

*“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,  
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)*

# ***The Light*** **AND** **ISLAMIC REVIEW**

**Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement  
for over eighty years**

**October - December 2007**

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

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**احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور**

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆  
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*The Light* was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. *The Islamic Review* was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

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The main objective of the A.A.I.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the *hearts and minds* of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

**International:** It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

**Peaceful:** Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence. Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

**Tolerant:** Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

**Rational:** In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

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Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that *no* prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, *Mujaddids* will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

#### About ourselves

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The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

#### History:

**1889:** Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

**1901:** Movement given name *Ahmadiyya* after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name *Ahmad*.

**1905:** Hazrat Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

**1908:** Death of Hazrat Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

**1914:** Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

**1951:** Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

**1981–1996:** Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

**1996–2002:** Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

**2002:** Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

## What's In A Name?

### The role of semantics in facilitating the spread of “democracy” in the Muslim world

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Recently, I was asked by the Editors of the Columbus Bar Lawyer's Quarterly to write an article on Islam for their periodical. I submitted a short piece discussing what I believe to be a fundamentally imperative approach to facilitating the acceptance and spread of democracy in the Muslim world. My objective was to expose the readers of the periodical to some of the established principles from Islamic scripture and early history that correlate with, and therefore are supportive of, the institution of a democratic form of government. For the sake of making the article appealing to the readers of the periodical, it was presented in the form of an argument about the benefits of the use of “semantics” in facilitating the spread of democracy in the Muslim world. The article is reproduced below. The issue of the Columbus Bar Lawyer's Quarterly in which the article was published is also available online at: <http://www.cbalaw.org/members/publications/barbriefs/CBLQFall2007.pdf>.

The word *semantics* is commonly defined as “the meaning that can be derived from words or some other form of expression.” As lawyers, we are quite familiar with the value of semantics. Whether it is a word in a statute, a term found in a decision, or an idiom used by a witness, we utilize semantics to argue interpretations that further our clients' interests. We provide meanings to words that go beyond their common import so that the substance of what is being presented may be captured. The process of employing effective interpretations to words in order to further a specific agenda, however, may prove beneficial beyond the realm of “lawyering”; it may also help promote democracy in the Muslim world.

The word *democracy* has no single definition. It means different things to different people. For some, it equates to a system of governance wherein a written constitution is supreme. The British though would necessarily disagree, for they have no written constitution. For others, it means a governing structure wherein persons are elected strictly by popular vote. This, however, does not hold true in representative democracies like the U.S. Still others view democracy as a political scheme whereby all people are guaranteed equality. Try reconciling this with the caste system prevalent in the so-called largest democracy in the world, India, or the years of slavery experienced in America's early history.

Clearly, when promoting something as complex and multifaceted as *democracy* to the Muslim world – where the concept is generally held suspect as an inherently *western* idea that attempts to deny the sovereignty of God over His creation through the establishment of man-made rules – a more descriptive interpretation of the term is required.

A general consensus may be reached in defining *democracy*, at its core, as a system of governance wherein: 1) majority opinion is accepted, and 2) minority/individual rights are protected. By deconstructing the term to this basic two part formula, the system being promoted is more easily understood. It demystifies the *western* concept by providing tangible mechanisms that may be correlated with established principles found in Islamic tradition.

For instance, the essence of *majority rule* finds explicit support in the Quran, the holy scripture of Islam. The Quran, in its forty-second chapter titled *Al-Shura* (“The Counsel”), specifically praises those: “whose affairs are (decided) by counsel among themselves” (42:38). In this verse, we find the foundation for the establishment of a *government by council* or *parliamentary government*. This principle was put into practice by no other than Muhammad himself, the holy prophet of Islam. Recorded history bears witness to him not only engaging in consultative processes with regard to administrative matters and state affairs, but also accepting the majority view despite his personal opinion at times being to the contrary.

The basis of a *majority rule* system is further espoused in Islamic tradition by the Quran instructing: “Surely God commands you to make over (positions of) trust (in government or affairs of the state) to those worthy of them” (4:58). This verse plainly calls for the institutionalization of an *electoral process* whereby the people determine who they want as their representatives. This principle was also practically demonstrated in the early history of Islam by the Muslims *electing* the first four *Khalifas* (i.e. heads of state after Muhammad) either by agreement of all parties, by nomination after consultation with leading representatives of the community, or by appointment by an elective council.

Similarly, the fundamental elements of the *minority/individual rights* notion are unequivocally upheld in Islamic tradition. The Quran champions the equality of all mankind: “All men are a single nation” (2:213). It also features what some believe to be the *magna carta* of religious tolerance by declaring: “There is no compulsion in matters of religion” (2:256). Even the economic independence of the sexes is advanced: “For men is the benefit of that they earn. And for women the benefit of what they earn” (4:32). Again,

undisputed history bears testimony to the distinguished civil liberties enjoyed by non-Muslims under early Muslim rule, the protected status of Jews in Spain being an illustrious example.

And just as it is understood in western democracies that the formation of fair and impartial tribunals that address the claims of aggrieved parties is essential to ensure the protection of minority/individual rights, the Quran likewise provides: “Judge between all men justly and follow not any bias, lest it lead thee astray from the path of truth” (38:26). Muhammad himself applied this principle to the fullest extent possible. He provided persons of other faiths living within Muslim communities the option, in certain circumstances, of being judged according to their own laws, if they so chose, so that fair adjudication may be achieved.

Clearly, the foundational components underlying the broad term *democracy* share many commonalities with entrenched Islamic principles governing statehood. Unfortunately, the term *democracy* in and of itself does not instinctively strike such parallels in the minds of common Muslims living in purported “Islamic States”. Rather, it is more often than not perceived as a foreign concept, at odds with the basic tenets of their faith. In order to spread democracy in the Muslim world, this misunderstanding must be corrected. The establishment of democratic forms of government in this region is much more likely to be realized if the basic concepts of *majority rule* and *minority/individual rights* are presented in terms of the people’s own authoritative traditions.

The process of explaining something by deconstructing it to its basic elements, though, is certainly not limited to the experience of lawyers. Rather, it is a natural phenomenon in which, whether conscious or not, everyone engages. We instinctively recognize that when something is not understood and an explanation is required, by presenting rudimentary parts of the larger, more complicated concept, the “thing” being explained may be more easily comprehended. Intuitively, we know this is the basis of knowledge and learning: by compartmentalizing and reconciling the basic elements of something, one may acquire a full realization and appreciation of it.

This process of learning is also uniquely “human”. It is only “man” that has the ability to study the basic elements of a thing in order to completely appreciate its true nature, rather than, as other creation, simply accept a thing or a phenomenon for its mere outward/physical/obvious characteristics. This is the primary quality that distinguishes man from other creation – man, is simply smarter this way. And this universal principle is beautifully illustrated in the Holy Quran.

In Chapter 2 verses 31-33 of the Holy Quran, it is stated:

And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said: Tell Me the names of those if you are right.

They said: Glory be to Thee! we have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise.

He said: O Adam, inform them of their names. So when he informed them of their names, He said: Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide.

The section in which these verses appear, deals with the nature of man. Using “Adam” as an illustration and representation of “man” in general, we are told that God “taught Adam all the names”. As Maulana Muhammad Ali explains in his commentary on these verses, although the Arabic word *asma* literally signifies *names*, what is meant is that God taught man “the attributes of things and their descriptions and their characteristics, for the attributes of a thing are indicative of its nature.” Thus, God explains that the distinctive characteristic that makes man superior to all other creation is his ability to study the attributes and characteristics of things. Man does not rely on instinct alone, but rather has the unique ability to conduct a comprehensive study of the properties of things and it is through this inherent skill, that he will rule the earth and all of its creation. Therefore, the article copied above actually serves two purposes. First, the obvious, is that it presents a simple overview of the compatibility between basic components of *democracy* with established Islamic principles. Second, the not so obvious, it presents a process by which the understanding of this compatibility may be facilitated, a process that is inherently *Islamic!*

It should be mentioned, though, that the Quran routinely explains spiritual concepts by using physical illustrations. The parallel spiritual significance to this physical analogy may be that just as man can attain greatness in the world due to his ability to acquire a full and complete understanding of things, so too can man reach a stage of spiritual eminence by acquiring a complete understanding of God. The ninety-nine *names* of Allah presented in the Quran are in fact the independent characteristics of God, which, when studied and understood thoroughly, can lead to the true realization of the “complete” Divine. The inherent, unique skill of studying the attributes and characteristics of a thing, what is referred to in the Quran as the “names” of a thing, there-

fore, is the basic quality which can lead to man's material as well as spiritual greatness.

May Almighty Allah help us recognize our inherent abilities so that we may put them to use in establishing systems of governance that lead to peaceful cohabitation on earth. May this recognition of our innate facilities also be used to develop our souls so that we may be fit to live a life in peace with God in the hereafter. Ameen. ■

## Remembering Ramadan

By Dr. Noman Malik

*[This article is the Khutba (sermon) that was presented on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr in Columbus, Ohio in November 2007. In this article, Dr. Malik explains the true significance of Eid. Defined as "a source of ever recurring happiness", Dr. Malik explains that Eid cannot be limited to the celebration of the accomplishment of the various physical exertions experienced during Ramadan. Rather, it is the effect that the experience of Ramadan has on the soul, the part of a human that continues forever despite the death of the physical body, that is the true "ever recurring happiness".]*

Today we celebrate Eid. There is a feeling of accomplishment for having fulfilled a duty which was laid upon us by God. Unfortunately, many of us approach the end of Ramadan as if it was the conclusion of some physical marathon which we participated in and successfully completed. We gave up drinking, eating and sexual activity, the three most basic physical human needs, because God ordered us to do so, and now today we celebrate the end of that exercise. However, there is a much more vital and deeper significance to Eid than that.

### Meaning of Eid

The word Eid means "a source of ever recurring happiness". If we consider Eid solely as a celebratory day commemorating the end of Ramadan, then the maximum number of Eids that a person can reasonably hope to celebrate in a lifetime would be between eighty and ninety. This hardly qualifies as *ever recurring*. So the mere physical celebration of Eid is certainly not a source of *ever recurring* happiness.

### Principle underlying the ever recurring happiness of Eid

Physical life is not eternal; each and every one of us must undergo physical death. But we all possess that greatest gift, the immortal soul, God's own spirit which

He breathed into every human being, and this soul survives death. As the soul is in fact the spirit of God that is breathed into us, it has the seeds of divine attributes which when developed along the right lines makes it enter into a heavenly state which is referred to as the *Garden* (or *jannah*). This heavenly life with God begins in this life and gets completely manifested in the next life. It is a gift which will be never cut off:

And as for those who are made happy, they will be in the Garden abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please — a gift never to be cut off (11:108).

Thus any action which helps us achieve this goal by helping are spiritual progress is a source of *ever recurring happiness*.

In the Holy Quran, God clearly lays down the rules by which this spiritual progress occurs and the process by which one enters this *Garden* or heavenly state:

And those who believe and do good, We shall make them enter Gardens in which rivers flow, to abide therein for ever. It is Allah's promise, in truth. And who is more truthful in word than Allah?

It will not be in accordance with your vain desires nor the vain desires of the People of the Book. Whoever does evil, will be requited for it and will not find for himself besides Allah a friend or a helper.

And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer these will enter the Garden, and they will not be dealt with a whit unjustly (4:122-124).

### Mercy of God as the basis for Ramadan

Eid, then, is a celebration of acquiring good habits and behavior patterns which help in the above mentioned spiritual purification. It is due to His attribute of Mercy (*Rahma*) that God Almighty has prescribed Ramadan for us. Mercy, or *Rahma* in Arabic, means "*love and tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence*." In other words, it means to have so much love for a thing that one must do good to it. This is one of basic attributes of God and constitutes the very essence of the Divine Being, as evidenced by the fact that it is the only attribute which God declares in the Holy Quran that he has made binding upon himself:

"He has ordained mercy on Himself" (6:12, 54).

One of the greatest forms of good that God can do to man is to guide him along the right path so that he attains the purpose or objective of life, which is union

with God. This path comprises believing in God and of doing good to Humanity. The facilitation of this path is, in fact, the goal of Ramadan:

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be aware of your duty (to Allah) / guard against evil (tattaqoon) (2:183).

### Ramadan makes God a living reality

The greatest force for the doing of good and abstaining from evil is the remembrance of God. Remembrance of God makes Him a living reality. Once God becomes a living reality in a person's life, one is continuously aware of God's attributes and is strongly attracted to Him. This love of God in turn engenders a strong desire in the human heart to emulate the divine attributes in order to get closer to God. Therefore, just as God does good to His creation out of love for it (His attribute of *Rahma*), so does a person, for whom God is a living reality, does good to his fellowmen out of love for them. This doing of good to humanity entails: a) refraining from behavior that causes injury to others, such as lying, cheating, stealing, killing, etc., and b) practicing virtues which benefit humanity, such as charity, kindness, truthfulness etc. The Holy Prophet Muhammad has aptly described this state in a *hadith* in which he states that "do good as if you see God, and if you cannot do that, then do good as if He sees you."

### Ramadan, a total spiritual immersion therapy

In Ramadan all our faculties physical and spiritual are harnessed in the remembrance of God. When we feel the physical desires of hunger, thirst and sexual desire, we refrain from satisfying them in obedience to God's command. The subjugation of these base desires, therefore, becomes a source of making God a reality in our everyday life. Similarly, we avoid anger, rage, lies and other immoral behavior, as these acts will break our fast.

Although all guidance is provided in the Holy Quran and the sunnah of the prophet, and we are made aware of this in our five daily prayers, many times we neglect our prayers or are so engrossed in our daily affairs that we forget God. In Ramadan, though, our animal instincts of hunger, thirst and sexual desire – which are always with us (one may forget to pray but never to eat) – are harnessed in such a way that we are constantly aware of God. When we feel hunger and thirst but do not satisfy them, we remember that it is only because God has so instructed us; God, accordingly, becomes a living reality throughout the day. At the same time, great stress is laid on prayer during Ramadan, especially the *tahajjud* prayers. The purpose is so that the habit of regular prayer is developed, and thus the attributes or God

and our relationship with Him are constantly reinforced many times a day. During the month of Ramadan the Holy Prophet used to personally wake people to perform their *tahajjud* prayers. Importance of prayer as instilling the reality of God in the Human heart is stated in the Quran as follows:

And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way (2:186).

Recite that which has been revealed to thee of the Book and keep up prayer. Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil; and certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest (force). And Allah knows what you do (29:45).

*And the tahajjud prayer itself is spoken of with such magnanimity in this regard:*

O thou covering thyself up!  
Rise to pray by night except a little,  
Half of it, or lessen it a little,  
Or add to it, and recite the Quran in a leisurely manner.

*Surely We shall charge thee with a weighty word.*

The rising by night is surely the firmest way to tread and most effective in speech. (73:1-6).

And:

And during a part of the night, keep awake by it, beyond what is incumbent on thee; maybe thy Lord will raise thee to a position of great glory (17:79).

Additionally, great stress is laid in studying the Holy Quran in Ramadan. The Holy Quran states:

The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion (2:185).

This revelation, the Holy Quran, was the spiritual food which was promised to the Christians by God in response to Prophet Jesus' prayer, as the Holy Quran narrates:

Jesus, son of Mary, said: O Allah, our Lord, send down to us food from heaven which should be to us an *ever-recurring happiness (EID)* to the first of us and the last of us, and a sign from Thee, and give us sustenance and Thou art the Best of the sustainers.

Allah said: Surely I will send it down to you (5:114-115).

In this present day and age when Christianity is in ascendance, this promise has a special relevance to Muslims and especially to us, members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Jamaat. It was the Christians of the Middle East who accepted the message of Islam wholeheartedly 1400 years ago, and *inshallah*, it will be the Christians of today in Europe and the Americas who will accept the message of Islam when the Maulana Muhammad Ali translation and commentary of the Holy Quran, inspired by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Mujaddid, Promised Messiah and Mahdi, is presented to them.

The Holy Quran contains all that is needed for the spiritual success of mankind and answers all the questions man has of unseen matters, like: who is God, what is our relationship to Him, how we can attain nearness to him, etc. And together with the revelation of the Holy Quran, we were also given a role model to follow in the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Charity in all its forms is also strongly encouraged in this month so that the development of the divine attributes within man can be applied in practice. It is also a fact that as we come to the end or the latter part of Ramadan, the body does get used to doing without food and drink, and the factor of hunger and thirst in making us aware of God lessens, but by that time one becomes so engrossed in prayer and study of the Quran that this spiritual exertion takes over and becomes more important in making God a spiritual reality. The Holy Prophet Muhammad has said that in Ramadan the devil is fettered in chains, and the doors of hell are closed, and the doors of heaven are opened. Truly in Ramadan when we control our physical desires which are constantly being inflamed by the devil then we do chain the devil and make him work for us. Similarly when we refrain from evil deeds the doors of hell are closed for us and the more we become aware of all the attributes of God and put them into practice by doing good to humanity, the closer we get to God and enter his Garden. All this happens because of the remembrance of Allah which occurs in Ramadan.

May Almighty Allah give us all the strength and guidance that we can carry on with the spirit of Ramadan for the rest of the year so that it becomes a source of *ever recurring happiness* for us. May He grant us the resolve to be regular in our daily prayers and *tahajudd* prayers and study of the Holy Quran so we may be constantly be aware of His existence. And may He grant us protection from forgetting these lessons learnt in Ramadan, so that we foolishly loosen the devil's chains or open the doors of hell with our own hands. Ameen and Eid Mubarik! ■

## Islam and the Foundation for Inter-religious Peace

By Samina Malik

*[The following article was presented at an international conference in Chechnya in August of 2007 titled: "Islam, the Religion of Peace and Creation." Mrs. Malik was invited by the Russian Federation in Moscow and the Government of Chechnya to be the American representative at the conference. In line with the theme of the conference, Mrs. Malik presented a talk before the international delegates on Islam's liberal view of other religions. More particularly, as is shown below, in a concise yet compelling manner, Mrs. Malik made the argument that, far from an intolerant faith, Islam offers the foundation for inter-religious peace in the world.]*

### Introduction

Dear Mr. President Kaderov, respected delegates, brothers and sisters in Islam, assalamu aleikum! It is a great honor for me to partake in this forum and speak on the subject of Islam being a religion of peace and tolerance.

I am the delegate from the United States of America and am the Vice-President of the U.S. branch of the international organization, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society. The primary goal of our organization is to translate the Holy Quran into all of the languages of the world and have it distributed widely so that people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, may study Almighty Allah's word for themselves, in their own language. Recently, we donated fifty thousand copies of the Russian translation of the Holy Quran to Russia for free distribution. We are also working in several Central Asian countries to develop learning centers where the local populations may come to learn about Islam from its original sources. Unfortunately, today, many Muslims are deprived of learning the Quran for themselves because they do not have access to its teachings in their own language. These people resort to learning their religion from others, who are sometimes more interested in politics than Islam. We believe by providing the people with the Quran in their own language, they will be in a much better position to learn the truth of Islam. Our motto is: *get the Quran into the hands of the people, and the spiritual force of the Quran will then do the rest.*

This forum here today could not have been held at a more opportune time. As you all know, Islam is being portrayed throughout the world as a violent, intolerant and destructive force. This image of Islam is based on the acts of terrorism by a small minority of Muslims who claim they are acting in accordance with Islam. Unfortunately, it is these violent actions that capture the headlines in the

media and feed the perception among non-Muslims that the religion of Islam is anything but peaceful. Forums such as these are extremely necessary as they are very effective in disseminating the correct, peaceful teachings of Islam. It is my earnest prayer to Almighty Allah that He causes the proceedings of this forum to be widely disseminated so that the true picture of Islam, as a religion of peace and tolerance, prevails in the world. Ameen!

As we all know, there is a very deep-rooted misconception prevalent in the world that the Quran itself preaches intolerance and that Prophet Muhammad preached his faith with the sword in one hand and the Quran in the other. This, it is argued, is the cause for Muslims carrying out acts of terror in the world today. This logic could not be further from the truth. And this is why I would like to discuss today the topic of: "Islam and the Foundation for Inter-religious Peace."

### Faith in all prophets

As a fundamental principle of Islam, a Muslim must believe in all prophets of the world. This fact, in and of itself, is enough to rebut the allegation that Islam is intolerant toward other faiths. The Holy Prophet Muhammad taught that simple respect for the founders of the great religions of the world was not enough – in Islam, one must have faith in them as well. Thus, the word "tolerance" cannot sufficiently describe the attitude Islam prescribes towards other religions – Islam preaches equal love, equal respect and equal faith in them all.

As the Holy Quran states in Chapter 4, verses 150 to 152:

*Those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers and desire to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others; and desire to take a course in between –*

*These are truly disbelievers; and We have prepared for the disbelievers an abasing chastisement.*

*And those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, to them He will grant their rewards. And Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.*

### No Compulsion in Religion

It is also clear that intolerance cannot be ascribed to a book which plainly declares:

*There is no compulsion in religion (2:256).*

Thus, "freedom of religion" is an entrenched principle of Islam. The Holy Quran clearly mandates that a person's

belief in religion is his or her own concern and that everyone should be given the choice of adopting whichever path they want; if he or she accepts the truth, it is for his or her own good, and that if he or she remains in error, it is to his or her own detriment. The Quran lays this down in the clearest words. In Ch. 18, verse 29, it states:

*The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve (18:29).*

In Chapter 6, verse 104, it states:

*Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord: so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm (6:104).*

And in Chapter 76, verse 3, it states:

*We have truly shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful (76:3).*

### Why fighting was allowed.

Now, certainly history testifies to the fact that Muslims were permitted to engage in certain wars. But what was the object of those wars? This is the question that must be asked.

It was surely not to compel non-Muslims to accept Islam, for this would be against all the verses I have just quoted from the Holy Quran. No, it was to establish religious freedom! It was to stop all religious persecution and to protect the houses of worship of all religions, whether churches, synagogues or mosques. The Holy Quran explains:

*And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down" (22:40).*

Every student of Islamic history knows that the Holy Prophet and his companions were subjected to the severest persecution as Islam began to gain ground at Makkah. Over one hundred of them fled to Abyssinia, but persecution grew still more relentless. Ultimately, the Muslims took refuge in Madinah, but they were not left alone, and the sword was taken up against them even there to annihilate this small group of believers. The Quran bears testimony to this; it states:

*Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And Allah is able to assist them — those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah (22:39, 40).*

Thus, in Islam, war is only permissible in "self-defense"! And even under these circumstances, it is limited. The Quran states:



*And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors” (2:190).*

The Quran, therefore, allowed fighting only as defensive measure to save a persecuted community from powerful oppressors; as soon as the persecution ceased, the fighting was to be stopped.

The Holy Quran goes so far as to prescribe that if the enemy offered peace, peace was to be accepted, though the enemy’s intention might only be to deceive the Muslims. The Quran states:

*And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah. Surely He is the Hearer, the Knower. And if they intend to deceive thee, then surely Allah is sufficient for thee (8:61, 62).*

In accordance with this principle, the Holy Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies. One such treaty brought about the famous “*Truce of Hudaibiyah*”, the terms of which were not only disadvantageous, but also humiliating to the Muslims. According to the terms of this treaty, “if an unbeliever, being converted to Islam, went over to the Muslims, he was to be returned, but if a Muslim went over to the unbelievers, he was not to be given back to the Muslims”. This clause of the treaty diminishes all allegations of the use of force by the Holy Prophet. It also shows the strong conviction of the Holy Prophet that neither would Muslims go back to unbelief, nor would the new converts to Islam be deterred from embracing Islam. And these expectations proved true, for during this period not a single Muslim deserted Islam, but rather a large number came over to Islam.

It is a mistake to suppose that the conditions related above were abrogated at any time. The condition to fight “against those who fight against you” remained in force to the last. The last expedition led by the Holy Prophet was the famous “*Tabuk Expedition*”, and every historian of Islam knows that, though the Prophet had marched a very long distance to *Tabuk* leading an army of thirty thousand, yet, when he found that the enemy did not fulfill the condition laid down above (i.e. was not currently engaged in aggression), he simply returned and did not allow his troops to attack the enemy territory.

So from first to last, the Holy Qur’an allowed fighting only against those who fought the Muslims first. It allowed fighting only in defense, without which the Muslims would have been exterminated, and it clearly forbade aggressive war. The view that Islam encourages the waging of war on unbelievers to compel them to accept Islam is a myth pure and simple; it is a concept completely foreign to the Holy Quran and untraceable to acts of the early Muslims.

### **No punishment for apostasy.**

Another widely prevailing misconception may also be noted here. It is generally thought that the Quran provides a death sentence for those who desert the religion of Islam. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Quran will see that there is not the least ground for such a supposition. The Quran speaks repeatedly of people going back to unbelief after believing, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. In Chapter 2, verse 217, the Quran states:

*And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter” (2:217).*

In Chapter 5, verse 54, it states:

*O you who believe, should anyone of you turn back from his religion, then Allāh will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him (5:54).*

And in Chapter 3, verse 90, it states:

*Those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in disbelief, their repentance is not accepted, and these are they that go astray” (3:90).*

So from where did this misconception arise? It appears that some people, who after becoming apostates, joined enemy forces, fought against the Muslims and took the life of a Muslim. Thus, if such a person was at some time killed by the Muslims, it was because of the crime of murder, not simply because he changed his religion. The principle is similar to the punishment for the crime of “treason” accepted widely in the world today.

### **Conclusion**

My dear brothers and sisters, we recite the *Surah Fatiha* in each of our daily prayers wherein we ask Almighty Allah: “*Ideen a siratul mustaqeem*” – “Guide us on the right path”! Almighty Allah has provided us this guidance in the form of the Holy Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Now it is our duty to study these two gifts from Almighty Allah and put them into practice. This is in fact the true “*jihad*”. The war that is obligatory upon each Muslim in this age is not any type of military action but rather a spiritual struggle to better our souls so that through our personal example others will come to know that Islam truly is a religion of peace. May Almighty Allah grant us the strength and courage to achieve this mighty goal. Ameen.

Jazak Allah for your attention, your hospitality and your kindness. ■

## Defamation in the Name of Christ: Evangelical Revision of Islamic Teachings and History to Accommodate the Christian Fundamentalist Agenda (Part 2)

By **Fatima Rahman, B.A., M.A.**

*[Members of the U.S. branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement have been preparing responses to each chapter of the book “Unveiling Islam” so that rebuttals to the arguments made therein, the same oft repeated allegations against Islam, may be compiled in one, easy to access publication. This article is the second of two parts of the response to chapter 3 of “Unveiling Islam”, the first being published in the July-September 2007 issue. Ms. Rahman tackles the subject of this particular chapter head on; she meticulously dissects each allegation then thoroughly analyzes its source, significance and validity. Ms. Rahman’s comprehensive work not only refutes the assertion that Islam is a religion of violence, but also provides valuable insight into the agenda of the resurrected Evangelical Movement in the U.S.]*

Having established the inaccuracy of the allegation that Islam has historically endorsed “holy war” and having traced its roots to Christian theology, another one of the core criticisms that the Caner brothers make is that Islam endorses forced conversions and that this intolerance has riddled the Islamic past.<sup>28</sup> Both points are erroneous. Firstly, the Quran upholds the greatest tolerance for other religions upon the principle that “there is no compulsion in religion” (2:256).<sup>29</sup> And secondly, from a historical perspective, Islam has had a rich record of tolerance for other faiths, a tolerance that has historically been unmatched by all other major religions. The respect shown to members of other religions is exemplified throughout Islamic history, most notably beginning with the inception of Islam during the Prophet’s time, through the Caliphate, the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ayyubid dynasties, and the Ottoman empire.

The Quran’s position on freedom of religion is very clear. Maulana Muhammad Ali describes the Quranic perspective as, “religion is treated as a matter between man and his God, a matter of conscience, in which nobody has a right to interfere.”<sup>30</sup> Not only does the Quran respect religion as a personal choice, but it repeatedly calls not only for the defense of Islam but for

the defense of other religions as well. In fact the Quran places such an incredible amount of stress upon respect for other religions that it commands Muslims not only to defend their religion and their community but also the faiths of other believers and their places of worship. The Quran says:

Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down (22:40).<sup>31</sup>

Maulana Muhammad Ali’s commentary on this verse describes the extraordinary respect that Islam showers on other religions.

The religious freedom which was established by Islam thirteen hundred years ago has not yet been surpassed by the most civilized and tolerant of nations. It deserves to be noted that the lives of Muslims are to be sacrificed not only to stop their own persecution by their opponents and to save their own mosques, but to save churches, synagogues, and cloisters as well—in fact, to establish perfect religious freedom. The mosques, though they are the places where the name of Allah is remembered most of all, come in for their share of protection even after the churches and the synagogues. Early Muslims closely followed these directions, and every commander of an army had express orders to respect all houses of worship, and even the cloisters of monks, along with their inmates.<sup>32</sup>

Sacrificing one’s life for another religion as ordained in the Quran epitomizes the highest respect that Islam has for other religions. It goes beyond mere tolerance to actual protection and defense of other faiths. Thus, the idea that Islam is intolerant of other faiths, let alone that it endorses forced conversions as argued by the Caner brothers is completely baseless.

The veneration bestowed upon other faiths as found in the Quran is a principle that was practiced strikingly uniformly throughout Islam’s history. One of the most glaring examples is found during the Prophet’s time in the conception of the Constitution of Medina, a contract of unity under which Muslims and Jews shared the same privileges and rights. The spirit of the Constitution is captured by the following excerpt from the Constitution which reads, “The Jews of Banu ‘Awf are a community (umma) along with the believers. To the Jews their religion (din) and to the Muslims their religion.”<sup>33</sup>

This attitude to live as one and in peace with members of other faiths, as exemplified by the Prophet, con-

tinued throughout Islam's history. As Islam's popularity grew so did its political rule, and this principle of freedom of religion and respect for other faiths was sustained. Members of other faiths which came into Islamic political jurisdiction were given rights and privileges equal to those of Muslims. Armstrong describes this phenomenon. "In the Islamic empire Jews like Christians had full religious liberty; the Jews lived there in peace until the creation of the State of Israel in our own century. The Jews of Islam never suffered like the Jews of Christendom."<sup>34</sup> In fact, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were simply given the title of "believers" as were Muslims.

The Caner brothers blindly accuse all of Islamic history as intolerant, but they focus special attention upon Umar for being intolerant towards Christians.<sup>35</sup> This is quite ironic because Umar historically has the reputation of being one of the most tolerant and merciful rulers to have ever lived. An excerpt from Alan Heston describes Umar's supervision of non-Muslim regions.

Umar was determined to maintain good discipline. The Arab soldiers were not to enjoy the fruits of victory; the conquered lands were not to be divided among the generals, but left to the existing cultivators... Muslims were not allowed to settle in the cities. Instead, new garrison towns (amsar) were built for them at strategic locations.<sup>36</sup>

Not only were Christian regions left intact exactly as they were found before coming under Islamic jurisdiction as shown by this excerpt, but many Christians actually preferred Islamic rule.

In fact, the tolerance and respect shown to non-Muslims under Umar's rule is often compared with the persecution and discrimination experienced by non-Christians and even some sects of Christianity under Christian rule throughout history. Alan Heston, in his article titled, *Crusades and Jihads: A Long-Run Economic Perspective*, compares the treatment of minorities under Muslim and Christian rule. "Umar permitted Christians and Jews to live in Jerusalem, while Byzantium had restricted Jews and the crusaders were to ban Jews and Muslims."<sup>37</sup> History shows that not only were Jews and Muslims persecuted under Christian rule but even Roman Christians were persecuted under Byzantine's Eastern Christian rule. Armstrong describes the reaction of the Western Christians as the Islamic nation led by Umar replaced the dictatorial Byzantine rule. "Indeed some of the Roman Christians, who had been persecuted by the Greek Orthodox for their heretical opinions, greatly preferred Muslim to Byzantine rule."<sup>38</sup>

It is quite ironic that the accusations made against Umar by the Caner brothers are in reality applicable to the Christian leaders of the Byzantine Empire and the Crusaders.

The respectful treatment of Christians, Jews, and other believers under Islamic rule continued in Muslim Spain in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the status of Jews under Muslim rule is recorded as one of the most positive periods in their history. Erwin Rosenthal describing this writes, "The Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more formative and positive time in our long and checkered history than that under the empire of Islam"<sup>39</sup> Reza Shah-Kazemi, a scholar in comparative religions adds,

One particularly rich episode in this golden period was experienced by the Jews of Muslim Spain. As has been abundantly attested by historical records, the Jews enjoyed not just freedom from oppression, but also an extraordinary revival of cultural, religious, theological, and mystical creativity. As Titus Burckhardt writes, 'the greatest beneficiaries of Islamic rule were the Jews, for in Spain they enjoyed their finest intellectual flowering since their dispersal from Palestine to foreign lands.'<sup>40</sup>

The same cannot be said of Jews or Muslims under Christian rule. Both Muslims and Jews have suffered great persecution under Christendom historically. One of the most glaring examples is the persecution of Muslims and Jews during the conquests of the Crusaders. In the essay, "Recollecting the Spirit of Jihad", Reza Shah Kazemi demonstrates the application of Quranic mercy and compassion through Islamic history. Kazemi provides a compelling vignette of the treatment of Muslims during the Christian conquest of the Crusades and the treatment of Christians under the Muslim sultan Saladin's reign. He writes, "Saladin's magnanimity at this defining moment of history will always be contrasted with the barbaric sacking of the city and indiscriminate murder of its inhabitants by the Christian Crusaders in 1099."<sup>41</sup> He then provides the following excerpt from Saladin's biographer Stanley Lane-Poole.

One recalls the savage conquest by the first Crusaders in 1099, when Godfrey and Tancred rode through streets choked with the dead and the dying, when defenseless Moslems were tortured, burnt, and shot down in cold blood on the towers and roof the Temple, when the blood of wanton massacre defiled the honor of Christendom and stained the scene where once the gospel of love and mercy had been preached. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,' was a forgotten beatitude when the Christians made shambles of the Holy City. Fortunate were the merciless, for

they obtained mercy at the hands of the Moslem Sultan...If the taking of Jerusalem were the only fact known about Saladin, it were enough to prove him the most chivalrous and great-hearted...<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, the Crusades are not a notable exception to the horrendous treatment of non-Christians under Christian authority but rather representative of the plight of non-Christians throughout much of Christian history. The over two hundred year Papal-authorized *Reconquista* of Spain was characterized by forced conversions of all Muslims and Jews in Spain accompanied by torture and death. The *Reconquista* was followed by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions which were the genocidal murdering of all remaining Jews and Muslims in the region. Heston provides a summary of the key elements that composed the Spanish Inquisition.

The infamous Spanish form of the Inquisition followed the capture of Cordoba in 1236. The victors built a church to partially replace the mosque, a common enough practice though a major loss to architectural history. Muslims and Jews, if they had not fled, were to convert or die. Many did convert and still were the victims of torture to confess their heresy, as all *conversos* were regarded with suspicion. Another reaction to Muslim rule in Spain was to regard bathing as sacrilegious, and baths were destroyed, as was done later at Aztec sites... Ferdinand and Isabella issued an edict expelling all Jews...there were many aspects of the *reconquista* of Spain that set back the cause of learning. And the intolerance continued to flower throughout the Counter Reformation in the sixteenth century, the refugees taking their knowledge to Northern Europe. The

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last execution for heresy in Spain took place in 1826, and the Inquisition was officially suppressed in 1834.<sup>43</sup>

The few Jews that survived the Inquisition turned to the Ottomans for refuge and protection.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, a historical perspective reveals that from the inception of Islam and throughout its history, non-Muslims under Muslim rule experienced freedom of religion, were free from persecution, and enjoyed the same rights and liberties as the Muslims. This treatment stems from the Quranic principle of freedom of religion, and its teachings of humanity, mercy, and compassion. Quite oppositely Christian history from its early beginnings is marred with intolerance and persecution of Muslims, Jews, and even some sects of Christianity as embodied during the Crusades, the *Reconquista*, and the Inquisition.

The Caner brothers link their account of Islamic history to present day with the argument that the emergence of extremist organizations today are a resurfacing of offensive war in the name of God which has characterized Islam's initial thousand year history. This argument like their other allegations is also flawed because of several fundamental reasons. Firstly, this paper has already examined the falsity of the claim that Islam is a violent religion, demonstrating that the Quran does not endorse any form of offensive war or conquest and that historically Islamic expansion has not occurred under the guise of religion. Thus, the allegation that these extremist groups have reemerged to implement a traditional, religiously ordained principle is once again erroneous. Secondly, even if these groups are hypothetically motivated by some past tradition of religious conquest, which as shown did not exist, the Caner brothers fail to provide a causal rationale for why these groups, one thousand years later suddenly have found the desire to revert back to this past. An analysis of these groups proves that they have not emerged because of a sudden desire to implement some construed religious ideals, but rather are politically-aimed organizations, born out of some political or social grievance.

The Caner brothers are guilty of the same intentional neglect that much of the foreign policy makers, politicians, media, and anti-Islamic organizations in the West are guilty of which is the failure to recognize the origins and grievances of these groups. Instead, these organizations are conveniently labeled as Islamically motivated zealots bent upon spreading a conservative and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. This label accommodates U.S. foreign policy's support of dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world and Israel's unlawful behavior as well as suits Evangelical groups' religious support for Israel.

A great majority of the extremist organizations that are headlining the news today were born only within the past thirty years, and behind each one of these organizations there is a foundational political injustice which they are fighting. That these organizations were born in the 1960s to 1980s is not a coincidence, rather it is due to the widespread consequences of the 1967 Six-Day War. It was this war which resulted in Israel's massive conquest of Arab lands, "including the Sinai peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan."<sup>45</sup>

It was the 1967 War which officially marked the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This directly resulted in the 1987 creation of Hamas, an organization with the central aim of ending Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Hamas is a deeply nationalist movement that is composed of both Palestinian Muslims and Christians, motivated by the drive to end Israeli occupation. In fact, it is Hamas' goal of attaining rights for Palestinians which brings together members of different faiths to support it. One of the Christian candidates running under the Hamas banner speaks of the political nature of his party, "I said that I am a Christian (Greek Orthodox) and I have a great loyalty to my Christianity. I am proud of that. But, here, we are speaking about political issues. I could win the support of all the Palestinian parties as I have done with Hamas."<sup>46</sup> Religion is obviously not the driving force behind this extremist organization. In fact, its recent victory in the Palestinian parliament proved that it was not their affiliation with Islam but rather their combined platform of national resistance and internal social reform which brought them support from both Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

Similarly, the group of extremist Egyptian organizations such as Jamaat al-Jihad and Gamaa Islamiya, born out of the post-1967 era, were also ultimately nationalist responses to the widespread corruption within their dictatorial government, which in the opinion of many was and continues to be a surrogate government of the United States. It is no coincidence that Egypt has been a fertile ground for these extremist organizations, after all after Israel, Egypt is the second largest receiver of US foreign aid since its signing of the 1978 Camp David Accords. It was after this signing, that dissent among the Egyptian population grew as the Egyptian government became to be viewed as a marionette government for the U.S. rather than a sovereign nation undertaking its own decisions. This resulted in nationalist movements looking to regain a national identity, free from American influence. It is the opinion of these groups that it was and continues to be their government's use of American diplomatic cover that allows

Egypt to suppress freedoms and liberties within its borders. Esposito describes this phenomenon as he explains what occurred within a few years of the Camp David Accords. He writes,

In early September 1981, faced with mounting discontent and opposition, in a sensational move the government launched a massive dragnet, arresting more than 1500 people. Secular and Islamic opposition publications were banned. Those imprisoned represented the entire political spectrum, from extreme right to extreme left, Muslim brothers and militants, as well as Marxists, Muslims, and Copts, young and old, journalists, writers, professors, and other professions"<sup>47</sup>

It is precisely this combination of political suppression along with American allegiance practiced by some Arab governments which has led to the birth of extremist groups in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world. Other transnational, extremist movements such as Al-Qaeda were also triggered in response to some political incident. Al-Qaeda originated as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Micheal Knapp, a Middle East analyst with the US Army National Ground Intelligence Center, comments that, "Bin Laden's ideology, however, is really more political than religious."<sup>48</sup> In fact, all of the grievances that Bin Laden publicly lists are political in nature. For example, the occupation of Palestinian lands and the strong presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia.

These few examples explain the emergence of extremist organizations as manifestations of political injustices occurring in the Middle East, with many of them characterized by nationalist sentiment. The dissent aimed at the United States arises from the United States' financial and diplomatic support of dictatorial regimes that stifle freedom and liberties and are seen as representing American policy rather than national and regional interests. The dissent does not stem from a desire to reconvene some past "offensive *jihād*," as alleged by the Caner brothers.

This paper has shown that *Unveiling Islam* is a compilation of deliberately constructed fabrications and lies that seek to incite hatred towards Islam and the Muslim world. Many of the elements that the Caner brothers characterize Islam's past with such as holy war and intolerance of other religions are historically features describing much of Christianity's past rather than Islam's. It is the fundamentalist Christian fanaticism that produces a piece like *Unveiling Islam* that also justifies revising history, publishing lies, and misinforming a public in order to demonize Islam, all in the name of spreading Christianity. The intolerance that the Caner brothers portray Islam endorsing is actually practiced

by them, manifesting itself in their anti-Islam rhetoric. By spreading these lies about Islam, they are cultivating hostility towards Islam and Muslims throughout the world which only adds to the trying circumstances that characterize the global atmosphere today. Instead of contributing to the effort of creating dialogue and understanding between members of our society, the Caner brothers undermine this endeavor that so many organizations like the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement are undertaking. It is especially disturbing that the Caner brothers are exploiting their past as “insiders” and discrediting their current positions as academics to propagate misconceptions about Islam that have been around since the Middle Ages. Religious debate is an important and educational tool for society, but it should be based on honest and historically accurate information. It is my sincere hope, that this paper has both provided insight into a misunderstood religion and exposed the fallacy behind much of the anti-Islamic propaganda that surrounds us today. ■

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## Islam's Trajectory

By Prof. David Forte

[David Forte is the Charles R. Emrick Jr. – Calfee, Halter & Griswold Endowed Professor of Law at Cleveland State University and author of *Studies in Islamic Law (Austin & Windfield, 1999)*. This article is based on his presentation at the May 6-7, 2006 “History Institute for Teachers on Islam, Islamism, and Democratic Values” held in Byrn Mawr, Pennsylvania. In this article, Prof. Forte presents a compelling case against the “clash of civilizations” theory. Rather, as he shows, the current global conflicts are between Islamic extremists and everyone else, including other Muslims who do not subscribe to the extremist’s ideologies. This article was originally published on the Foreign Policy Research Institute’s website at <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200609.religion.forte.islamtrajectory.html>.]

In March 2006, Abdul Rahman, an Afghan who converted to Christianity, was charged with apostasy because, in a custody dispute, his wife had reported him to the authorities as a Christian. Had he been found guilty, according to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (which is the form of Sharia in Afghanistan), Rahman would have had three days in which to recant; if he maintained his Christian beliefs, he would have been executed. But after enormous international pressure the judge dismissed his case on the ground that Rahman

may have been mentally unstable, and under the procedural rules of Sharia, one cannot be convicted of a Hadd offense—the crimes for which God has affixed a set penalty (adultery, fornication, false charge of adultery, drinking wine, apostasy, theft, and robbery)—unless he is mentally competent. Rahman is now safe in Italy, albeit with his identity hidden for fear of assassination.

This was a quick and easy way out of the problem, because everyone knew that once he was released in Afghanistan, Rahman would have been murdered, likely by his family, and under Islamic law there is no liability for killing an apostate. Knowing this, the Afghan parliament protested Italy's granting asylum to Rahman, thus robbing the people of Afghanistan of their opportunity for vigilante justice. Abdul Raouf, a moderate member of the Ulama (legal fraternity), who himself had suffered persecution under the Taliban, said "We will call on the people to pull him into pieces so there's nothing left." Another top religious leader stated, "We must set an example, he must be hanged."<sup>[1]</sup> Ordinary Afghans agreed. To them, a conversion to Christianity was an affront that had to be avenged. One of Rahman's neighbors said "There is no way we're going to allow an Afghan to insult us by becoming Christian."<sup>[2]</sup> One resident of Kabul stated, "According to Islamic law, he should be sentenced to death because Christianity is forbidden in our land."<sup>[3]</sup>

There are in fact Christians in Afghanistan. They're a tiny minority, but they do number in the thousands. Virtually all of them were or are the offspring of converts from Islam. And so they fear. There is no public Christian church in Afghanistan; Christians must worship secretly in their homes or within the diplomatic compound. This is no Saudi Arabia; this is a country freed from a gross tyranny by an army from a Christian land. And now this is a democratic country in which Christians fear for their lives.

It is events like this that have begun to turn Americans against the notion of Islam as a religion worthy of respect. After 9/11, George Bush famously said "Islam is a religion of peace," and there is a strong moderate and spiritual strain in Islam that would affirm this. But Americans have seen so much going on in the name of Islam that their attitude toward it has shifted.

The constitution of Afghanistan stipulates that it shall abide by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief." But the Afghan constitution also says "No law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." How can such a contradiction be negotiated?

There is a great mystery in Islam. Islam should have been the first civilization to have abandoned slavery; it was the last. Islam should have been the first to establish complete religious liberty; today, non-Muslims suffer egregious persecution in Muslim lands. Islam should have been the first to establish social equality for women. Instead, women who stray outside the family's code of behavior are murdered with impunity. Islam should have been the foremost civilization to observe the humanitarian laws of war, but its empires have been no different from others; some claim they have been worse. Today Muslims slaughter innocent civilians precisely because they are innocent.

The founder of every great religion sets its message off on a trajectory into the world that is carried through history. But the followers of religion, being human, inevitably deflect the trajectory from its original path. The Old Testament, especially in its prophetic literature, is to a large extent a narrative of a people being called back to the path set for them by God. The Protestant Reformation changed the trajectory of Christianity and itself set off a thousand attempts at righting the Reformation's trajectory. Catholicism's counterreformation, or as Catholics prefer to call it, the Catholic Reformation, was a frank acknowledgment that the Church had strayed from the direction set for it by Christ. In fact, looking at modern times, John Paul II's pontificate was itself so historically seminal because it refocused the Church in the world on the trajectory first begun in the early church by Peter.

To understand a religion's sense of its identity, we must focus on its founding documents and traditions and on its developing sense of itself. We must get a hold of its animating ethos. The founding documents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have all been subjected to historical criticism. But for their adherents, they are real and truly derived from divinity. To understand a religion's place in history, therefore, we must appreciate how the faithful see their sacred documents. As observers, we must accept them in that sense as a historical given.

As we take the Quran, as most moderate educated Muslims interpret it, we find the following: Christians and Jews are respected as Abrahamic brothers in faith and will enjoy the favor of God on the last day. There is no compulsion in faith for any person. A person who abjures Islam will suffer God's disapproval, but may not be harmed in this world. Non-Muslims can practice their religion and receive protection upon the payment of tribute, the standard mechanism for a subject population in ancient imperial times.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, most women lived at the sufferance of their husbands and male relatives. Although

some women achieved wealth on their own—Khadija, Mohammed's first wife, was such a woman—most Arabian women could not inherit wealth, the bride price was given to the father, they could be divorced at will or kept unavailable to other men during a period after divorce, and they could be beaten with impunity. Mohammed took Arabian society as far as it could go in his time. Women are to be recognized as *sui generis* of the law; they may own their own property; they get to keep the dower, which the husband may not interfere with, even if he is indebted. Wives must be maintained according to their station. They cannot be abused. At most they can be physically chastised so long as there is no physical harm. And even that is not seen as the morally preferable option in Islam. Polygamy, unlimited before Mohammed, is limited to four wives, but only if each wife can be maintained equally. A man may not marry a second wife if he has fear of injustice to his first wife and every man, were he honest with himself, should fear that he might commit such an injustice.

Slavery has been the universal unexceptionable norm throughout human history until recent times. In the Quran, the slave must be well treated. Muslims cannot be enslaved by other Muslims after battle, for debt, or for any other reason. Another international norm at the time was universally observed by Christian armies, Muslim armies, and Persian armies: a soldier taken in battle can be killed, enslaved, let loose, or kept for ransom. There was no dissent to this proposition. The Muslims, however, were told in the Quran not to harm subject populations, monks, or any innocent civilians. A child of a slave cannot be separated from its mother in Islam. Manumission is meritorious; it overcomes sin and is counted among the good deeds in the balance of life upon which attaining paradise is dependent. In Muslim moral theology, one attains paradise according to the balance of good deeds over bad deeds. There is no deathbed recantation. There can be a deathbed conversion that wipes out previous sins if one were not Muslim. But if one were a bad person all one's life, saying you're sorry on your deathbed is not going to do it. Islam has a sophisticated five-level sense of moral actions: there are some moral actions that are compulsory; others that are approved, that is, gain one moral credit; some actions are neutral; some are disapproved, what we call sins; and some are absolutely forbidden, which the state must proscribe. Manumission is approved. It gains a soul moral favor. But owning a slave is legal and morally neutral. It is permitted to enslave someone after a battle, but it is meritorious to manumit a slave.

So how did such a noble start come a cropper? How did tolerance become intolerance? How did protection become persecution? How did the dignity of women

turn into indignity? How did limited war become massacre? It is not enough of an answer to say that there have always been bad Muslims and bad Christians and bad Jews. For the problem in Islam is that intolerance and indignity and the murder of a person because of his changed religious belief have gained authoritative sanction from some quarters.

Three institutions have deflected the trajectory of Mohammed's original message: the law, the empire, and the tribe. Let us take apostasy as an example. The Quran condemns the apostate to damnation but imposes no earthly penalty. The death penalty arose later, in the law. It was the traditions of the Prophet, known as the Sunna, developed and codified later during a drive for the Islamicization of the early Islamic empire, that required putting the apostate to death. A primary tradition relied upon for this view attributes to Mohammed the statement, "Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him."

Most traditions, however, including the one just cited, inflict the death sentence because the apostate waged war on Islam. Indeed, the primary justification for the execution of the apostate is that in the early days of Islam, apostasy and treason were in fact synonymous. War was perennial in Arabia. It never stopped. To reject the leader of another tribe, to give up on a coalition, was in effect to go to war against him. There was no such thing as neutrality. There were truces, but there was never a permanent neutrality. It is reported, for example, that immediately after the death of Mohammed, many tribes apostatized. They said in effect, "The leader whom we were following is gone, so let's go back to our own leaders." And they rebelled against Muslim rule. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, ordered such rebels to be killed.

Many scholars argue that the tradition that all apostates had to be killed had its origin during these wars of rebellion and not during Mohammed's time. In fact, many argue that these traditions in which Mohammed affirmed the killing of apostates were apocryphal, made up later to justify what the empire had been doing. In fact, most of these traditions do not have a sound *isnad*, or chain of authority. Muslims knew that there were tens of thousands of fabricated traditions in the 8th and 9th centuries during the ideological battles between the legalists and other parties in the Islamic empire. And so the method of authenticating what were sound traditions developed. Those traditions that could be regarded with authority possessed a clear, unbroken chain of transmission by reputable Muslims reaching back to the Prophet. In Islam, as in most ancient methods of adjudication, authority was the method of determining truth, not objective forensic evidence. If the witness were moral, the witness had to be believed. You can



impugn the witness's character, but you don't impugn the testimony. The testimony is accepted. So if one could find a sound *isnad*, one had to accept its authority. (Of course, one could fabricate the transmissions as well as the substance of the tradition, but that problem was not, to my knowledge, systematically addressed in Islamic tradition.)

But there are breaks in some of the *isnads*. That tradition is then called weak, or not sound. Most, if not all, of the traditions regarding Mohammed's assertions of apostasy as a capital offense are either apocryphal, according to Western and some Muslim scholars, or have weak *isnads* and need not be believed. In one of the most exhaustive studies of the classical sources of Islamic law, S.A. Rahman, a Pakistani jurist of renown, argued that all references in the Quran to apostasy tied retaliation to rebellion, not merely falling from faith. Rahman argued that most other verses and sound traditions indicate an undeviating view that changes in belief were left to God to punish, and that it was forbidden to compel any person to join or rejoin any religion.

Whatever the source for the sentence of apostasy, most jurists of the Sharia came to regard the crime as one of neither rebellion nor unbelief, but merely a falling away from Islam. They were, after all, religious judges, and they came up with these rules a century or two after Mohammed's death. And so the religious judge would import authoritative actions into a religious mold. No distinction was made between the apostate who converts to one of the protected religions and one who falls into polytheism or unbelief. All apostates were denominated as unbelievers. No connection with rebellion was required. All that was needed was some evidence of disbelief, and unless recantation occurred relatively quickly, death was imposed.

For the Maliki school, it was the act of falling away from the religion of Islam that mattered. The law had no regard for conversion from one non-Islamic faith to another. But for the more casuistical Shafii school, any act of apostasy was fatal, even from say Judaism to Christianity.

As in other areas of Islamic law, probative evidence relies upon the *bona fides* of the witnesses more than upon the substance of the act that constitute apostasy. According to Abu Zakariyya Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (1233-78) of the Shafii school, "witnesses need not recount in all their details the facts that constitute apostasy; they may confine themselves to affirming that the guilty person is an apostate." The punishment for an apostate is death; traditionally by beheading, although crucifixion and immolation have also been employed. For some jurists, the apostate must be given a period of time in which to recant and return to Islam; most

schools require that the apostate be exhorted to repent. But the Shia will not accept the recantation of an apostate who was born a Muslim. The Hanafi school recommends three days of imprisonment before execution, although neither the delay nor the requirement to try to dissuade the apostate before killing him is mandatory. The Maliki school (dominant in Egypt), which is normally stricter than the Hanafi school, will in this case allow up to ten days for recantation. Although the Hanafi school does not condemn the female apostate to death, jurists in the Maliki and Shafii schools do.

Under most schools of Islamic law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, Hanbali, Shia Jaafari), the apostate is an outlaw. The Hanafis are explicit: any person killing an apostate is himself immune to prosecution and immune from retaliation. In addition, the apostate loses all civil entitlement. His marriage becomes a nullity, and he has no rights to inherit. In 1995 in Egypt, for example, a court declared Nasr Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic literature and Islamic studies at Cairo University, an apostate, and he and his wife had to flee to France. He and his wife escaped to France because they knew the fate of with the novelist Farag Fouda, whom the ulama of Al-Azhar university had declared to be an apostate. Certain that he was going to be assassinated, Fouda was in fact murdered in 1992. His killers announced "All we did was carry out the appropriate Islamic punishment in light of the accusation leveled by Al-Azhar's ulama."

Here is where the religious law can become pernicious. One of the most signal reforms of Mohammed was to get rid of self-help vengeance between the tribes. In seventh-century Arabia, if a member of one tribe were killed or harmed by a member of another tribe, the tribe of the victim could retaliate at will. This led to unending feuds. Mohammed decreed that there would no longer be retaliation allowed until the guilt of the malefactor was proven to an impartial third party. And then, retaliation was allowed only in the most egregious circumstances, where there was what we would call malice afore thought. In all other circumstances, there could only be compensation. Self-help was no longer allowed. This is a fundamental legal principle of any ordered society.

But the legal jurists, in turning apostasy from an act of treason to an act of unbelief, allowed self-help vengeance to return to Muslim society. They undid one of the most important reforms of Mohammed. This has been filtered into the tribal culture that has always remained within Islam. The act of apostasy became an offense against the honor of the clan or the family. And since the law allowed acts of private vengeance in such cases, there was a return to the very kind of violent act that Mohammed originally decreed out of Muslim society.

Such a cultural practice leaves non-Muslims paralyzed. On a trip I made to a moderate Muslim country, I visited non-Muslim religious leaders and asked them what happens if a Muslim wishes to convert to Christianity. They were all upset by that question. One religious leader told me, “Well, there are many reasons why a man might want to convert to Christianity, none of them genuine. It might be a psychological reason, it might be he’s unstable, etc.” It is not just that it is politically embarrassing for a Christian leader that someone might want to become a Christian. If his family should find out, and he cannot be gotten out of the country, his family will kill him.

So apostasy has been brought into tribal cultures, which sadly to many Westerners seems to give the lie to the Quranic verse that there shall be no compulsion in religion. Such actions, in my view, distort the genuine heart of Islam. But it shows how far from the original principles the culture has come because of what the legal community did to it, what the empire’s needs were, and how tribalism has distorted the religion’s spiritual message.

Another example is the treatment of religious minorities. When Mohammed conquered a religious minority, he gave them safe conduct and the right to continue their religious practices on payment of tribute. There was nothing unusual about that. Tribute was the normal method of acknowledgment of a superior ruler over an inferior people. Even during the middle period of the Islamic empire, when the Byzantine Empire had a brief resurgence, the caliph paid tribute to the Byzantine emperor. And then afterwards, the Byzantine Empire generally paid tribute to the caliph.

When the Islamic armies had first conquered Syria, the Holy Land, and Egypt, they came with no historic tradition of imperial rule. The first empire, after the four caliphs who succeeded Mohammed, was the Umayyad Empire (661-750), which had its capital in Damascus, a Byzantine city. At the start, the Muslim conquerors were in effect garrison troops. Virtually the entire population was non-Muslim. In fact, in the first few decades of the Umayyad Empire, the court language was Greek, not Arabic.

Now the Byzantines had already invented the idea of what to do to a heretical sect (short of persecution). They would permit it to exist on payment of tribute. The Umayyad Empire simply adopted the Byzantine practice. Then when the Abbasids took over from the Umayyads in 750, they moved their capital to Baghdad, which had been part of Persia. The Abbasids absorbed the Persian Sassanid imperial structure. The Persians, who were Zoroastrians, had, under the Parthians (till around the year 250), been very tolerant of other reli-

gions. But under the Sassanids, who had succeeded the Parthians, deviant sects were persecuted. The Sassanids would allow some sects to exist, provided they paid a higher tax than did the Zoroastrians. This practice was absorbed by the Abbasid Empire and developed into the law of the dhimmi (Christians and Jews, but later including Zoroastrians, Hindus, Sabians). The practice was codified into the law that the jurists were developing at the same time. It was a contemporaneous development, not something from the Quran or from the Prophet.

The dhimmi were allowed to exist and practice their own religion on payment of a *jizyah*, which originally meant tribute but became much higher than the normal *zakat* that the Muslim had to pay. (The *zakat* itself was originally a voluntary tithing, but the empire turned it into a permanent tax, for empires know a good tax scheme when they see it.) This differentiation put great pressure upon the dhimmi to convert, because most people maintain their religion as a matter of social norm, not as a matter of personal belief. This differentiation between the *zakat* and the *jizyah*, as well as a later differentiation in property taxes, derived from the Sassanid Empire and became part of the Islamic rule regarding the dhimmi. But if you take Mohammed’s original premise, which is that a subject religion can continue to practice so long as they recognize the legitimacy of the state over it, there’s nothing contrary to that in modern religious freedom.

With the dhimmi under imperial rule, ratified authoritatively by the Sharia, as a subject religion, tribalism adds the mental construct of intolerance of the other, and the results are the kind of massacres against dhimmis that have always punctuated Islamic history over the centuries. It need not have been so. But it became ratified by the law through the structure of empire and acted upon through the lens of tribalism.

As most moderate and reformist Muslims readily agree, none of these untoward practices of Muslim civilization are required by the spiritual message of the Prophet. Looking past the present-day violence of radical Muslims, we see that, in the long run, the great struggle within Islam is to return to its spiritual roots undeflected by empire, tribe, or rigid legal norms. In sum, moderate and reformist thinkers in Islam are seeking to return to the spiritual trajectory established by the Prophet. ■

## Notes

- 1 Daniel Cooney, “Afghan clerics want Christian convert killed,” AP, Mar. 24, 2006.
- 2 Allan Wall, “Abdul Rahman and the ‘New’ Afghanistan,” NewsMax.com, Mar. 24, 2006.
- 3 Sanjoy Majumder, “Mood hardens against Afghan convert,” BBC, Mar. 24, 2006.

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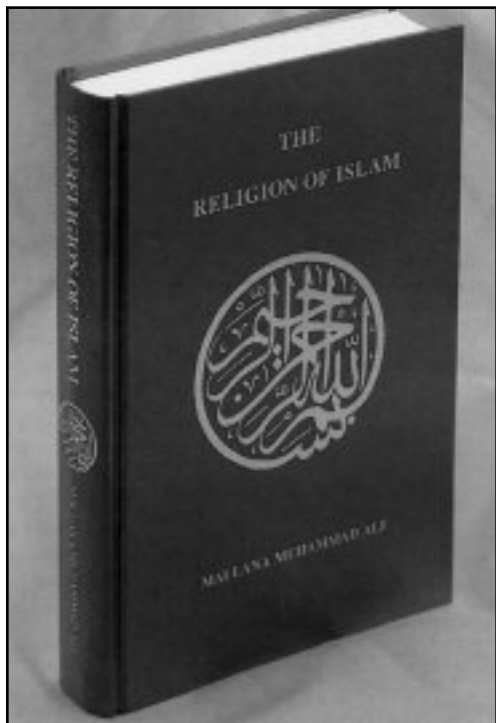
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