four principles, the Qur'an affirms the truth of the faith of Muslims, Jews, Christians and Sabaeans.¹⁷

It is to be observed that although a scripture or divinely revealed book is of the utmost importance for the truth of a religion, it is not the sole criterion by which a religious community is to be judged. While the Jews, Christians and Muslims are people of the Book, the Sabaeans may not have had a scripture. Nor is it clear that they were true monotheists, as they are reported to have venerated the stars. They did acknowledge a divine creator, on the basis of which the Qur'an includes them among the people of faith in God. Hence, it may phenomenologically be concluded that the Sabaean faith may spiritually prefigure the truth in the non-prophetic wisdom religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and the religions of China and Japan.

It may be further argued that the Qur'an affirms faith in any book that God has or may have revealed.¹⁸ This means that, like the plurality of religions, the plurality of scriptures is open ended. The Zoroastrians, for instance, under Muslim rule collected an impressive canon of sacred books, which they claimed goes back to their ancient prophetic sages.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that the Prophet himself bestowed on them the status of the people of the Book in his command, "Follow in dealing with them the Sunnah (practice) of the people of the Book."²⁰ Likewise, the famous young Umayyad general Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim extended this status to the Hindus, following his conquest of the Indus Valley in 711.

The Qur'an claims to have been revealed as a book confirming all previous scriptures, but particularly the Torah, the Psalms and the

Gospel. Thus the scriptural requirement is understood, and therefore omitted in the following crucial verse for our discussion. The three remaining principles are affirmed, where the Qur'an transcends all religious affiliations:

Surely those who have faith [that is the Muslims], the Jews, the Christians and the Sabaeans; whoever accepts faith in God and the last day and performs good deeds, those shall have their reward with their Lord; no fear shall come upon them, nor will they grieve. (2:62), and (5:69)

This verse is of decisive importance for several reasons. First, it occurs twice in the Qur'an at the beginning and near the end of the Prophet's career in Madinah, as surah 2 was the first major surah to be revealed in Madinah and surah 5 was revealed before surah 9, which was the last major surah sent down to the Prophet. It must therefore be conclusively argued that this verse could not be abrogated, as many classical and modern jurists and Qur'an commentators have held. This is because abrogation applies only to legislative verses and this is a narrative verse.*

The verse under discussion is important also because it does not limit faith and its rewards to the people of the Book. It has already been observed that the Sabaeans may not have had a sacred scripture.²¹ Yet they are included among those who shall have the reward of their faith with God. The identity of the Sabaeans has been under debate. Shahrastānī, in his book *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (The Book of Sects and Creeds) presents two sects of the Sabaeans.²² These are the religious Sabaeans of Iraq and the philosophical Sabaeans of Harran in northern Syria. While the religious Sabaeans, with whom we are here concerned, acknowledged one divine creator, they probably did not have a sacred book and they venerated the stars, as did the Babylonians before them. Yet they are included among the people of faith in God.

* PUBLISHER'S NOTE: Abrogation in the Qur'an is a controversial issue. For a detailed and comprehensive understanding of abrogation in the Qur'an, please see: Khan, Israr Ahmad, *Theory of Abrogation: A Critical Evaluation* (Research Management Centre, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2006.) Also see, Dr. Taha J. Alalwani, *Nahwa Mawqif Qur'ānī min al-Naskh* [Towards a Qur'anic Position on Abrogation] (Egypt: Maktabah al-Shorouk al-Dawliyyah, 2007), in which he rejects the concept of abrogation entirely.

A close hermeneutical analysis of this verse would reveal two further points. The first is that both the plurality of religions and scriptures are open ended, and closely related. Even though the Qur'an limits the designation "people of the Book" to the Jews and Christians, it speaks of an unspecified number of prophets and messengers who were sent by God as guides and warners to every nation or community. On the basis of this Qur'anic assertion, Muslims, as we have already observed, extended this designation to Zoroastrians and even Hindus. Any other community that could lay credible claim to a sacred scripture would have been included. The second point is that the assertion, "whoever has faith in God and the last day and performs good deeds" provides a universal criterion of divine favor, independent of any religious identity.

According to the principles outlined above, religious affiliation in itself is no guarantee for the attainment of Paradise. The scriptural religions are important frameworks of legal and social identities, but they must be lived within a higher sphere of sincere faith and righteous works. God addresses Muslims and the people of the Book with the warning:

It is not in accordance with your [Muslims] wishes, nor the wishes of the people of the Book; rather, whoever does evil, he will be recompensed for it, nor will he find for himself any friend or helper besides God. And, anyone who performs righteous deeds – be he male or female – and is a person of faith, those will enter the Garden [of Paradise] and they will not be wronged in the least.²³ (4:123-24)

Thus we see that the criterion for acceptance with God is neither religious identity, nor class or gender but faith and good deeds.

The plurality of religions and scriptures arises ultimately from the great number of prophets and messengers who followed one another, from Adam to Muhammad, in a great universal procession. Relying on the Qur'anic assertion, "...There is no community (Ummah) but that a warner was sent to it" (35:24)²⁴ later Islamic tradition puts the number of prophets at one hundred and twenty-four thousand. The Qur'an further asserts that God did not send a messenger to a community

except in its own language, in order that he may elucidate for them God's commands and prohibitions.²⁵

Human history, according to this Qur'anic worldview, is prophetic history. Prophetic history is in reality the history of God's guidance of humankind through the mission of His prophets and messengers. Divine guidance, moreover, is promised to a heedless humanity that must be reminded again and again of its primordial covenant with God.

God tells us in the Qur'an that in primordial time, when humankind were still in the realm of potentiality, called by tradition "the world of atoms" (*'ālam al-dharrah*), God brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their progeny and made them witness over themselves. He said, "...Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto." God then warned humanity, "lest you say on the Day of Resurrection we were heedless of this..." (7:172). The human part of this primordial divine covenant is to affirm in word and deed the sovereign Lordship of the one God. God's part is to guide humankind out of the darkness of heedlessness (*ghaflah*) into the light of faith in Him.

God first renewed this covenant with Adam and his spouse, after they lost the bliss of Paradise through man's first act of heedlessness, first in His saying, "...Their shall come from Me to you guidance; and whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them nor will they grieve"(2:38).²⁶ God then renewed this covenant with every prophet until the coming of the last Prophet, Muhammad.

The Qur'an presents religion as such under two distinct, but also interrelated, dimensions. The first is institutionalized religions, such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. These are the framework of the laws and rituals of worship which give their followers their legal and social identity as Jews, Christians and Muslims. All three traditions should ideally constitute what the Qur'an calls, "*millat abīkum ibrahīm* (the religion of your father Abraham)," who called all his children Muslims. Institutionalized human religions are the necessary vehicle and framework of the inner dimension which they represent.

The Qur'an calls this inner dimension the *fiṭrah*, or original creation of God of all His human creatures. The Qur'an identifies this divine original creation with the straight (*qayyim*) religion: "Set [O

Muhammad] your face straight towards God, a man of pure faith (ḥanīfan), for this is God's original creation (fiṭrah) upon which He created humankind; there is no altering of God's creation...." (30:30).²⁷

This divine pure creation is the innate capacity to know God and have faith in Him, with which every human being is born. This means that every child is born pure, and is thus ready to affirm anew the divine primordial covenant of "Am I not your Lord?" This innate capacity to know God is realized through human unaided reason, as was the case with Abraham who took first the luminous star to be his Lord, then when it set, he said, "I love not those that set." He then turned to the moon, and when it set, he exclaimed, "if my Lord guides me not, I shall surely be one of those who had gone astray." He finally took the sun to be his God, but when it set he realized that the sun is not God. Then, in an outburst of adoration, he cried out, "I turn my face towards Him who created the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith, nor will I be one of the associators (*mushrikīn*)" (6:76-79).²⁸

This Qur'anic two-dimensional view of religion in no way implies dichotomy or duality. Rather, institutionalized religion is itself legislated by God as the instrument for the realization of the inner dimension of faith and righteous living. God says in the Qur'an:

To everyone of you we have appointed a [sacred] law and a course to follow. For, had God so wished, He would have made you all one community. Rather He wished to try you by means of what He had given you; who among you is of the best action. Compete therefore with one another as if in a race in the performance of good deeds. To God shall be your return, and He will inform you concerning the things in which you had differed (5:48).²⁹

This verse first stipulates that the exoteric dimension of religion should mirror its inner dimension through the performance of good deeds. Secondly, differences among God's laws which He appointed for different peoples should be respected, and should not lead to conflicts. Finally, the truth concerning these different divine dispensations will be known only on the Day of Judgment when God will inform all faith-communities of all their religious differences. To paraphrase St.

Paul, here we see things through a glass darkly, but then we shall see things as they are.³⁰ Here we must avoid turning our religious differences into religious conflicts through dialogue in humility and the desire for better understanding. But then God, the absolute Truth (*al-haqq*) will manifest the truth, all the truth.

The Qur'an not only acknowledges religious diversity and plurality, it also lays down the principles that should govern inter-religious relations. It first calls for respect and protection of all places of worship. God says: "...Had God not repelled some people by means of others, synagogues and churches, mosques and monasteries in which God's name is mentioned, would have been demolished...." (22:40)³¹ The Prophet himself applied this principle by allowing the delegation of the Christians of Najrān to pray in his mosque. He went even further by calling them and the Muslims to a "just word of common ascent" between the two communities.³² It took the Muslims fourteen centuries to renew this call, and for some Christians and Jews to listen.

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to dialogue with Jews and Christians in the fairest manner. It sets forth both the etiquette and theology of dialogue:

Do not debate with the people of the Book save in the fairest manner, except those among them who do wrong; and say to them 'we accept faith in that which was sent down to us [that is the Qur'an] and that which was sent down to you [that is the Torah and the Gospel]. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we are submitters (Muslims) (29:46).³³

What then is the ultimate goal of interfaith dialogue from the point of view of the Qur'an? The following few conclusions will, it is hoped, suggest some tentative answers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It may first be concluded from the preceding discussion that neither the Qur'an nor the Prophetic tradition demands of Jews and Christians that they give up their religious identity and become Muslims unless they freely choose to do so. The basis of this religious freedom in Islam

is the categorical Qur'anic assertion (2:256), "there is no compulsion in religion..." This is a categorical command, not a statement of fact.

Secondly, the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition only enjoined Muslims as well as the followers of other faiths to engage in meaningful dialogue, cooperation and agreement on basic principles. This is what the Qur'an calls "a just word of common ascent," between the Muslims and the people of the Book to worship no one except God and not take one another as lords beside God (3:64).³⁴ This important call to a unity of faith across the diversity of religions is far more relevant to our time than it was to the time of the Prophet and his people. It goes far beyond the issue of whether Christians actually worship their monks or not. One of the Companions of the Prophet, 'Adī ibn Ḥātim who was formerly a Christian, said to the Prophet: "But the Jews and the Christians do not worship their Rabbis and their monks." The Prophet said, "Do not they legislate for them and they accept their legislation?" This is tantamount to worshipping them.³⁵ This is because worship in Islam is obedience and if one obeys anyone other than God it is as though one worships him instead of God.

It is important in this regard to observe that Karaism, a movement within Judaism which arose after Islam, may be regarded as an answer to this call. The Karaite movement continues to this day to call other Jews to return to the law of God as revealed in the Torah, and rejects Rabbinic Judaism. It is with this Rabbinic Judaism that the Qur'an was concerned and with which the Muslim community has been struggling ever since.

Judaism, as it has been observed for nearly 2,000 years, is Rabbinic Judaism. Although Rabbinic Judaism is continuous with biblical religion, the latter has been completely superseded by the former. This is perhaps the reason behind the Qur'anic call for the people of the Torah to judge by what God has revealed in it. For the same reason, the Qur'an calls upon the people of the Gospel to judge by what God has revealed in it (5:44, 47).

To the extent that eastern Christians, more than other peoples, at least at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, tried to harmonize their faith in God with moral living and humility before Him, they are considered to be the "nearest in amity" to Muslims.³⁶ This special

relation with the Christians does not close the door to dialogue with other religious communities. In fact, the legal designation of *ahl al-Kitāb* (people of the Book) has been quite fluid. It came to include more and more communities as Muslims came to know more and more religious traditions.

To conclude: what then is the challenge that the Qur'an presents to us today? The challenge is this, that we all have faith in God and compete with one another in righteous works. It follows from this challenge that all people of faith respect one another and that they believe in all of God's revelations.

The Qur'an presents the followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism not only with a great challenge, but with a great promise as well. The promise is this:

Were the people of the Book to abide by the Torah, the Gospel and that which was sent down to them from their Lord [i.e. the Qur'an], they would be nourished with provisions from above them and from beneath their feet (5:66).³⁷

NOTES

- 1 The present paper has appeared in different forms in the following publications: "Islam and Pluralism," *Encounters* (September, 1997), vol. 3, no.2, pp.103-118; "Islam and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism," *Global Dialogue* (Winter, 2000), vol. 2, no.1, pp.53-64; and "Religious Pluralism and The Challenges of Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Globalism: An Islamic Perspective," *Commitment of Faiths: Identity, Plurality and Gender*, eds. Sumartana et. al (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Institute of DIAN/Interfidei, 2002).
- 2 For the role of religion in the rise of human civilizations, see William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- 3 This capacity is called in the Qur'an "fīrat Allah," God's pure creation. See Qur'an (30:30), to which we shall return later in this discussion.
- 4 See Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion Volume 2* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1987), electronic edition produced by Infobases Inc, Provo, Utah. SV Cyprian. For a modern Protestant defense of Christian exclusivism, see Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, eds. K. Meeker and P. Quinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.172-192.
- 5 See also (3:19), and Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), vol. 2, pp.56, 66, 240-43 for the views of Qur'an commentators of these verses.
- 6 For a good study of the term Islam in the Qur'an and exegetical tradition, see Jane Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term Islam as seen in a Sequence of Qur'an Commentaries* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for Harvard Theological Review, 1975).
- 7 Rahner developed his idea into an elaborate theology of salvation through the cross of Christ. See his *Theological Investigations*, 23 vols. (London, Baltimore and New York: 1961-92), particularly vols. 14 and 16, both available in English translations.
- 8 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church no. 16.
- 9 See for a penetrating study of the different approaches to religious pluralism, as well as the issue of religious relativism, John Hick, ed., *An Interpretation of Religion; Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd edn. (London and New Haven: Palgrave Macmillan and Yale University Press, 2005).
- 10 See for examples Qur'an (10:47), (4:41) and (16:36); and the Bible, Acts (2:1-11), 1 Timothy (2:4) and Hebrews (1:1) ff.

- 11 This notion was first introduced by Karl Jaspers in his *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953). For a good discussion of this important period in the development of human civilization and Islam's place in this development, see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 1.
- 12 See I. Gershevitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Bible, Isaiah (44:27-28), (45:1-3), (45:12-14); see also II Chronicles (36:21-23); Ezra, (1:1-9), (3:6-8), (5:12-17), (6:2-4).
- 13 Muslim hagiography identified Alexander with the prophetic figure *dhū al-qamayn* of (18:83-98).
- 14 See Bible, Matthew (2:1-12).
- 15 See for a quick reference on Mani's life and death and his religion, *Encyclopedia of Religion* sv Mani.
- 16 (30:22). See also (2:213) and (5:48).
- 17 See Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), pp. 17-30. For a more detailed discussion of these four principles from a comparative religion point of view, consult my original lecture, on which this paper is largely based, in the IIIT archives, summer 2008, www.iiit.org.
- 18 See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: Bibliothica Islamica, 1994) p. 162.
- 19 Max Muller, ed., *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897), vol. 47, "Pahlavi Texts, Part 5: Marvels of Zoroastrianism,"
- 20 Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa'ādāt al-Mubārak ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī, *Jāmi' al-Uṣūl fi Ahādīth al-Rasūl*, ed. Abd al-Qadir al-Arnaut, 2nd edn. (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1983), vol. 2, p. 660, hadith 1161.
- 21 For a *tafsīr* discussion of the religious identity of the Sabaeans see Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 109-110.
- 22 Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī's *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl* two-volume famous heresiographical work exists in many editions for example Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1994. See the chapter on the Sabaeans in the first volume.
- 23 This is a cardinal principle of the Qur'an; see for example (2:177), where faith in God, His revelations and prophets and human virtues such as generosity, steadfastness and keeping one's covenants are given as true signs of righteousness.
- 24 See also (40:78), where the plurality of faiths is clearly asserted.
- 25 See (14:4); see also (10:47).
- 26 For the story of Adam's mistake and God's forgiveness, see Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 1, pp. 83-93.

Notes

- 27 The Prophet is said to have asserted that every child is born upon this divine *fiṭrah*, and then his parents bring him or her up a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian. See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: Dār al-Hadith, ed 1, 1995), vol. 7, p.33, hadith 7182.
- 28 This human capacity to know God by unaided reason has been recognized by both ancient and classical philosophers and theologians. It is called by Muslim theologians “the way of the friend (*khalīl*) of God,” that is Abraham.
- 29 This is a recurrent theme of the Qur’an.
- 30 See I Corinthians (13:12).
- 31 See also (24:36).
- 32 See (3:61-64), and Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 2, pp.187-208.
- 33 See also (49:13), which calls upon all the peoples and tribes of humankind to get to know one another through dialogue.
- 34 It is significant that this call to dialogue follows the only heated debate which the Prophet had with the Christians. This debate is alluded to in the *mubāhalah*, or imprecation verse, (3:61). See Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 2, pp.188-202, 206.
- 35 Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 2, pp.205-207.
- 36 The piety and humility of these Christians is touchingly described in the Qur’an. See (5:82-5). See also my paper “Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qur’an and Contemporary Exegetical Tradition,” *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (July, 1997), vol. 8, no.2, pp.145-64; or in my book *A Muslim View of Christianity*, pp.187-208.
- 37 This means that they would eat and drink of the bounties of the sky through rain and the rich yield of the earth.