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## *Interpretations for Peace in the Religions of the Near East*

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**I**NTERFAITH AS AN IDEAL and as an activity now abounds. Very few in the world will admit they do not affirm peaceful and collaborative relations among religions and believers from different traditions. This current expanse of interfaith consciousness has been evolving and maturing for approximately 40 years since the 1970s. The elder statesmen of the interfaith pantheon coincided with the spirit of peace that gave rise to the United Nations. These include the Temple of Understanding, World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the Congress of Faiths. Also quite old and established is the International Council of Christians and Jews, a bilateral interfaith group. These early organizations paved the way for contemporary interfaith. from the 1950s onwards. They were in a way parallel to the United Nations dream only from a religious instead of a political framework.

In the 1970s UN limitations began to harden in the diminished hopes of the global community, as did any radical hope for evident change that might have been harbored for the work of these early interfaith groups. In both cases all recognized the positive value of ongoing work in both areas, but hope for real change transformed itself into recognizing peace work as something worthwhile in its own right. Sort of a “the poor you will always have with you” approach to doing good.

These organizations continued to represent what would become “the establishment” in the interfaith panoply, and many of its seasoned leaders served as mentors for the new turns and developments of interfaith work in later years. In the late 1970s another major surge of interfaith arose that persisted in an unbroken line of development from that time until the present day.

This period of interreligious relations from the late 1970s until the present has traversed a number of different phases based on global and international developments and contexts for their relations. During the

cold war, interfaith was beneath the surface and did not concern the average person on the street, or the average religious believer. The world at the time was distracted by communist aggression and the proxy wars sponsored by the East and West blocs. Though the problem of communism should have been recognized as a religious problem, people tended to see matters as economic, or based in political theory. In all of life in this period, religion took a backseat. The same was the case and perhaps more so with interreligious activity. People presumed that such conversations were simply for the few who happened to take interest in that sort of thing, much in the same way one was a movie goer, or a classical music aficionado.

Good interfaith progress occurred during the cold war, but it was not recognized as pressing in world affairs. It was beneath the surface or in the background, so far as most people were concerned. But among religious professionals and people naturally insightful about the central importance of religion in human affairs, important strides were realized in the hard and challenging work required to advance positive interreligious relations. Greater knowledge, wisdom, and facility in positive interreligious relations were developed, as was greater complexity and breadth. These developments and progress during this phase of obscurity remain the treasure and legacy of interfaith opportunity as seen at present.

In 1989 when communist states (particularly the Soviet Union) imploded, instead of the appearance of the era of peace expected by some, there erupted onto the horrified surface of human and international relations full blown, old fashioned, medieval, kill-the-infidel style religious war! The tinderbox of course was the Balkans (former Yugoslavia), which by the way erupts now once more, with the declaration of Kosovo independence. This war (and subsequent global instability) all revealed a persistent reality of religion taken with deadly seriousness in human affairs.

The path to secular enlightenment that finally realized itself in full blown State-enforced atheism proved to have made nary a dent in religious devotion and religious passions. The only thing that happened post-enlightenment was the rise of a new religiously-held passion, namely religious-ignorantism in the forms of post-enlightenment rationalism and secularism. These emerged to become one of the smaller “religious” communities in the scheme of things.

With the surprise evidence that old fashioned religious hatred had gone nowhere at all, the major secularist and materialist powers found themselves asleep at the wheel of world affairs. Even to this very moment, North Atlantic power centers (especially media, as well as the “management theory movement”) stubbornly resist the wisdom of recognizing the enormous influence of religion (for good and for bad) in the unfolding of contemporary world affairs.

Though the interfaith movement struggles to be effective in the face of massive outbreaks of conflict that involve and include religious dimensions, it should be noted that the interfaith movement did not suddenly arise with the post-Soviet-era “discovery” that religious passions still inform human life. As noted above, these already attempted to instill themselves alongside UN dreaminess, and then arose again due to other factors in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

The cold war distracted many from the truth about religion and the importance of interfaith for most of the twentieth century, but despite the immediate eruption of Balkan-type interreligious hatreds in the wake of communist decline, the elite still imagined a non-religiously influenced world throughout the 1990s. This “second slumber” was characterized by the dog dream that at last everyone in the world would want to be just like the United States. The rude awakening from this modernist delusion was perhaps even more stark than the religio-political clashes that shredded the Balkans. The infamous 9/11 attacks once again labored hard to remind the secular elite that religion seems to matter to some, and matter quite a lot!

Hopefully this ostrich-like attitude of the secular elite is changing, as might be indicated in phenomena such as we find in this uncharacteristic *New York Times* quote of February 25, 2008:

Michael Lindsay, assistant director of the Center on Race, Religion and Urban Life at Rice University, echoed that view. ‘Religion is the single most important factor that drives American belief attitudes and behaviors,’ said Mr. Lindsay, who had read the Pew report. ‘It is a powerful indicator of where America will end up on politics, culture, family life. If you want to understand America, you have to understand religion in America.’

Events since 9/11 that evoke religion (however bastardized) are so persistent and relentless, that even those who find belief bothersome

in its tenacity, seem to recognize (if reluctantly) that efforts and experts on how religions might better get along are now seen not only as not “quaint” but perhaps even welcome.

Once again we should be thankful that interfaith activists did not spring to life on September 12, 2001, green, and clueless. Rather, as I have posited in these few words, current interfaith reflection, scholarship, and activity represent an unbroken period of approximately 40 years of development, sophistication, and increasing experience and complexity.

There remain key and vital elements missing in the repertoire of interfaith professionals that still leave the industry insufficient to influence radical change and success in the face of severe, world-threatening conflict. Addressing these inadequacies is one of the responsibilities of journals such as this. In the meantime steady education and information from scholars in the field of religion and peace, and interfaith relations are vital to our current situation.

We are proud of the content of this issue of *Dialogue and Alliance* as we seek to contribute in our small way to this pressing need of our time.

This issue consists of six important articles from what are often thought of as the religions of the “Middle East,” or the “Near East,” and finally are sometimes called “The Abrahamic Faiths.” In short, we refer to Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Two outstanding articles come from Christian and Jewish traditions respectively, and the remaining articles are from and on Islam.

Two of the Muslim-oriented articles are interpretive in ways similar to the Jewish and Christian counterparts in this issue, and two of the Muslim-oriented articles are analyses of the particular Muslim groups, phenomena, and the landscape Muslim movements in our current moment.

Rabbi Dr. Allen Maller, in his finely written and innovative hermeneutic on several passages from Isaiah 41 through 44, does a splendid and important work with the concept of the “suffering servant.” This concept and these texts traditionally divide Christian and Jewish commentators, though each community is committed to these as sacred texts. For this reason Maller’s work is a valuable contribution to the pressing conversation between and among Jews and Christians. This is a rich and engaging work that includes reflection on key and challenging theological categories such as messiah, holocaust and others.

Father Dr. Leonoardo Mercado's interpretive work for the sake of greater interreligious harmony is not textual per se, but rather interprets a core element of Christian piety, namely Christian spirituality. The good thing about Mercado (whose work appears occasionally with us at *Dialogue and Alliance*) is that it comes out of a rigorous tradition. Interreligious advocacy is easier in many traditions than it is out of strictly orthodox Roman Catholicism. In other words, Mercado is in real dialogue with what many recognize as an exclusivistic tradition. Thus the challenge to render Roman Catholic understanding as fully interreligious with full integrity requires creative and exacting effort. Here Mercado examines the term and concept "spirituality" through two interpretive lenses, dualism and holism. This is a valuable and edifying study.

The Muslim essay from this family of essays, seeking to open avenues for greater interreligious collaboration is that of Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid. Sajid does the valuable service of providing for *Dialogue and Alliance* readers interpretation of what might be called "the difficult passages" in the Qur'an. Sajid goes through a great many Qur'anic passages that are often called upon to justify violence, and in place of such harmful readings presents how these passages are better understood when contextualized in the larger vision of Islam.

In the essay "Tabligh Jama'at and Hizbul Tahrir" by Ameer Ali we learn of two important, contemporary "Muslim movements." Ali makes available knowledge of the historical and theological roots and the present form and influence of these closely related, but clearly distinct, major movements in contemporary Islam.

Finally, Dr. M. O. Adeniyi's paper "Towards Political Stability in Nigeria: Guide from Islam" puts forth an argument that the Qur'an has sufficient guidance for proper temporal governance and that if it were responsibly applied it would help Nigeria overcome the many challenges faced by the current government of Nigeria. This essay does not incorporate into its understanding and advocacy the multi-religious make up Nigeria, especially the hugely important presence of Christianity and the special difficulties Nigeria has faced due to the historical clash between Islam and Christianity. Its value rather lies in the effort to distill guidance from the Qur'an. Through this our readers can increase our knowledge about world religions and hear their voices on specific responsibilities for life in the world.

As always, we wish to thank you for your constant support for the efforts, vision, ideal, and mission of *Dialogue and Alliance*. Please be sure to recommend us to friends and colleagues, and especially to institutions devoted to our shared ideals. Also, please submit your work in the field to be considered for publication, and recommend your friends in the academy do the same.

Frank Kaufmann  
*Editor-in-Chief*

## *Isaiah's Suffering Servant: A New View*

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*Rabbi Allen S. Maller*

Recent Jewish and Christian history enables us to understand in a new way Isaiah's famous passage about God's servant whose tragic suffering can be redemptive to those who once reviled and belittled him. Most Jewish scholars have glossed the text as referring to the Jewish people during its exile among anti-Semitic European nations. Christian scholars gloss the passage as referring to a suffering and redemptive Messianic figure. I think both purports are correct. The passion and sacrifice of Jesus and Israel as God's servant and innocent victim is today providing the world with a new opportunity for redemption/salvation.

In Jewish thought the prophet Isaiah himself provides the strongest evidence for the claim that the servant is Israel, the Jewish People. Several verses in prior chapters of Isaiah specifically state that Israel/Jacob is God's servant. "*You Israel are my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen*" (41:8), "*Hear me now, Jacob my servant; hear me, Israel my chosen*" (44:1), "*Have no fear, Jacob my servant: Jeshurun whom I have chosen*" (44:2), "*Remember all this, Jacob, remember Israel, for you are my servant*" (44:21). These verses make it clear that Israel/Jacob is God's chosen servant. The national community is spoken of in terms of an individual, as is often the case in the Bible (see Jeremiah 30:10).

But some Jewish scholars did claim that the suffering servant referred to an individual messianic figure because in one place Isaiah states, "*You are my servant Israel, through whom I shall win glory*" (49:3). Yet two verses later Isaiah states "*Now the Lord who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, that Israel should be gathered to him, now the Lord calls me again: is it too slight a task for you as my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob, to bring back the descendants of Israel?*" (49:5&6). This verse clearly indicates that in addition to God's chosen servant Israel/Jacob, there is a prophet-like person (perhaps like Jeremiah who suffered a lot in

his role as God's servant) who will be God's servant to help restore the exiled Jewish people to its land, and to its role in God's plan for human redemption. Thus there are two types of suffering servant. The individual servant's passion initiates the process of individual redemption for those who are not part of Israel, the servant people. Some time later the son of David comes in glory at the flowering of a worldwide personal redemption that brings about universal peace and prosperity. Thus the upheavals that precede the Messianic Age are avoided or minimized and as Franz Kafka wrote, "The (Davidson) Messiah will only come when we do not need him" i.e. to verify and crown the Messianic Age rather than to personally bring it about.

If the world is not saved through individual repentance and rebirth, the cataclysmic upheavals of war and revolution predicted by the prophets will come and suffering and redemption will be on a vast national and international scale.

Many rabbis did identify Isaiah's individual messianic figure as Messiah, a son/descendant of David, from the tribe of Judah. Most Christians identify this individual as Jesus, the Son of God. I think this individual is a messianic figure called by the rabbis: Messiah, a son of Joseph, i.e. from one of the northern tribes, who precedes David's son, and is killed in battle by the enemies of Israel. Christians also believe that Jesus will have to come a second time to fulfill all the messianic prophecies of worldwide peace and prosperity that have not yet come to pass. Thus the first appearance of Jesus could be as a messianic figure like the Josephson messiah. If we keep in mind the Josephson messiah as well as the role of Israel/Jacob as God's chosen servant, we will understand Isaiah's suffering servant prophecy. The belief that there would be two different messiahs, one a moral political leader from the house of David (Davidson) and the other, a religious reformer from the house of Aaron (Aronson), as well as a special "end of days" prophet such as Elijah or Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14) is found in intertestament literature. A Dead Sea scroll states that the Qumran community must continue to live according to the original discipline "until there shall come a prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel" (Manuel of Discipline 9:11).

There is also a rabbinic belief in a messianic figure from the northern tribes; a Josephson messiah who is killed by Israel's enemies. This idea may be modeled on the example of Saul who reigned before

David and was killed in battle by the enemies of Israel. Thus there could be as many as four individual messianic figures as well as the people of Israel who act as God's agents in bringing about the Messianic Age. Gentile rulers also play a role, first as destructive oppressors of the Jewish people, and second when they later acknowledge their error and are ultimately included in helping bring about the Messianic Age's worldwide blessings. Cyrus was such a messiah (Isaiah 45:1)

*All of this makes for a complicated future scenario that might take generations, or even centuries to develop.* When people are persecuted, afflicted and oppressed as a community, and despised and rejected as individuals they need hope for a much quicker and simpler process of redemption. This is why there is an overwhelming focus on the final stage Davidson messiah by most teachers, preachers, commentators and expositors. This is also the reason that those who believe in the imminent coming of the Davidson messiah always think it will occur soon within their lifetime (John 14:19, 21:22).

Also, since humans have free will, the exact time and manner of redemption cannot be determined in advance. Much depends on what we do. Repentance produces changes in the future of both individuals and nations. Repentance enables some individuals and communities to escape the consequences of prior evil. On the other hand, God's promise is that evil powers will never succeed in destroying Israel or in overcoming justice in the long run. Thus even without full repentance, God will act if the Divine promise of a Messianic Age is threatened. As Isaiah states a few verses prior to the suffering servant passage, "The Lord says: you were sold but no price was paid, and *without payment you shall be redeemed.*" (52:3) That is, all your suffering in exile was not really merited and your redemption from exile will not really be fully earned. Both are part of God's outline for human destiny and will occur sooner (through repentance) or later (in God's own time).

Finally, if one believes that God-inspired prophets are able to describe scenarios of various developments in the distant future then one has to accept that the understanding of these passages should change and improve as we come closer and closer to the times they describe. As an example, Jeremiah describes a radical future in which woman surrounds man, "The Lord will create a new thing on earth—a woman will surround a man" (31:22). The great commentator Rashi understands "surround" to mean encircle. The most radical thing

Rashi can think of (and in eleventh-century France it was radical) is that woman will propose marriage (a wedding ring/circle) to men. In today's feminist generation we can see women surrounding men in fields once almost exclusively male such as law, medical and rabbinical schools. Of course, this means that a few generations from now we might have even better understandings of some predictive passages in the prophets so humility should always be with us.

Isaiah proclaims the good news of peace and salvation (52:7) when God returns to Zion (8) and comforts his people (9) so all the Gentiles see his salvation (10). The Jewish people will depart the exile not in flight but under God's protection (11&12). Israel/Jacob, God's servant, whose appearance (14) was disfigured, marred and appalling (during the holocaust) will prosper (13) and be lifted up (in subsequent generations). A marvel for many nations, whose rulers will shut their (anti-Semitic) mouths because of this, since they will see what they had not been taught and will understand what they had not heard (15). For centuries the Church taught that the Jews were being punished for rejecting Christ and couldn't be redeemed without believing Jesus was the Son of God. Now some Gentile rulers see that this teaching is false. The biblical message of God's commitment to redeem Israel without their believing in Jesus wasn't believed (53:1) but now there is a growing minority who affirm a two covenant theology.

Many Gentile rulers (kings, governments, business and religious leaders) now admit what their anti-Semitism did to the people of Israel. The Jews were like a tender shoot in dry ground, unattractive and undesirable, despised and rejected, sorrowful and familiar (intimate) with suffering (52:2&3). We (the Gentile rulers) scapegoated them and they carried our projected infirmities, but we rationalized that the Jews were stricken and afflicted by God, not by us. Israel was pierced and crushed due to our transgressions (anti-Semitism) for we sought our peace by blaming Jews for all kinds of evils (54:4&5). This anti-Semitism led to: Crusaders slaughtering Jews in France and Germany, blaming Jews for the Bubonic Plague in central Europe, torture by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, many expulsions and pogroms at various times throughout Europe, and the deaths of tens of thousands of Jewish civilians massacred during wars in Poland (1648–9) and the Ukraine (1919–21). All this set the stage for the worst martyrdom of all, the six million Jew-

ish victims of the Holocaust (plus five million non-Jews). Each evil regime turned its own kind of iniquity (religious, political, economic and social) on its Jews (54:6).

Again and again Jews were passively taken away to exile, or like sheep to the slaughter cut off from the land of the living, though they had done no violence (54:7–9). Yet faithful Jews accepted all this as God's will and refused to abandon their religion or their people. Survivors of the concentration camps who had lost their entire family had the courage and faith to marry, and lived to see their offspring (Jewish children and grandchildren) grow up (54:10). Many, whose days were prolonged (54:10) and are now in their 70s and 80s, have lived long enough to see the most amazing outcomes of the Holocaust. The return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of its cities and countryside are the subject of many passages in Isaiah both preceding chapter 53 and following it. The realization of these prophecies did not require a Holocaust. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the mass departure of more than one million Soviet Jews to the land of Israel also are not directly linked to the Holocaust. *But the redemptive aspect of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust for Gentile rulers and nations is only emphasized in this suffering servant passage.*

The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials that followed World War II set a pattern for later trials of Cambodian, Serb, and Hutu mass murderers by international courts. When the German government decided to pay reparations for property losses to German Jews, it was the first time an oppressor had voluntarily accepted responsibility for acts of oppression upon another people. The Prime Minister of France finally apologized 56 years after the end of World War II for the collaboration of the Vichy French government in deporting French Jews to the death camps. A more recent example is the Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt who in May of 2007 apologized for his country's deportation of Jews to Nazi death camps during World War II. "Only by recognizing the responsibility of the authorities at the time can we build a future where this will never happen again," The government had just released "Submissive Belgium," a report that shows how high-ranking Belgian officials and municipalities collaborated with the Nazis in the deportation of Jews.

When the Pope and several Protestant denominations began to atone for previous centuries of anti-Semitism in the 1970s and 1980s a

rising awareness of the Holocaust began to influence a wider spiritual consciousness in the West. The American government finally made a token payment to the Japanese interned in American concentration camps during World War II. In 1993 President Clinton signed into law a resolution stating, “Congress apologizes to the native Hawaiians on behalf of the people of the United States for the overthrow of their independent government.” The Pope expressed sorrow over the evils done when Europeans conquered North and South America. More recently (2005) the great majority of U.S senators officially expressed sorrow over the many times the Senate refused to pass federal anti-lynching laws (over 4,000 men—70 percent black—were lynched in the U.S.). In February of 2006, two centuries after profiting from the venture, the Church of England has apologized for its role in the global slave trade, which included running a Caribbean island sugar plantation and branding the blacks who worked it. On the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in 1607, the Virginia House of Delegates unanimously approved a resolution expressing “profound regret for the commonwealth’s role in sanctioning the immoral institution of human slavery, in the historic wrongs visited upon native peoples and in all other forms of discrimination and injustice rooted in racial and cultural bias” In May of 2007 the Legislature of the State of Alabama passed a resolution expressing “profound regret” for the state’s enslavement of black people. Alabama was the fourth southern state to formally apologize for slavery.

Of course, the Turkish government still denies responsibility for the deaths of over one million Armenians; the Japanese deny slaughtering 300,000 residents of Nanking, and only French leaders admit to the complicity of the Vichy government in rounding up Jews for the Nazi death camps. Even the UN has not officially admitted its dereliction of duty in the genocide of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. Yet the few steps of public confession and atonement that have been taken by some political and religious leaders are truly remarkable when you consider that nothing like this has ever happened in previous human history. If the Holocaust-stimulated willingness of religious and political leaders to accept responsibility for past examples of persecution and iniquity done by their institutions and governments continues to expand, society will improve greatly. If other governments and institutions admit responsibility for the sins

of their predecessors, it reduces the likelihood of repetition. Then the numbering of God's innocent servant Israel/Jacob with transgressors will, when the lessons are finally learned, justify not just those directly involved but also many others. Israel's pouring out of life (six million deaths) will not have been in vain, and the revived Jewish people will see the light of life and be satisfied (54:11–12).

It will take another century of spiritual development to see if this interpretation is correct. Israel's passion in the twentieth century should be for the leaders of churches and nations, what the passion of Jesus was for many non-Jewish individuals in the first century. Without the powerful example of the sacrifice of Jesus that Christianity spread throughout the western world, this would not be possible. Both Jesus Josephson and God's servant Israel/Jacob fill the role of the martyred Josephson messiah. The Davidson messiah will come after all nations, religions and political parties learn to respect and value as a gift from God, each other's right to differ in large as well as small issues. Since this religious reform requires great leadership from all the major religions, each religion will have to produce its own Aronson religious reformer messianic figure. These plural messianic religious reformers are referred to by Jeremiah as "shepherds" (3:14–18) and their teachings will provide each religion with a reformed and renewed covenant (31:31–34). The advocacy of pluralism by the major religious communities will then produce the basis for the ultimate messianic predictions of worldwide peace, justice, prosperity, and salvation that the prophets proclaimed so often. The Davidson Messiah will come to crown our faith in God's deliverance.

### **BASIC TEXTS FOR FURTHER READING**

*The Wolf Shall Lie With the Lamb: Messiah in Hassidic Thought*

by Shmuel Boteach

*Revelation and Redemption* by George Buchanan

*Eschatology in the Old Testament* by Donald Gowan

*Midrashay G'ulah* by Yehudah Ibn-Shmuil

*The Messianic Idea in Israel* by Joseph Klausner

*Mashiach: Who? What? Why? Where? When?* by Chaim Kramer

*The Messiah Texts* by Raphael Patai

*The Open Heaven* by Christopher Rowland

*The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* by D. S. Russell  
*I Await His Coming Every Day* by Menachem Schneerson  
*A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* by Abba Hillel Silver

# *Christian and Interfaith Spirituality*

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*Leonardo Mercado*

This study from the Roman Catholic perspective presents a view of Christian spirituality as it relates to interfaith spirituality.

## **I. Christian spirituality**

The dictionary defines the traditional meaning of spirituality as “the state, quality, manner, or fact of being *spiritual*, as referring to the clergy and to revenue or property belonging to the church or to a cleric.” But the modern definition goes beyond this. Today the word “spiritual” has to do with existence that is *experienced*. From this view, the word spiritual must therefore also include the senses and what has meaning to life, requiring the concept to embrace the physical, emotional and the intellectual as well.

There are two paradigms associated with the concept of spirituality. These are the dualistic paradigm and the holistic paradigm. Following Kuhn (1970), we distinguish the term “paradigm” from that of “model.” Paradigm is the bigger umbrella under which exist models. A model is an aid to support our look at complex reality. For example Avery Dulles, in his book, *Models of the Church* (1987), describes the church as existing in any one of six different models. Some include the Church as sacrament, as hierarchy, or as people of God. These models co-exist and do not necessarily preclude the co-presence of many models in a single church simultaneously. A paradigm, on the other hand, can be only one. For instance, we could have the heliocentric paradigm (the earth going around the sun) or an earth-centered or Ptolomaic paradigm which holds that all the stars and sun circle around the earth. Christian spirituality springs basically from following the way of Christ. But this basis has been understood through two different paradigms namely, the dualistic and holistic paradigms.

### **Dualistic Paradigm**

The dualistic paradigm, beginning with Plato, says that spirit and matter are exclusive to one another. This paradigm of spirituality makes a clear distinction between the spiritual and the physical, the worldly and the non-worldly, between the contemplative life and the active life, between the clerical state and the lay state. It prefers the spiritual and the contemplative life. Platonic philosophy also influenced early Christianity. According to Plato, humans are essentially souls trapped in their bodies.

Schneiders (1989) traced the historical development of spirituality. He argues that it deviated from the original biblical meaning of the term and became divorced from social and political commitments. Hence the word “spiritual practices” came to mean prayer, meditation, fasting, etc. It became private and not involved in social issues. In the twelfth century the word spirituality was opposed to materiality. Then in the thirteenth century, its juridical meaning distinguished ecclesiastical goods and spiritual jurisdiction from secular property and power.

The term spirituality gained support in the beginning of the seventeenth century in France. The French school of the seventeenth century made the word *spiritualité* a technical term “to indicate the personal relation of man to God” (Sudbrach 1970:148–149). In the pre-Vatican II or preconciliar paradigm, spirituality referred to the interior life of clerics or religious whose life of prayer and virtue exceeded that of the ordinary believer. It was “theoretical, elitist, other-worldly, ahistorical, antiseccular, individualistic, concentrated on the ‘interior life’ and ‘perfection’” (Schneider 1989:679).

The dualistic paradigm infected the religious congregations and orders that have been founded from the time of Descartes (1596–1650) until 1950. Because traditional spirituality is mechanistic and dualistic, religious life then was thought to be ideally found in churches, temples and monasteries. It stressed perfection which is the product of following rules, rituals, and teachings as based on tradition. The so-called concern for perfection triggered scrupulosity, stress, and guilt. That kind of piety so stressed uniformity that individuality was almost erased because spirituality must conform to the ideal mold.

The etymology of the word spirituality, from *spiritus*, spirit, denotes something different from the physical or material. From the

pre-Vatican II Roman missal, we read in post-communion prayer of the second Sunday of Advent:

Repleti cibo *spiritualis alimoniae*, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur: ut hujus participatione mysterii, doceas nos *terrena despicere, et amare caelestia*. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, qui tecum vivit et regnat in saeculorum. Amen.

Our English translation runs thus:

Filled with the food of *spiritual sustenance*, we suppliantly ask you, Lord, that by the participation of this mystery, you teach us *to hate earthly things and to love the things of heaven*. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

We highlight the words, “to hate earthly things and to love the things of heaven.” This prayer shows a theology based on Platonic dualistic philosophy that the invisible and heavenly are more important, that the material because earthly things pull us down. It despises the material and prefers only the spiritual. One implication of this philosophy was *fuga mundi*, the flight from a world that was viewed as evil. This was the rationale of the early monks who left the world and lived in secluded monasteries.

Gutierrez (1984:13–16) faults this older paradigm on two counts. First, he says, it was dualistic (one for the elite such as those who are in the “states of perfection” and one for the rest in the majority. This dualistic paradigm entailed fleeing (*fuga mundi*) from the world which was believed to be against spirituality. It also had an individualistic bent. It did not consider community and interpersonal interaction to be a necessary element of spirituality. “Individualism and spiritualism thus continue to impoverish and even distort the following of Jesus” (15). By “spiritualism” is mean “little interest in temporal tasks and a great deal of insensitivity to the presence and needs of the real, concrete persons who surround Christians as they follow this spiritual way” (15). Guetierrez continues: “Many of those bound by religious vows, for example, have felt challenged by the real poverty of the dispossessed and marginalized. They asked themselves what meaning their own promise of living a poor life had in the face of such a situation” (31)

Spirituality will also be clarified from the perspective of dualism between the spirituality of the contemplative life and the spirituality of the active life. This dualism stems from a misinterpretation of the models of Martha and Mary (Lk. 10:38–42), that “Mary has chosen the better part” to listen like a disciple at the feet of the Master. And supported by Aristotle’s claim that the contemplative life is the most noble human activity, Western tradition has agreed that the contemplative life and its corresponding spirituality is spirituality *par excellence*. To avoid this dichotomy, St. Benedict ruled that his monks combine the models Martha and Mary by the principle of *ora et labora* (pray and work). Prayer corresponds to the spiritual while work corresponds to the physical or material. The crucial point is the word *et* (and). How do we solve the dichotomy? Some authors have translated *ora et labora* as being a “contemplative in action,” something like a car charging its own batteries through its running motor. But such interpretation comes from a dualistic model.

In short, the word spirituality, “from spirit,” connotes that it is distinct from the body. It betrays a Platonic dualism, as has been seen in the in history of spirituality. The expression “inner life” hints that spirituality refers to the spirit and not to the body. Likewise the stress on God’s transcendence forgets that God or the holy is also immanent and as concrete (Mercado 1992a:43–66).

### **Holistic paradigm**

The holistic paradigm on the other hand seeks to do away with dichotomies. In the holistic paradigm, spirituality takes a different perspective about what it means to follow Jesus Christ (*sequela Christi*). Following Christ or Christian discipleship was lived out originally in a variety of life situations. Lozano (1980) traces its history with the coming of the lay and clerical vocations in different ministries, monks, mendicant orders, and the like. Christianity, which originally was Semitic in nature, gradually embraced Greek culture. This already began in the New Testament which was originally written in Greek. And the growing dialogue of Christianity with Greek culture continued to have its impact.

According to Genesis 1:31: “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.” If to hate earthly things is the norm, that includes also hating wheat and wine, the materials used for the

Eucharist. It goes against the model of the incarnation, that the spiritual and the human are one in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. This is not to say that monastic life is bad. It has had an important place in the Church. But *fuga mundi* is not for missionaries and others in the active apostolate.

The dichotomy of the body and the spirit is far from the Hebrew thinking that humans are to be considered as a whole. Instead of body and spirit, the Bible speaks of three elements: body (*sarx* in Greek or *bashar* in Hebrew), soul (*psyche, nephesh*) and spirit (*pneuma, ruach*). The three elements make a totality (Mork 1967). The dualistic model misread the Bible. It also gave a bad name to the body. The term spirit, according to Schneider (1989:680–681) is based on St. Paul’s neologism “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*, referring to the Holy Spirit as God’s *pneuma*) to mean “any reality (charism, blessings, hymns, etc.) that was under the influence of the Holy Spirit.” Paul was “not contrasting the spiritual with material, living with dead, or good with evil, but the person under the influence of the Spirit of God with merely natural human being.”

In Paul (Gal. 5:3, 16–25), the word “pneumatic” (spiritual) means a person whose whole being and life is led and ordered by the Holy Spirit. “The opposition for Paul, is not between the incorporeal and the corporeal or between the immaterial and the material, but between two ways of life” since Paul puts the opposition in another level, namely, that “one’s body and one’s psychic soul...can, like one’s spirit, be spiritual if led by the Spirit, and one’s spirit, mind, or will can be carnal if opposed to the Spirit” (Principe 1993:215). The body finds new meaning when incorporated to the Risen Christ. In St. Paul we know that Christ as the exalted Lord is with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and that the followers of Christ are united both to Christ and to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

In his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (DCE), Pope Benedict XVI speaks about the holistic nature of humans. When speaking about the different kinds of love, he writes (DCE 5):

Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love—*eros*—able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Therefore he concludes that being a Christian must be taken holistically:

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. Eros, reduced to pure “sex”, has become a commodity, a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man’s great “yes” to the body.... The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter penetrate, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, eros tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing

Now the new paradigm has also influenced the concept of spirituality (Parappully 2004). Spirituality according to the new paradigm is characterized as holistic and ecological. It is holistic because the wholeness of body, soul and spirit. Holiness does not only come from the observation of the rules but also from the nature of beauty, relationships and every moment of ordinary life. Holistic also means integrating everything in life, including sin and failure. Because it must cope with plurality and ambiguity, this kind of spirituality must be self-renewing and creative. Instead of a state of perfection, holiness is a journey, following the eschatological journey of the whole people of God until its perfection in the Kingdom (*Lumen Gentium*, chap. 7). It is built on self-transcendence, that is, one’s existence is imperfect and incomplete. It is ecological because it is interconnected with the whole of reality. It is likewise sensitive to injustice and to the abuse of the ecology. What, then, is definition of spirituality? If applied to Christians, the following is worth noting:

Christian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian belief in both its general and more specialized forms.... It is possible to distinguish spirituality from doctrine in that it concentrates not on faith itself, but on the reaction that faith arouses in religious consciousness and practice. It can likewise be distinguished from Christian ethics in that it treats not all human actions in

their relation to God, but those acts in which relation to God is immediate and explicit. (McGinn et al. 1980:xv–xvi)

Earlier we mentioned about the paradigm shift and its implication on spirituality. One element is its holistic nature. What implication has it to the concept of spirituality? A better paradigm for translating the *et in ora et labora* is the holistic or incarnational paradigm. If seen from the incarnational paradigm, the whole problem appears in a different light. There need not be a conflict between contemplation and action because humans are both material and spiritual. The incarnation is a scandal in Greek or Platonic model because the body is the prison of the soul which aims to be free from its chains. On the other hand, spirituality according to the Bible is incarnational because the body, soul (*nephesh-psyche*) and the spirit (*ruach-pneuma*) are one since humans are to be viewed as a whole (Mork 1967).

Hence spirituality involves the total person who is body, soul, and spirit, which returns to its biblical meaning. This unity is also seen in terms like *loob* or *kalooban* in Tagalog which can mean the physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and ethical (Mercado 1974:53-72; 1994:3–40). It is also similar to the Japanese meaning of *kokoro* (Swanson 2007). The *kokoro* “is the center of both emotive and cognitive sensitivity” which English translation render as “heart and mind” (:11). But the problem is that *kokoro* is not a compound. It like saying that water is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, which does not justice do to the uniqueness or oneness of water. The same problem applies to humans when one starts saying that humans are composed of body, mind, and spirit. Scientists today have pointed out the connection between psychosomatic diseases.

### ***The Better Word for Spirituality***

First, we must distinguish the nuances of the term. Spirituality has been separated from dogma, moral theology, the psychological, and other areas. As an academic discipline it has branched into particular schools like Cistercian, Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit spiritualities. We do not refer to this academic meaning.

Second, the better word has to avoid the term “spirituality” because the word spirituality is not comprehensive. It only connotes the spirit; it excludes the body and soul as necessary components. It does not contain

the material and does not include the other nuances of the emotional and physical as emphasized in the lively charismatic communities today and other forms of renewal. “As a result, the word ‘spirituality’ still carries with it today the flavour of the enfeebled, the ascetically de-materialized, and the esthetically esoteric” (Sudbrach 1970:149).

Third, the better translation must follow the holistic paradigm. It has to do with the experience of the Absolute who/which both is transcendent and immanent. It is built on *kenosis* and openness to the interconnectedness of reality. It must embrace wider areas, even as wide as life itself. Our time needs, Sudbrach continues, “a more intensive commitment within the world, especially in the area of its social need; diametrical to that, a more intensive conscious-personal responsibility; stressing of the dialogical; and all of this in an open-mindedness that is today allowing Christianity to look more and more to other religions and even to atheism” (153).

What then is the better word for spirituality? Given the parameters mentioned above, one possibility is a phrase like “authentic human living” or “authentic existential living.” If taken in this sense, then the academic scope of “authentic human living” must also expand from its earlier narrow meaning. If we follow the incarnational model, then the word may be a phrase like “the following of Christ” or “Christian discipleship” understood as authentic living. Just as Jesus Christ was intimately linked with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and united with the Father, we must understand this discipleship as Trinitarian. It is also inter-religious by nature.

Since the expression “authentic living” in lieu of “spirituality” has not yet gained acceptance, we continue to use the word “spirituality,” however, understood as authentic living.

### ***One or Many Spiritualities?***

Vatican II struggled with the question of whether there is a spirituality proper for the religious and another spirituality for the laity. Given the variety of opinions among the participants, most documents were compromise documents in order to appease opposing views of the 2,400 bishops present.

The classical example for ecclesiology is the charismatic, salvation-historical view of the church in Chapters one and two of *Lumen Gentium*, followed by the hierarchical view of Chapter 3. For religious

life, the call to holiness is a call to all Christians (Chapter 4 to 6). And yet, the description of the laity in *Lumen Gentium* 31 reaffirms the three-partite division of the Church in Holy Orders (priesthood), Religious State and Laity. Religious life is a separate state in between clergy and laity (Wostyn 2007:4).

The call to holiness is no longer reserved to the chosen few of the clergy and religious life but meant for all because the universal call to holiness is based on baptism. But if all Christians are called to perfection, what then is the difference between secular and religious vocations? The multiplicity of vocations must be situated in the context that all charisms are destined for the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4–11; Rom. 12:4–8). Hence the call to the married life and to the celibate life are charisms, which are two ways to attain perfection. Jesus says that the greatest commandment (and therefore perfection) is fulfilling the law of loving God and all people (Mt. 22:34–40). In the words of Vatican II, “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society” (LG 40). Here lies the difference: in addition to the baptismal vows of dedication to God which all Christians make, the individual religious wants to go further in order to derive still more abundant fruit from the grace of baptism. For this purpose he makes profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels. He does so for two reasons: first, in order to be set free from hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly, and secondly, in order to consecrate in a more thoroughgoing way to the service of God. The bonds by which he pledges himself to the practice of the counsels show forth the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his bride the Church. The more stable and firm these bonds are, then, the more perfect will the Christian’s religious consecration be (LG 44). But the religious must not flee the world because they have earthly responsibilities (LG 46, GS 43). Hence the religious contribute to the building of the world through their social services and through their kind of human existence.

Is spirituality one or many? It is one in the Christian idioms, the following of Jesus. But it is expressed in many ways. Hence, spirituality is one and many. For Gutierrez spirituality means following the path of Jesus: “it has to do with the following of Jesus” (Gutierrez

1984:136). The following of Christ (*sequela Christi*) is not individualistic but “a community enterprise” (137). How is love of neighbor possible if one is alone? For the cloistered nun or monk, this is still possible if one’s prayers embrace the whole of humankind.

Spirituality ultimately means the whole person who chooses to live according to Holy Spirit. It is one because all Christian spirituality is essentially one. But it is also many insofar as that same spirituality is lived out. Thus poverty led Francis of Assisi to actualize the Franciscan spirituality. Likewise, St. Dominic was led by the spirit of preaching (Pedrogosa 2007: 54). We can multiply the variations such as cosmic spirituality, environmental spirituality, as feminine, masculine, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and so forth. Each unique spirituality is an aspect of the white light, the same Spirit. According to Gustavo Gutierrez (1984:88), “The reason for this diversity is that nucleus around which a spiritual way is built is not exactly the same in every case.”

Spirituality must be based on a particular experience. “At the root of every spirituality there is a particular experience that is had by concrete persons living at a particular time. The experience is both proper to them and yet communicable to others” (37). If “authentic living” (that is, spirituality as we have defined above) is one and many, the concept of missionary spirituality, for example of those working with Philippine indigenous peoples, is a manifestation of that one authentic living.

If spirituality is defined as following the way of Jesus, the problem is the freedom of following Jesus. If all are called to freedom, then there is no law. Explains Gutierrez (33–34): “A spirituality is the terrain on which the children of God exercise their freedom (Rom.8:21).” Another definition of spirituality “is walking in freedom according to the Spirit of love and life” (35).

Although spirituality is the one following of Christ, why the diversity of spiritualities? According to Gutierrez, “Each strives to encompass the various aspects of Christian life, and yet each differs from the others” (88). He continues that the reason for the diversity is how it is built and the historical standpoint. To use the metaphor of construction, the building material makes a big difference. Individual differences and talents also have much to do with the varieties of following Christ. The call of the times may also influence the nature of the spirituality.

Another explanation for the difference of the one spirituality and its many forms can also be seen from the perspective of religious

experience (Mercado 1977:181–184). The 1973 interfaith meeting of monastic superiors distinguished three aspects: the experience itself, the interpretation of the experience, and the memory of the experience. In the case of Saul meeting Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–31), the experience was translated into Paul’s personality and institutionalized in his ministry and influencing others. Since culture also has a role in interpreting the experience, the pluralism of cultures will also provide a variety of realization. And as the practice becomes institutionalized, we have further strength.

What metaphors can we give to the oneness and pluralism of spirituality? One metaphor is light, which is white. But as light gets refracted, the colors of the rainbow appear. When applied to each person or each culture, the same following of Christ or the same experience of Christ will have its pluralism. Another metaphor is the embryonic stem cell. All the different parts of the human body start from the same stem cell which diversify as the cell develops. Although human bone cells differ from skin cells and blood cells, they all began as stem cells. We can also make this analogy with the experience of Christ: the same experience flowers into the garden of spiritualities.

## **II. The Inter-religious Dimension**

So far we have discussed only Christian authentic living (spirituality). In the Christian sense, it is the following of Christ in fostering the Kingdom. But that is not complete either because it lacks the Holy Spirit and God the Father. It must be Trinitarian. Can it have an interfaith definition? The question is based on the premise that salvation, according to Vatican II, is open to all religions: “Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ of 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 dictates of conscience” (LG 16). Only God knows how divine graces are channeled to non-Christians. However, theologians have speculated on how this is possible (Dupuis 1999, 2001). We interviewed some missionaries working with Philippine indigenous peoples. The missionaries testify that the indigenous peoples are sometimes better than Christians. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, confirms their sentiment:

Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness? (RH 6)

Jacques Dupuis (2001) in his book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, has gone into detail about this topic.

If we are to dialogue with other religions, then the definition for spirituality as the following of Christ will have to change. As we said earlier, the better definition of spirituality as authentic life also has an inter-religious application. Kirby (2004:8) has a definition that deserves some consideration:

The ways in which people or peoples perceive and respond to God's graced presence in their lives and act as co-participants in building the reign of God in today's world. The "ways" are always highly contextualized, that is consonant with language, culture, and individual charism.

What is common to all religions? If we remove the following of Jesus in the definition, what is its inter-religious definition? If people of good faith are also co-members and co-builders of the Reign of God, what is authentic living? Attempts have been made to describe Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist asceticisms (Gerlock 2003:57–89). What is authentic living in Philippine traditional religion? That can be a subject of another study. Traditional religion or animism, its pejorative name, has been put in a bad light (Mercado 2000). After examining several concepts connected to spirituality, Waaijman (2001:55) concludes with a definition which may be interfaith by nature:

All basic words denote a relational process between God and humans. The accent falls one moment on the divine pole (the Awesome, the Holy, the Merciful, the Infinite One), the next on the human pole (application, dedication, awakening). These two poles are not first considered separately and then related

to each other, but constitute an original relational whole within which the two poles make their appearance.

If authentic living is not limited to Christianity but open to all God-seekers, then it is an openness to the Absolute and “in principle it is equally available to every human being who is seeking to live as authentically human life” (Schneider 1980:682). Schneider’s position applies to all religions: “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence within and toward the horizon of ultimate concern” (684). “Ultimate concern” is Tillich’s definition of religion. Spirituality then is a lived experience which actualizes something fundamental in humans as they journey in the project of life in their particular contexts.

In the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31–46), the norm of salvation and of damnation is not theology but the practice of charity, of seeing the hidden Christ in all persons. And all the world’s major religions have their counterparts of the law of love. Authentic living then for all religions is following the path of love.

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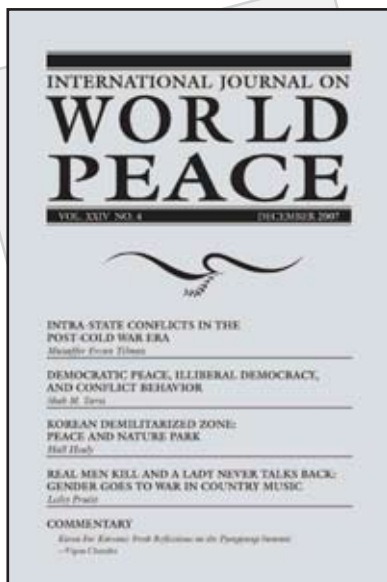
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# New Perspectives on the Pressing Issues of World Peace

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## *Qur'anic Text and Violence*

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*Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid*

*Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loves not aggressors.*

*The Holy Qur'an 2:190*

*And those who, when great wrong is done to them, defend themselves.*

*The Holy Qur'an 42:39*

Violence is the use of force to subdue others that may include killing. Violence may be morally legitimate in the eyes of a majority of people when killing animals and birds for self-protection or for food. However, in the religions of Jainism and some sects of Buddhism and Hinduism even killing of animals and insects is not legitimate.

At the human level, violence may be divided into three major types: (1) Violence committed by an army against another army; in this case it is called a battle or war, (2) Violence organized by the civilians against tyranny and oppression or to replace one political system with another; in this case the conflict may be called terrorism, civil war or a war of liberation or freedom, depending who is talking. (3) Violence committed by individuals or a small group of people for personal gain or revenge; in this case it is called murder, robbery or vendetta, respectively.

Commonly, the meaning of the term Islam is given as peace and also submission. "Violence in Islam" is an oxymoron; a meaningless phrase. Contemporary events invite as relevant the question of violence in Islam. Anti-Islam forces from both inside "Muslim" culture and from without cherry-pick verses from the Holy Qur'an verses either to call for and perpetrate violence, or to make the case that Islam means terrorism and violence.

Unfortunately, since most in the West have not known the beautiful side of Islam, many adopt the ignorant view that Islam promotes terrorism and violence.

Since the 9/11, 2001 terror attack in New York, 3/11 in Madrid and July 7, 2005 in London, the most cited Holy Qur'an verse is 9:5 in support of false allegation of murder of non-Muslims and forcing them to convert to Islam when they refuse. The meaning of this one verse may best be understood and appreciated when the reader has full background of the context of revelation and what the message was given as a whole. The Holy Qur'an Surah (chapter) 9 has two names, At-Tauba and Al-Bara', meaning the repentance and freedom from obligation (disavowal), respectively. Verses 1–37 of Surah 9 were revealed as a block and verses 1 to 16 make up the context of verse 5. Let me quote the translation of all 16 verses from Zafar Ishaq Ansari's *Towards Understanding the Holy Qur'an*, Vol. 3, pp 187–95.

“(1) This is a declaration of disavowal by Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) to those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) and with whom you have made treaties. (2) You may go about freely in the land, for four months, but know well that you will not be able to frustrate Allah, and that Allah will bring disgrace upon those who deny the truth (*kafireen*). (3) This is a public proclamation by Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) to all men on the day of the Great Pilgrimage (*Al-Hajj Al-Akbar*): Allah is free from all obligations to those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*); and so is His Messenger. If you repent, it shall be for your own good; but if you turn away, then know well that you will not be able to frustrate Allah. So give glad tidings of a painful chastisement to those who disbelieve (those who reject this call). (4) In exception to those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) are those with whom you have made treaties and who have not violated their treaties nor have backed up anyone against you. Fulfill your treaties with them till the end of their term. Surely Allah loves the pious (*muttaqeen*). (5) But when the sacred months (*Al-Ashhar ul-Hurum*) expire, slay those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) wherever you find them; seize them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them. But if they repent and establish the Prayer (*As-Salat*) and pay *Zakah*, leave them alone. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. (6) And if any of those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) seeks asylum, grant him asylum that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to safety for they are people bereft of all understanding. (7) How can

there be a covenant with those who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) on the part of Allah and His Messenger except those with whom you made a covenant near the Sacred Mosque (*Al-Masjid Al-Haram*)? Behave straight with them so long as they behave straight with you for Allah loves the God-fearing (*muttaqeen*). (8) How can there be any covenant with the rest who associate others with Allah in His divinity (*mushrikeen*) for were they to prevail against you, they will respect neither kinship nor agreement. They seek to please you with their tongues while their hearts are averse to you, and most of them are wicked (*faasiqoon*). (9) They have sold the revelations of Allah for a paltry price and have firmly hindered people from His path. Evil indeed is what they have done. (10) They neither have any respect for kinship nor for agreement in respect of the believers. Such are indeed transgressors (*mu'tadoon*). (11) But if they repent and establish Prayer (*Salat*) and give *Zakah* they are your brothers in faith. Thus do We expound our revelations to those who know (*ya'lamoona*). (12) But if they break their pledges after making them and attack your faith, make war on the leaders of unbelief (*A'immatul Kufr*) that they may desist, for they have no regard for their pledged words. (13) Will you not fight against those who broke their pledges and did all they could to drive the Messenger away and initiated hostilities against you? Do you fear them? Surely Allah has greater right that you should fear Him, if you are true believers. (14) Make war on them, Allah will chastise them through you and will humiliate them. He will grant you victory over them, and will soothe the bosoms of those who believe; (15) and will remove rage from their hearts, and will enable whomsoever He wills to repent. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. (16) Do you imagine that you will be spared without being subjected to any test? Know well that Allah has not yet determined who strove hard (in His cause), and has not taken any others besides His Messenger and the believers as His trusted allies? Allah is well aware of all that you do.” The Holy Qur'an 9:1–16.

### ***No Compulsion or Coercion the Holy Qur'an 2:256***

The Holy Qur'an verses are clear in commanding the believers that there is no coercion or compulsion in Islam to convert. The history of 14 centuries is the proof that Muslims had no systematic compulsion to convert people to Islam. One verse translation is given below:

There is no coercion or compulsion in the *Deen* (religion, way of life). The right way now stands clearly distinguished from the wrong. Hence he who rejects the evil ones (*Taghut*, non-god power acting as god) and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle, and Allah (Whom he has held for support) is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (The Holy Qur'an 2:256)

Muslims have honoured this commandment and they have been careful in not forcing people to convert to Islam. The best examples are Spain, India, and East Europe where Muslims entered with armies and conquered them yet these countries remained non-Muslim majority. On the other hand, in Sub-Sahara Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia where Islamic armies never entered, these countries became Muslim majority countries. In our time in the twenty-first century, no Muslim army has entered North America or Europe, yet millions of people are converting to Islam by their own will.

It is obvious that Allah condemns aggression totally and condemns any war in pursuit of worldly reasons. Whereas Allah approves and motivates a war of defence and to protect the weak who are persecuted and oppressed. In this early twenty-first century there are hundreds of millions of Muslims who are oppressed and persecuted by the West and its agents as rulers of the Third World countries.

One of the principles of understanding the Holy Qur'an is that a verse (*ayah*) should be read (a) in the context of the surrounding verses, not in isolation, (b) in the context of its revelation, which may be found in the Hadith collections, and (c) in the context of the whole the Holy Qur'an. A fourth requirement frequently presented is to see the words, terms and phrases used and as understood by the companions of the Prophet and following two generations (*Salaf*). It simply means reading various commentaries of the Holy Qur'an of the classical period and finding how they understood and explained a given verse or a passage. Not knowing Arabic is not an excuse because in the 20th century a few commentaries of the Holy Qur'an in the English language have appeared and these writers have summed up the earlier commentators; some of them are Tafseer Ibn Katheer, *Towards Understanding the Holy Qur'an* referred to above and Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali. There are two translations and commentaries in the works, one by Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan to be published

from India and the other by Dr. Ahmad Zaki Hammad to be published from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. Some parts of both works have been published.

Another aspect of understanding the Holy Qur'an verses is the time frame for application of their meaning. A verse or a passage may have special meaning for a particular time of the revelation and it does not apply after the time has passed. A verse or a passage may also have a generalized meaning for all times to come since its revelation.

Over 114 verses spread throughout 54 suras (Chapters) of the Holy Qur'an advocate living peacefully with neighbours within the Dar al-Islam. The two 'verses of the sword,' which advocate warfare, often receive the most attention. For many outside the bounds of Islam, these verses seem to nullify themes of peace.

Commentary on the 'verses of the sword.' Abdullah Yusuf Ali's commentary on these 'verses of the Sword' is helpful.

### ***The Holy Qur'an 2:216-217***

"Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you. God knows, but you know it not. They ask you about the sacred month. Say: "To fight in this month is a grave offence; but to debar others from the path of God, to deny Him, and to expel His worshippers from the Holy Mosque, is far more grave in His sight. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed."

The Abdullah Yusuf Ali's commentary reads, in part, "...their enemies not only forced them to engage in actual warfare, but interfered with their conscience, persecuted them and their families, openly insulted and denied God, kept out the Muslim Arabs from the Sacred Mosque, and exiled them. Such violence and intolerance are deservedly called worse than slaughter."

### ***The Holy Qur'an 9:5***

"When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful." Commentary includes, "When war becomes inevitable, it must be prosecuted

with vigor...But even then there is room for repentance and amendment on the part of the guilty party, and if that takes place, our duty is forgiveness and the establishment of peace.”

Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s commentary includes, “The emphasis is on the first clause: it is only when the four months of grace are past, and the other party show no signs of desisting from their treacherous designs by right conduct, that the state of war supervenes—between Faith and Unfaith...When war becomes inevitable, it must be prosecuted with vigour. According to the English phrase, you cannot fight with kid gloves. The fighting may take the form of slaughter, or capture, or siege, or ambush or other stratagems. But even then there is room for repentance and amendment on the part of the guilty party, and if that takes place, our duty is forgiveness and the establishment of peace.”

In the above quoted passage of the Holy Qur’an 9:1-16 in the verses 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 7 the term used is *mushrikeen* meaning this is not about any other people than the idolaters (*mushrikeen*) of Makkah. Another point to note is that the address is towards those who violated the peace treaty with the Prophet Muhammad. This theme repeats in all the verses up to 9:16. Naturally, Allah, in the Qur’an, is instructing the Prophet Muhammad to free himself from the peace treaty obligation, known as the Treaty of Hudaibiyah that he made in the year 6 AH for a ten-year period. But the idolaters of Quraysh violated the treaty in the second year and raided a tribe who was an ally of the Prophet. The verse gives specific instruction to fight those who violated the treaty and killed allies of the Prophet. The meaning of the verse does not extend to other non-Muslims except under the exact similar conditions. Those who have never been allies of the Muslims have no treaty to violate. Islam prohibits aggression against those who have not attacked the Muslims. This point takes us to the verses 2:190–194.

In the verse 9:5 there is a mention of “*Al-Ashhar ul-Hurum*” meaning the months of prohibition, sometimes translated as sacred months, which are Rajab, Dhul Qe’dah, Dhul Hijjah and Muharram, the 7th, 11th, 12th and 1st months of the Arabic lunar calendar. The month of Rajab was reserved for Umrah or lesser Hajj and the other three months were considered the months for Hajj the greater pilgrimage to Makkah. During these months Arabs used to celebrate peace for the safety of the return travel to Makkah and any war or looting was

considered prohibited. However, they found a back door to violate these months of safety and invented the custom of *Nasi*. Under this invention they could exchange a real prohibited month with another non-prohibited month and could go on looting and war and surprise the weaker travelers. Islam kept the custom of prohibited months but abrogated the custom of *Nasi*.

***The Holy Qur'an 2:190-194.***

Fight (*qaatilo*) against those who fight against you in the way of Allah, but do not transgress, for Allah does not love transgressors (*mu'tadeen*). (2:191) Kill them whenever you confront them and drive them out from where they drove you out. (For though killing is sinful) wrongful persecution is even worse than killing. Do not fight against them near the Masjid Al-Haram (in Makkah) unless they fight against you; but if they fight against you kill them, for that is the reward of such disbelievers (*kafireen*). (2: 192) Then if they desist, know well that Allah is Forgiving, Most Merciful. (2:193) Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah prevails. But if they desist, then know that hostility is only against the transgressors (*Adh-Dhalimeen*). (194) The sacred month for the sacred month; sanctities should be respected alike (by all concerned). Thus, if someone has attacked you, attack him just as he attacked you, and fear Allah and remain conscious that Allah is with those who guard against violating the bounds set by Him." The Holy Qur'an 2:190–194.

In the verses 190-191 given above it is obvious that Allah is commanding the Muslims, in the Holy Qur'an, to fight against those who began the fight but do not do anything more than necessary to repel the attack because Allah does not like transgression, that is, going beyond one's limits. Verse 192 puts further emphasis on driving the invaders out of your homes, your property and maybe out of your country to remove their occupation.

Verse 193 emphasizes that mischief and persecution is worse than killing, therefore, it is the responsibility of the Muslims to remove mischief and persecution and work to bring justice and equity according to the rules of Islam.

Verse 194 refers to the sacred or the months of prohibitions of war; the command is to honor the months but if the adversaries violate them the Muslims are allowed to respond in kind. Similarly, if the

opponents attack, the Muslims are allowed to respond in kind but not to violate the limits or the use of excessive force. The use of excessive force is a pagan concept as the U.S. is doing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

***The Holy Qur'an 5:33-34.***

Another verse that is frequently quoted for attacking the Qur'an is 5:33 but it should be read with 5:34. The translation is given below:

“(33) Those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and go about the earth spreading mischief – indeed their recompense is that they either be put to death, or be crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off from the opposite sides or be banished from the land (or imprisonment). Such shall be their degradation in this world; and a mighty chastisement lies in store for them in the World to Come (34) except for those who repent before you have overpowered them. Know well that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.”

These two verses were revealed in response to the treatment of one or more “Muslims” who reverted back to his/their previous religion and became terrorists and highway robbers looting trade caravans. In addition they began encouraging the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims to attack and destroy the city-state of Madinah. Allah’s order came to fight them and subdue them followed by killing or crucifying them or cutting hands and feet from opposite sides or imprisoning them. If they submit themselves before being subdued forcefully and ask for forgiveness then forgive them. Their asking forgiveness includes their voluntary returning to Islam. Obviously, these verses are not about non-Muslims or forcing them to convert to Islam.

Such a treatment will be meted out to all apostates who combine treason with apostasy. Also, the same fate is due to highway robbers and terrorists who commit heinous crimes after peace, justice and equity has been established under Islamic rule. In the absence of Islamic rule neither peace is possible nor justice and equity but a tyranny of one kind or the other. In the contemporary Muslim world (2004 CE) there is not a single “Islamic” country having Islamic rule but there are over fifty Muslim majority countries having tyrannical rules. A great many of these states have cozy and unwholesome relationships with European and/or American powers. Naturally, there is no peace, no justice and no equity in places where evil rulers do not care for their populations. Instead chaos, murder, persecution,

exploitation of every sort obtain. These countries are ruled by criminals supported and protected by states with no care or knowledge of Islam.

***The Holy Qur'an 4:74-76.***

These verses are part of the section 4:71–76 but I will skip first three verses, as they are simple to understand. The translation is given below:

(4:74) Let those who seek the life of the Next World in exchange for the life of this world fight (*yuqatil*) in the way of Allah. We shall grant a mighty reward to whoever fights in the way of Allah, whether he is slain or comes out victorious. (4:75) How is it that you do not fight (*la tuqatiloona*) in the way of Allah and in support of the helpless—men, women and children—who pray: “Our *Rabb* (Cherisher, Provider), bring us out of this land and whose people are oppressors and appoint for us from Yourself a helper.” (4:76) Those who have faith fight (*yuqatiloona*) in the way of Allah, while those who disbelieve (*kafaroo*, reject Islam) fight in the way of *Taghut* (Satan, any non-God). Fight, then, against the followers of Satan (*Shaytan*). Surely, Satan’s strategy is weak. The Holy Qur’an 4:74-76. [Note that the word *Jihad* or its derivatives have not been used in these verses. The words for fight are derived from the root *qatala*.]

The background of these verses is the Battle of Uhud that took place in the year 3 AH in the vicinity of Madinah. One year before the Battle of Uhud, the Makkans pagans had brought a well-equipped army of 1,000 in with the plan of annihilating the Prophet and his followers. But the Prophet intercepted them 60 miles south of Madinah in the company of 313 companions; this was a very poorly equipped band of Muslims. The Prophet and his companions were victorious and all major leaders of the pagan Quraysh were killed and they lost 70 soldiers. The Makkans returned defeated but swore to come back to destroy the Prophet, his mission and his city-state of Madinah. In the following year, in 3 AH Makkans came back with a better equipped army of 3,000 and the Prophet was able to gather a band of only 700 and the battle took place near Madinah at the foot of Mt. Uhud. Both sides suffered heavy losses and there was no clear victory for either side. Makkans returned to Makkah without achieving their goal of annihilation of the Prophet and his mission, yet this emboldened the Makkans. This was followed by two years of hard persecution and torture of Muslims living outside of Madinah, whether in Makkah or in

other villages where pagans ruled. Prophet Muhammad had to send intelligence and guard missions all around to find who was conspiring and who was planning another aggression against Madinah and the Muslims.

The Holy Qur'an verses 4:71–76 were revealed in the above given background and they should be understood within this context. The verse 4:71 instructs the Muslims to stay ready for defense because they may not know who and when will attack the small city-state of Madinah. The verse 4:72–73 talks about the condition of hypocrites who do not want to fight because they love this worldly life more than the life hereafter, however, they do want the war booty when victory comes. The verse 4:74 assures sincere Muslims that if they die in the battle they will surely enter paradise but if they come back victorious, that would be good for them, too. Either way whether they survive the war or die in the war, they are assured of great reward from Allah. The verse 4:75 motivates the Muslims to stand up to defeat the oppressors and tyrants who have no conscience but the greed of this world and power. The oppressed people cry for Allah's help and it comes in the form of sincere Muslims who stand up in support of these people.

The verse 4:76 declares that sincere Muslims fight to make Allah's rule supreme and to establish peace, justice and equity, whereas those who fight for land, country, nationalism, patriotism, loot, murder, revenge, wealth and other worldly motives, fight for the *Taghut* (anyone other than Allah, that is, for the sake of the Satan). Those who fight for the sake of Satan, sometimes may appear to be winning in achieving their worldly goals but they are losers in the long term and certainly, in the life hereafter they will end up in the hell-fire.

It is obvious that Allah condemns aggression totally and condemns any war in pursuit of worldly reasons, whereas Allah approves and motivates a war of defence and to protect the weak who are persecuted and oppressed. In this early twenty-first century there are hundreds of millions of Muslims who are oppressed and persecuted by the West and its agents as rulers of the Third World countries. Abdel Rahman al-Rashed, a Muslim and the general manager of the Arab news channel, Al-Arabiya has said: "It is a certain fact that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it is equally certain, and exceptionally painful, that almost all terrorists are Muslims."

***The Holy Qur'an verse 9:29.***

“Those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day—even though they were given the scriptures, and who do not hold as unlawful that which Allah and His Messenger have declared to be unlawful, and who do not follow the true religion (*Deen Al-Haqqe*)—fight against them until they pay tribute (*Al-Jizyah*, protection tax or exemption tax) out of their hands and are utterly subdued.”

This verse of The Holy Qur'an (9:29) is also a part of the revelation 9:1-37 and it has the same background as 9:5, which has already been discussed earlier. However, in this verse there is inclusion of the “people of the Book” meaning the Christians and the Jews who were also living under the rule established by the Prophet Muhammad. Superficially, it appears that this verse disregards an earlier revealed verse 2:256 (discussed below) ordering that there is no compulsion in Islam. The reader has no other choice but to ask if the verse 2:256 has been abrogated by the verse 9:29. If not, interpretation of this verse will not allow forcing people to accept Islam or be killed. All Islamic scholars agree that 9:29 is not an abrogating verse and 2:256 stands valid. By the time 9:29 was revealed Zakat on all Muslims had become obligatory for those who had enough wealth to levy this “wealth purifying tax”. Zakat may be translated as wealth purifying tax or growth tax because the payment of Zakat makes wealth grow. Muslims were already paying Zakat, in addition to Sadaqa (charity) and Infaq (required donations), for various causes but there was no such tax on non-Muslims. The verse 9:29 makes tax obligatory upon all non-Muslims except the clergy, very old and poor without adequate income. In fact, the very poor and very old began receiving maintenance money from the general welfare fund of the Muslim treasury by the orders of the Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab.

The Holy Qur'an Verse 9:29 requires non-Muslim population of the Muslim-run state to either accept Islam or pay *Jizyah* or fight till death. The fourth option, given without saying, is to migrate to another land. *Jizyah* was a tax much lower than the Zakat paid by the Muslims and its payment gave non-Muslims equal citizenship rights with the Muslims besides exempting them from military service. This is the reason *Jizyah* has been translated as protection tax (giving full citizenship rights except becoming head of the state) and exemption tax (giving exemption from military service which was not given to the

Muslims). Payment of *Jizyah* is a symbol of accepting to live under Islamic law; this is what it means to be subdued. A non-Muslim cannot become head of the Islamic state because Islamic state is an ideological state and a person who does not believe in the Islamic ideology has no right to head it.

***The Holy Qur'an 22:39-40.***

During the Prophet's life in Makkah he was forbidden to respond to violent offenses against him or his followers. The command of Allah was to tie down their hands; it was total pacifism. The only thing his followers were allowed to do was to leave the town and take refuge in Habashah (Ethiopia). This restriction was lifted in Madinah when an Islamic city-state was established with its own free government under the Prophet, its own economy and volunteer defence forces. Order came in the following words in translation:

“(22:39) Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged—and, verily Allah indeed has the power to help them; (22:40) those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Rabb (Sustainer, Cherisher) is Allah. For had it not been for Allah repelling some men by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned, would assuredly been destroyed. Surely, Allah helps him who helps Allah. Lo! Allah is Strong, Almighty.” The Holy Qur'an 22:39–40

The meanings of these two verses are simple enough and not requiring any explanation.

***The Holy Qur'an 47:4-6.***

These verses were revealed shortly after the verses 22:39-40 given above lifting the ban on armed resistance against the invaders and aggressors.

(47:4) “Therefore, when you meet those who disbelieved (*kafaroo*) (in the battle) smite their necks and, when you have thoroughly subdued them, then take prisoners of war and bind them firmly. After the war lays down her burdens, then you have the choice whether you show them favour or accept ransom. Thus are you commanded? If Allah wanted, He Himself could have punished them; but He adopted

this way so that He may test some of you by means of others. As for those who are slain in the cause of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost. (47:5) Soon He will guide them, improve their condition (6) and admit them to the paradise which He has made known to them.” The Holy Qur’an 47: 4–6.

Aggression against the Muslim society of Madinah was already in progress; therefore, further instructions were given regarding defensive strategy. Allah instructed the Muslims to stand firm and fight hard taking prisoners only when necessary. These prisoners may be forgiven and released or accept ransom and release them. Allah promised Paradise for those who defend their faith.

Hate is not good for any person. I want to assure you that we Muslims also do not hate any non-Muslims, be they Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhist or followers of any religion or no religion. Our religion Islam does not allow killing any innocent person regardless of his or her religion. The life of all human beings is sacrosanct according to the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the guidance of our blessed Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him and upon all the Prophets and Messengers of Allah. The Holy Qur’an says about the prohibition of murder, “Take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus does He command you, that ye may learn wisdom” (The Holy Qur’an al-An’am 6:151) and Allah says in the Holy Qur’an, “Nor take life—which Allah has made sacred—except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, We have given his heir authority (to demand Qisas—equality in punishment—or to forgive): but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the law)” (The Holy Qur’an al-Isra’ 17:33).

According to the Holy Qur’an, killing any person without a just cause is as big a sin as killing the whole of humanity and saving the life of one person is as good a deed as saving the whole of humanity. (See the Holy Qur’an al-Ma’idah 5:32.)

However, if the question is valid then how come the Holy Qur’an says, “kill them wherever you find them.” as it is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an Surah al-Baqarah 2:191 and Surah al-Nisa’ 4:89. The answer is simple and that is you should read these verses in their textual and historical context. You should read the whole verse and it is better that you read a few verses before and a few after. Read the full text and see what is said: “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight

you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors. And kill them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, kill them. Such is the reward of those who reject faith. But if they cease, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression. The prohibited month, for the prohibited month, and so for all things prohibited, there is the law of equality. If then any one transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him. But fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves.” (The Holy Qur’an al-Baqarah 2:190-194)

The Holy Qur’an says “They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they): so take not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of Allah (from what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them; and (in any case) take no friends or helpers from their ranks. Except those who join a group between whom and you there is a treaty (of peace), or those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. If Allah had pleased, He could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you: therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (guarantees of) peace, then Allah hath opened no way for you (to war against them). Others you will find that wish to gain your confidence as well as that of their people: every time they are sent back to temptation, they succumb thereto; if they withdraw not from you nor give you (guarantees) of peace besides restraining their hands, seize them and slay them wherever ye get them; in their case We have provided you with a clear argument against them.” (The Holy Qur’an Al-Nisa’ 4:89-91)

Now who can say with full honesty that these verses give a free permission to kill any one anywhere? God to Prophet Muhammad revealed these verses at the time when the non-Muslims of Makkah attacked Muslims on a regular basis. They were frightening the Muslim community of Madinah. One may say using the contemporary jargon that there were constant terrorist attacks on Madinah and in this

situation Muslims were given permission to fight back the “terrorist”. These verses are not permission for “terrorism” but they are a warning against the “terrorists.” But even in these warnings you can see how much restraint and care is emphasized. It is important that we study the religious texts in their proper context. When these texts are not read in their proper textual and historical contexts they are manipulated and distorted. It is true that some Muslims manipulate these verses for their own goals. But this is not only with Islamic texts; it is also true with the texts of other religions. I can quote dozens of verses from the Bible, which seem very violent, if taken out from their historical context. Many violent Jewish and Christian groups have used these Biblical texts. Crusaders used them against Muslims and Jews. Nazis used them against Jews. Recently Serbian Christians used them against Bosnian Muslims. Zionists are using them regularly against Palestinians.

Let me mention just a few verses from the Old Testament and New Testament and tell me what do you say about them: “When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you. And when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favour to them. (Deuteronomy 7:1-2)

“When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labour and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. When the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you. Only in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes (Deuteronomy 20:10-17) Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls, who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves. (Numbers 31:17-18)

Even in the New Testament we read the following statement attributed to Jesus saying to his disciples: “I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.” (Luke 19:26–27)

A question is asked if Islam is so peaceful then why the violence by the Muslims? Is it not that the Holy Qur’an is inspiring them to commit acts of violence?

I say that there is no justification of killing or dying in any circumstances. In my understanding of Islam and the Holy Qu’ran, there is no valid reason for violence. However for the sake of argument, just like a devils advocate, I give an argument which is given to me by many when I am travelling in Muslim lands such as Algeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq and many other Muslim countries. Please note that an explanation of the psyche of some Muslims is not justification; therefore, the following explanation should not be considered as justification. In the absence of an Islamic government, or Islamic state which is prevented from establishment under the pressure of the Western powers, some Muslims feel that they are free to take the law into their own hands. If there were an Islamic government establishing peace, justice and equity, any violent activity would be declared an act of “terrorism” under the Holy Qur’an verse 5:33–34, discussed previously, and a majority of the Muslims would agree with apprehending such miscreants. In the present situation of anti-Islam hegemony, an overwhelming majority of Muslims are supporting violence against the aggressors and their puppets and this violence is expected to increase until the West gets out of the Muslim lands.

War in Islam was permitted to the Prophet Muhammad only after fifteen years of trying to live in peace against all aggression. Only when anti-Islam forces decided to totally annihilate Islam were Muslims permitted to fight back. The situation remains the same even in our time at the beginning of the twenty-first century CE. Over 50 years ago Muslims had been living as colonial subjects of the West for over two centuries. As they are coming out of the submissive posture of colonial days and desire to live according to Islamic principles, the Western powers are trying to re-impose its hegemony over the Muslim world. The Muslims are left with no choice but fight back. The West

must learn to let the Muslim world face their problems, challenges and future prospects their own way rather than imposing hegemony over the Muslims through puppet rulers.

Islam is about establishing justice between people, and through justice, peace. Islam stands clearly against all forms of racism. Islam protects the universal, God-given rights of humankind, while recognizing that people have differing paths in religion which they are free to follow and which confer differing social and economic rights among people such as in marriage, divorce and inheritance. This freedom is at the heart of the tolerance of Islam.

In this world there are many injustices. Among these are the rise of anti-Semitism especially that manifested in unjust attacks on innocent Jews, the Islamophobia and the attacks on innocent Muslims and the numerous other cases where human rights are violated across the world. In seeking to heal the world of these problems, we need to understand how victims become perpetrators and in our sympathy for the victims we must avoid becoming perpetrators ourselves. Key to this process is providing sincere and fair criticism, criticism that is clearly intended not to inflame but to help. Sometimes it may be harsh but it must always be factual and fair. To make our helpful intention clear we need to identify the good actions of those being criticised, as well as identifying their bad actions, and we need to avoid intending retribution by our criticism by forgiving those who have injured us or at least clearly being prepared to do so, should they ask for it. If it is done right, this will help to create not inflamed argument but sincere dialogue.

We need a dialogue of civilisations, not a monologue and not a clash of civilisations. Finally, I conclude this article with the following admonition of Allah in the Qur'an:

“O you who (claim to) believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty (to Allah). Observe your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is well aware of what you do.”

*(The Holy Qur'an 5:8)*



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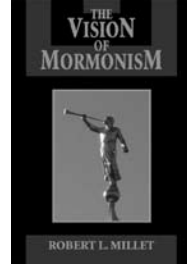
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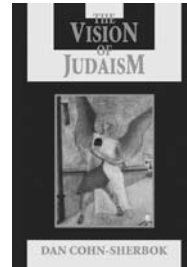
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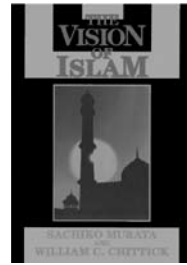
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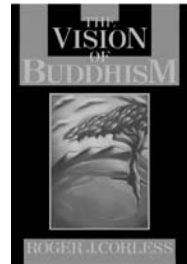


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# *Tabligh Jama'at and Hizbul Tahrir: Divergent Paths to Convergent Goals, Education to Counter Extremism*

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*Ameer Ali*

Of the known global Islamist organizations in the West, the Tabligh Jama'at (TJ) or the "group for propagating Islam," founded in 1926 by the Deobandi religious teacher Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (1885-1944) in Mewat, a town near Delhi in British India;<sup>1</sup> and Hizbul Tahrir (HT) or the "Party of Liberation," founded in 1952 by the Palestinian sheikh Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1977), a product of the al-Azhar and Dar ul-Ulum universities in Cairo,<sup>2</sup> have more followers today than any of their counterparts. Between the two, TJ is more visible and mass-based than HT and has an unregistered total membership of several millions scattered in almost all countries where there is a significant Muslim community. In the post-9/11 terrorism-counterterrorism debates these two movements, apart from others like al-Qaida and Jamaa Islamiyya, have received focal attention. This paper aims to discuss the socio-political origins of the two movements, the nature and depth of influence they exert in different quarters of the Muslim world, and the prospects of their future growth, particularly in the Western countries.

## **The Origins and the Architects of TJ and HT**

Both movements originated in a similar set of political circumstances. TJ was founded in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Indian Khilafat Movement<sup>3</sup> (1919-1924) which, according to one writer, "was an ethnic movement of disaffected Muslim professionals and...government-job-seeking educated Indian Muslim middle class, mainly...(from) UP and Bihar and urban Punjab."<sup>4</sup> Among the leading figures of the Khilafat Movement were a group of moulanas (generally, descendants of the Prophet), including the famous Ali brothers, Muhammad and Shaukat, and moulavis (in the Indian

subcontinent this name refers to a Muslim religious teacher or an imam) like Hazrat Mohani, and all belonged to the class of Muslim clerics. Even though the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 by the Turkish nationalists under Mustapha Kamal pulled down the final curtain on a centuries-old pan-Islamic political symbol, and with it the collapse of the Khilafat Movement, the entire episode unwittingly pushed the Indian Muslim clergy to the centre of India's political arena. While the clerics built their own political organization, the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind (JUH), to agitate for favour and privilege from the colonial regime, Khwaja Hasan Nizami, a sufi attached to the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya, Maulana Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal madrasa,<sup>5</sup> and Maulana Ilyas negatively viewed Muslim political involvement and sought in grass-root missionary work the salvation for all Muslims. Of the three main founders of TJ, it was Ilyas who dedicated himself entirely to the movement and became its chief architect. After his death the leadership was passed on to his son Maulana Muhammad Yousuf (1917-1965) and it was during his time that TJ became an international mass movement.

Almost a quarter of a century after the demise of the Caliphate and in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which ended in an Arab rout by the Israeli army, and in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arab civilians from their Palestinian homes, al-Nabhani, who was a judge at that time in the Islamic court of Ramleh in Palestine and a member of an Islamic society called Jamiyyat al-I'tisan, founded the HT in 1952. It was founded as a political vanguard not only to recover the losses in Palestine but also to re-establish the past glory of Islam.

While Maulana Ilyas was a product of the Deobandi School of Islamic traditionalism, which was influenced to a great extent by the puritanical Wahhabi School of conservative Islam in Saudi Arabia, al-Nabhani was a product of Cairo's al-Azhar and Dar ul-Ulum School of Islamic conservatism but with personal contacts and working familiarity with the then contemporary social and political Arab movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Baath Party in Syria. While Maulana Ilyas "was neither a charismatic leader" nor "an outstanding religious scholar" nor "even a public speaker" and "a prolific writer,"<sup>6</sup> al-Nabhani was a combination of all of these plus a theoretician.

## Convergent Goals and Divergent Paths

The key and ultimate objective of both TJ and HT is to unite the universal Muslim umma under the banner of Islam and to re-establish an Islamic state modelled on the fifty-one year Muslim experiment in Medina, which included twenty-two years under Prophet Muhammad and twenty-nine years under his four close companions, the celebrated rashidun (wisely guided) caliphs. The Quranic description of the Muslims as one brotherhood (22:92; 23:52), its invitation to a group among them to enjoin that which is right and forbid that which is wrong (3:104), and its reminder to them that God does not change a nation unless it changes within itself (13:11) provided the divine justification and *raison d'être* to both TJ and HT for their respective missions. Back to the Quran and the sunnah (sayings and practices of Muhammad) of the Prophet or back to the shariah (divine law) became the common maxim and matrix to the two movements.

While the Maulana was neither involved in the Khilafat Movement nor in the politics of JUH, al-Nabhani's Jamiyyat al-I'tisan provided military training to volunteers in the Palestine war. Thus, while politics to the Deobandi-type movements and therefore to Maulana Ilyas, as Barbara Metcalf believes, was "an empty 'box', filled expediently and pragmatically depending on what seems to work best in any given situation,"<sup>77</sup> to al-Nabhani on the other hand, as al-Farouki found out, politics became "an Islamic duty."<sup>78</sup> To separate politics from Islam and to treat the latter as entirely a spiritual doctrine was, in al-Nabhani's view, a deliberate imperialist conspiracy. Islam, therefore, has to be rehabilitated as a political ideology.

Members of the TJ are the Muslim equivalent of Christianity's Jehovah's Witnesses. TJ's national assemblies (ijtimaa) attract tens of thousands in South Asia, while its international gatherings pull hundreds of thousands from all over the world. In 1988 for example, TJ's annual convention in Chicago, Illinois managed to attract 6,000 Muslims from all over the world. In the same year, in Raiwind near Lahore in Pakistan, more than one million Muslims from nearly ninety countries were estimated to have attended such a gathering. And, by the late 1990s "the annual Raiwind meeting had become the second largest congregation of the Muslim world after the annual haj, or pilgrimage to Mecca."<sup>79</sup> Although the Muslims in India claim that Delhi is the headquarters of TJ because it was from there and from

the Deoband school of Islam that Ilyas launched his TJ movement, those in Pakistan and Bangladesh are equally competing to grab that status for their respective countries. This is on the basis of the fact that unlike India, which is essentially a Hindustan, Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslim countries and therefore the movement can operate more freely from either of the two countries. There are a large number of TJ followers in the West. In Australia too, TJ's annual gatherings attract thousands and are generally held mostly at state levels during Easter Holidays.

Medical doctors and engineers, teachers and students, landlords and peasants, businessmen and artisans, lawyers and accountants and many more professionals have become the foot soldiers of the TJ missionary mass movement, inviting Muslims to "enjoin good and forbid evil" as commanded by the Quran. HT on the other hand is not a mass organization, but more doctrinaire in its approach and therefore attracts the young and educated rather than the old and semi-literate. HT is also more popular than TJ among the girls because of the latter's strict advocacy of female segregation and a more androcentric interpretation of the shariah. To Oliver Roy, HT is "an Unidentified Fundamentalist Object (UFO)."<sup>10</sup> According to one source, HT has following in forty countries and its membership is estimated to be around one million.<sup>11</sup> HT's activities in Australia date back to the early 1980s and are being closely monitored by the country's law enforcement authorities. Ironically, and according to some researchers, HT "derives its ideological momentum from understandings of a radical Marxist provenance along with a deeply illiberal and relativist strain in contemporary Western thought," which is in adequate supply in "British and more recently, Australian schools of political science and international studies."<sup>12</sup>

While both these organizations are strict adherents and advocates of the fundamental tenets and practices of sunni Islam, there is one notable difference between the two. TJ neither expresses views on nor becomes openly involved in political issues and it approaches the mundane matters of life with an ascetic disdain. HT on the other hand is politically oriented and aspires to recreate the Islamic Caliphate with a constitution based solely on the so called Islamic shariah. As Taji-Farouki describes in her pioneering research on this movement, "the term Caliphate, which has become HT's hallmark designated

a divinely prescribed, complete and definitively detailed system, broadly identifiable in its institutions and forms with those of the Abbasid period.”<sup>13</sup> Even though HT does not advocate violence as a means to achieve its end, the fact that it has been very selective in condemning some violent acts like the September 11 attack in New York and the July bombing in London, while condoning others like the suicide bombings carried out by the Palestinians in Israel has revealed its ambiguity regarding violence. Relying on “credible reports,” The Nixon Centre Conference Report concludes that HT was involved in coup attempts in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Iraq.<sup>14</sup> This is the reason why in certain countries like Russia, Pakistan, France and Germany HT is proscribed by the government. It is not allowed to operate in most of the Middle East.

TJ in contrast is a silent supporter of an Islamic state and shariah-based constitution but does not openly struggle for it. The movement’s immediate concern is with Islamizing the life of individual Muslims and therefore it strives to bring about changes at the grass-roots level. In fact, the original objective of Ilyas was to bring back into the fold of Islam those Indian Muslims whose religious faith and practices were significantly corrupted by Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Barbara Metcalf compares TJ with Alcoholics Anonymous, which also rejected “progressive era government politics in favor of individual bootstraps.”<sup>15</sup>

HT, on the other hand, hopes to change the macro scene. While TJ adopts a bottom-up approach to Islamization, HT goes for a top-down formula. According to al-Nabhani, no Islamic order, in the words of Taji-Farouki, “could be created without first establishing the Islamic state.”<sup>16</sup> To TJ, regime change is a precondition to reformation. This is why to several non-Muslim governments and even to some Muslim regimes HT appears to be more threatening, while TJ appears moderate and peaceful. This does not mean, as will be shown in the following section, that Muslim governments welcome the operation of TJ.

### **TJ’s Influence on Muslim Society**

Without exception, none of the studies on TJ have focused on the “dynamics of its ideology, methods and impact either in its own terms or with reference to the work of other Islamic movements operating

in the same sociopolitical space.”<sup>17</sup> The preoccupation with security matters in the post-9/11 milieu and the rush to scrutinize every Muslim organization and Islamic religious movement solely for the purpose of assessing their potential threat or otherwise to international peace and harmony have led many scholars, journalists and writers to neglect this important dimension of TJ. The following observations may sound opinionated but are based on personal experience with TJ, both in Sri Lanka, a country viewed by the movement as a successful model for its activities, and in Australia.

Even though TJ escapes close scrutiny by government authorities, its other-worldly outlook and literalist interpretation of the foundational scriptures of Islam creates a mindset, especially among its young followers, that has the potential to drive the youngsters either towards a life of lethargy, withdrawal and exclusion or to become more radical and violent. In either case, these youngsters seek to achieve through their commitment the elusive heavenly benefits of the Hereafter. While the first option makes them less active and indifferent to the economic, political, and social issues confronting Muslim societies, thereby making them a class of social parasites, the second option prepares them to become martyrs in the hands of jihadists.<sup>18</sup> If there is anything positive about TJ’s teachings it is its advocacy of simplicity in life and the undiluted devotion to God and His messenger. If the preponderance of mosque attendance and the intensity of Muslim ritualistic devotion are on the ascendance all over the Muslim world, the credit for that trend should almost entirely go to the dedicated work of TJ members. The more intense and regular the devotion and the more numerous the number of devotees, the greater is the need for additional and spacious mosques. The phenomenal increase in the number of mosques newly built, renovated and enlarged all over the world after the 1970s is a fact that cannot escape the eyes of even casual observers today.

Beyond that however, the movement’s influence on Muslim societies raises some serious concerns to enlightened minds. One of the constant themes that comes out in the sermons and lectures of TJ leaders is the impermanency and fleeting nature of this life and the need to prepare oneself to life in the Hereafter. Although this theme is not uncommon to several other religions, TJ’s interpretation of it is unique. The leaders of TJ profess to preach a philosophy of non-detachment to

this world while being noncommittal to it. This is similar to the sunni-shariah-sufi outlook that developed during the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates from the seventh to the tenth centuries, as described by Lapidus.<sup>19</sup>

However, the fine line between detachment and commitment is not always understood by the followers and the finer details and mechanics of treading such a middle path are never spelled out clearly in the teachings of TJ. While the Quranic concept of “*amalan salihan*” or good deeds, according to TJ, are deemed to be the passport to heaven and are narrowed down to the five pillars of the religion namely, confession of faith (*kalima*), prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), alms (*zakat*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*), the movement’s interpretation of the scriptural description of this life as nothing more than a seductive deception (*ghurur*), and its incessant reminder ad nauseam of the certainty of death, the horror of punishment in hell for falling in love with this world, and the abundance of heavenly rewards to the pious are tantamount to asking Muslims not to live at all. The main purpose of life according to TJ is to serve God, but the way it defines that service and crowds out the real time in performing that service hardly allows any room for an individual to involve and contribute to society in matters of politics, economics, culture, aesthetics, and other dynamic sectors of life. The *Tablighi Nisab* (Tablighi Curriculum), the only text read by its members has nothing to say about Muslim role in these matters.

The result is a total indifference towards and even avoidance of mundane affairs. In a number of countries where the movement is strong, “Going out on Tabligh” has resulted in dereliction of duties by professionals, neglect of studies by students, abandonment of family-care by married individuals and bread-winners, and even demoralisation of team-spirit where collective effort is needed as in sports. This negative influence has led to an ironic political situation.

In countries where the Muslims are in a majority TJ is not actively encouraged, but where they are in a significant minority the movement is allowed to operate freely and sometimes with government blessings. The reason for this strange paradox is not hard to understand. In a Muslim majority, country the task of governing and administering the nation and the responsibility of managing the country’s economy, defence and international affairs fall squarely on the majority. If that majority were to shirk this supreme responsibility and spend more

time in the mosques and mausoleums then the material advancement and international status and security of that country will be in jeopardy. No nationalist leader can afford to encourage this apathy among the citizenry. But in a country where the Muslims are in a minority and where there are other communities competing for political positions and economic advancement, the disinterest of Muslims in these matters will be an unexpected blessing to the rulers. It will be in the interest of the ruling elite to promote this tendency and make the Muslims even more committed to their religion. It is these inner dynamics of TJ philosophy that makes the movement a welcomed guest in a Muslim minority environment and a parasitical burden in the majority situation. But some recent developments in the activities of TJ have raised concerns even in minority countries.

According to John Cooley, TJ operates “behind-the-scenes”<sup>20</sup> in winning recruits for jihad. In his analysis, several of the Islamist extremists in Algeria in the 1980s had their original training in TJ. In the 1990s, among the anti-Soviet mujahidin warriors in Afghanistan, TJ had recruited 160 of them from Tunisia for military training and jihad.<sup>21</sup> More recently, in July 2007, two of the individuals who were involved in the botched attacks in London and Glasgow, Sabeel Ahmad and Kafeel Ahmad, were reported to have been members of TJ. One is a medical doctor and the other an engineer. During the World Cup cricket competition in the West Indies in 2007 a post-mortem into the shocking performance of the Pakistani team highlighted the influence of Islamic fundamentalism which appears to have had a hand in engineering that defeat. It was alleged by the Pakistani team manager, Pervez Mir, that a few of his players were members of TJ and that they were more interested in praying than playing.<sup>22</sup>

Ziauddin Sardar believes that there are two groups of TJ now. A breakaway group appears to have emerged in the mid-1990s with jihad as one of its primary functions in order to overthrow corrupt rulers in Pakistan and abroad.<sup>23</sup> This group is said to have infiltrated the Pakistani army and plotted to overthrow the Benazir Bhutto government. Even the old TJ has come under the influence of more militant groups like Lakhkar-e-Toiba and Harkat-ul-Ansar, both now banned in Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the image and role of TJ has changed over time and it is not a harmless moderate missionary group as it was once perceived to be.

### **Dangers of HT's Elusive Caliphate**

Many Muslims who are pious in a religious sense but not aware of the political history of Islam still nurture a romantic attachment to the idea of an Islamic Caliphate. The fact that political institutions, like all societal innovations in history, do not remain static and permanent but change, adapt and even disappear in accordance with altering human needs and circumstances is yet to penetrate the orthodox mindset. Taji-Farouki's summary of al-Nabhani's position on political institutions captures the irrelevance of the Caliphate to this day and age. Al-Nabhani "overlooked the fact that specific institutions were created to particular socio-historical situations. He attempted to resurrect models reflecting the socio-economic life of societies much less complex than today's, making little allowance for the needs and circumstances of the contemporary age. His preoccupation with Islamic authenticity and his passion for defending the self-sufficiency of the Islamic model thus constrained him to adopt anachronistic forms, in a forceful rejection of contemporary political realities."<sup>25</sup>

HT, by clinging passionately to its leader's uncompromising commitment to resurrect the dead caliphate, is all out to exploit the romantic attachment of Muslim masses in order for HT to gain political power. In a sense, the movement joins the expressed desire of many militant Islamist groups of its kind for the rebirth of "Islamic Imperialism"<sup>26</sup> as debatably traced by Efraim Karsh. The danger is that it puts its movement in direct conflict with nationalism and nation-states that map the Muslim world today. Even the current and powerful tide of economic and cultural globalization that began with an outlandish objective of creating a "borderless world" has failed to break the resilience of nation states although the latter's sovereignty, because of the rising power of NGOs like the environmental movement and international bodies like the United Nations, is not as solid as it was once.<sup>27</sup> Islam failed miserably to unite the Arabs as proven by the demise of the United Arab Republic Project of Gamal Abdal Nasser in the 1950s. Islam could not unite the Malays but led to a war between Malaysia and Indonesia in the early 1960s. Islam openly demonstrated its abysmal failure to prevent Pakistan, a country that was deliberately created on the basis of religion, from splitting into two halves, Bangladesh and Pakistan, in the early 1970s. In short, the so called Islamic unity touted by Muslim politicians and Islamic

religious leaders has been and continues to be a demonstrable mirage. To aspire for the Islamization of a particular Muslim state is itself a daunting task in the context of ever-growing plural societies. To crave for an Islamized universal caliphate is to engage in a permanent but losing battle. All it does is to keep the dream alive and create more instability and violence to a Muslim world that is already unstable and violent.

HT is more a threat to the Muslim countries than to the West. The Muslim countries, with very few exceptions, have, under dictatorial regimes, neglected over a long period of time the economic, social, and educational development of the masses. As a result, poverty and illiteracy has made the majority population gullible to the visionary rhetoric of varied groups. HT's message, "back to the shariah" and back to the "rightly guided" Islamic caliphate, is bound to receive popular support and stir up the social status quo if left with no countering voice. The heavy-handed response of banning Islamist movements and incarcerating their members may be a short term palliative but not a long term cure. There is an absolute rupture between the rulers and the ruled in Muslim countries. It is this rupture that is driving many innocent youth into the hands of utopian visionaries like the HT.

In the West the danger of HT lies in its "anti-integration message" as correctly identified by The Nixon Center 2004 Conference Report.<sup>28</sup> While strenuous efforts are being made by some Western governments, like in Australia,<sup>29</sup> to create an environment of inter-faith understanding and inter-ethnic integration, HT's call for liberation of Muslims from Western culture, its appeal to Muslim parents to protect their children from contamination by Western influence, and even encouraging Muslims to migrate to Muslim countries is an attempt to create Muslim ghettos in the West. "If the Muslims who live in Western countries choose not to integrate, and instead seek parallel lives," warns the above cited report, "then there will inevitably be clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims in the long run."<sup>30</sup> The phenomenon of "home grown terrorism" is the product of this anti-integration message.

### **Countering the TJ-HT Influence**

Why is it that professionals who have gone through modern education and training and students learning science, technology, and liberal arts

in secular universities easily succumb to the fundamentalist teachings of TJ and HT? What happened to the power of critical thinking and rationalism that modern education is supposed to impart? In the West and even among Muslim scholars there has been a chorus of criticism against and condemnation of the indoctrination of outdated ideas and personalised teaching in the *madrasas*, all in the name of religious education. A literal interpretation of the foundational texts of Islam and an uncritical obedience to the commands of medieval clerics are the essence of *madrasa* indoctrination. Memorisation rather than analysis is the essential tool of acquiring religious knowledge in these institutions. Doubting the religious texts is deemed to be an act of impiety while scholarship is measured by flawless memory. The entire Taliban echelon that brought havoc to Afghan civil society was the product of such indoctrination. Similarly, the followers of Jama'a Islamiyya in Indonesia who were involved in the 2002 Bali bombings and other acts of violence are also products of the Indonesian *pesantrens*. Should it therefore be a surprise that these centres of indoctrination are becoming recruiting agencies for martyrdom operators?

But then how does one explain the attraction of such Islamist thoughts to university graduates and high school students who learn secular subjects like medicine, engineering and computing? Are our modern educational institutions also failing in their primary role of developing an inquiring mind? The answer to these questions should unravel the puzzling link between secular professionals and Islamism.

Shiraz Maher, a Ph.D student researching aspects of Islamic Thought at Cambridge University in the UK (published in the British *Sunday Times* and reproduced in *The Australian* of August 14, 2007) and the story of Ed Hassan, a former member of HT, whose *Islamist*, published by Penguin in 2007, reveal that students who study Islam and its history with a dispassionate mind rather than from the angle of a religious believer realise that the teachings of the Islamists are a serious and deliberate distortion of the truth. Does this mean that every young Muslim has to do a post-graduate study in Islam to realise this? How do we make students in high schools and in universities realise this truth much earlier in their career?

Many years ago in the fields of arts and humanities subjects like history, politics, sociology, literature, and philosophy trained students

to develop a critical mind and made them to question and debate textual facts before accepting or rejecting them. These subjects were popular in the universities and many of the students who were trained in those disciplines later went on to become national leaders and pioneers of progressive movements in different parts of the world. Those students became the vanguard of reformation and revolutionary movements to the chagrin of many established authorities. The dawn of post-modernism as a philosophic movement in the 1970s and after was undoubtedly the result of this wave of critical thinking. Student unrests in the universities and in high schools in the 1960s and 1970s were a reflection of this phenomenon and were suppressed by the authorities with bloodshed.

From then on and with the end of the Cold War and the ascendancy of global capitalism universities have gradually become institutions of manufacturing consent and compliance rather than bastions of critical thinking and intellectual debate. With fund restrictions to universities, several departments in the field of arts and humanities have been closed down or been drastically downsized, and students have been diverted to study quantitative and technical subjects, because the so-called market outside is dangling with promises of better jobs and higher incomes. Teaching and learning in the institutions of higher education has become largely a money-making business. Students who could afford to pay the cost of their education enter these institutions with minimum qualifications and pass out with testimonials with an equally minimum effort. The tragic fallout from this transformation is the diminishing space in the educational curricula for the development of an analytical mind.<sup>31</sup>

The infamous events of September 11th were no doubt the product of an extremist ideology that was couched in religious vocabulary and sold to young Muslim minds with promises of heavenly rewards. But the battle against this extremism has taken a narrow focus and has consumed a disproportionately huge amount of energy and resources in waging un-winnable military campaigns and ill-informed security crack-downs, all in the name of identifying and eliminating the carriers of the ideology rather than to debunk and expose the intellectual bankruptcy of the ideology itself. Reza Aslan summarises the futility of this tactic brilliantly: “Fundamentalism, in all religious traditions, is impervious to suppression. The more one tries to squelch it, the

stronger it becomes. Counter it with cruelty, and it gains adherents. Kill its leaders, and they become martyrs. Respond with despotism, and it becomes the sole voice of opposition. Try to control it, and it will turn against you. Try to appease it, and it will take control.”<sup>32</sup> This battle cannot be won through security measures but has to be won through education and thought process.

Among the recommendations submitted by the Nixon Center Conference, none dealt with education, but one of them said that “The best way to defeat HT’s Islamic teachings is to allow non-Arabic schools of thought to be introduced to Western Muslims.”<sup>33</sup> It went on to elaborate that, “Theologians and imams educated in different schools of Islamic thought, such as Turkey, Central Asia, Indonesia or Malaysia offer a much more tolerant interpretation of Islam that is highly spiritual and welcomes peaceful coexistence with other religions and cultures.”<sup>34</sup> This recommendation has completely missed the basic problem. It does not matter from which country or from which school of Islamic thought (*madhahib*) the theologians are coming. What matters is whether their listeners have the capacity and skill to question and debate what they hear and read from those theologians without any fear of being ostracised and condemned. The fundamental challenge is to teach and train young Muslims in the West to question and be critical of what they read and listen. Rational thinking is the need of the day. The educational institutions in the West undertook this challenge and accomplished the task with remarkable success in the past and they should resume that task with urgency. This should be the essence of the educational revolution that politicians and policy-makers talk and not the mechanisation of education through computerization of learning. Neo-liberal policies of privatization of higher education and depriving universities of public funds have a lot to answer to this tragic development.<sup>35</sup> Martha Nussbaum, in a provocative study on the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India, addresses this problem quite forcefully and her words are worth quoting here:

“The very idea of a progressive education to which critical thinking and the arts are crucial is very much out of fashion in an India dominated by the goal of success in science and technology. The average middle-class parent dreams of sending a child to IIT, the Indian Institutes of Technology... What parents do not value, or demand is the part of education that we

associate with the humanities: critical thinking, imagination, knowledge of and participation in the arts. The same struggle is constantly being waged in all modern countries.”<sup>36</sup>

In answering the question of what should be done to remedy the situation, she emphasizes among other measures the need to build “a capacity for critical examination for oneself and one’s traditions... This means a life that accepts no belief as authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit; a life that questions all beliefs, statements, and arguments and accepts only those that survive reason’s demand for consistency and for justification.”<sup>37</sup> This revolution in modern education has become all the more urgent in the light of competing and dangerous ideologies that are in the forefront to capture the hearts and minds of vulnerable sectors of disgruntled communities. Until the West embraces these progressive educational measures, TJ and HT will continue to thrive and their followers will continue to become fodders for jihadists and martyrdom.

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# *Towards Political Stability in Nigeria: Guide for Islam*

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## **Introduction**

In tackling the question, “what is the place of Islam in the formation and sustenance of political stability in Nigeria?” one needs to explicate concepts crucial to understanding the question. This paper begins by presenting the working definitions of “politics” and “Islam.”

We take as our working definition of Islam the simple description, “total submission to the will of Allah and the awareness of its impact in day to day life.”

The term politics calls for a more complicated explanation. Etymologically, politics refers to the art of governing, the structuring of power for achieving articulated goals.

Presently, Nigeria strives to function democratically under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the political platform of the National Democratic Party (PDP).

Not unlike other countries in the region, Nigeria also faces significant challenges through conflicts and other problems. Additionally there are problems of embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, bad governance on the part of political leaders in some states and, above all, widespread and seemingly incurable corruption. I argue in this article that Islam and politics can combine and collaborate positively, and as such I posit ways in which Islam can contribute to toward political stability in Nigeria.

## **2.0 The Ideological Teaching of Islam**

On the issue of politics Islam teaches that at least some should take active part in politics. The willingness to shoulder this responsibility by some is sufficient to realize the responsibility for all the rest. If, however, there exists a given nation or community in which

no Muslim participates in politics, then all others are held responsible and regarded as being negligent in their duties.

The Qur'an stresses that Islam is meant to be a religion of peace, and that Muslims are expected to have peaceful attitude towards human-kind. If this were adhered to, Nigerian politics, namely "authority to control and distribute the resources and assets of Nigeria"<sup>1</sup> could be enhanced by such citizens. In other words, politics in Nigeria deals with how particular governments are run and how power is distributed, that is, political powers, and the interest groups. The differences between the political guidance one finds in the Qur'an and the politics practiced in Nigeria are extreme. Ideally both should complement one another, but reverse is the case. The political habits and practices of many Nigerian political leaders greatly threatens democracy in Nigeria.

These include bad governance, corruption, money laundering, and the problem of nepotism and political god-fatherism. How can Islam from the Qur'anic point of view be helpful in such a situation? Can Islam meaningfully contribute its own quota to the body politic in Nigeria in a way that advances political stability in the country?

The political model expressed in the Qur'an holds that the state should not be controlled by any political ideology or organization of a non-Islamic foundation. It cannot be subject to foreign powers. It must be independent and exercise its due authority on behalf of God and in His cause. This idea originates from the principle that a Muslim is one who submits to God alone and pledges loyalty to His law alone, and then offers utmost co-operation and support to those who administer law and observe its stipulations.<sup>2</sup>

The political system advocated by the Qur'an is unique in its structure, function and purpose. It is not a theocracy in which a certain class of elite assumes divine rights, by virtue of hereditary or otherwise, and then carries absolute authority beyond accountability. It is neither a communism nor socialism; interestingly, it is not even democracy as the term is understood in its popular sense. The political ideology of the Qur'an is far different from all these. The Qur'an rather advocates freedom of belief and conscience and freedom of thought and expression. Every man is free to develop his potentialities to improve his lot, to work and compete, to earn and possess, to approve and disapprove of things, according to his honest judgment. But because human sense of judgment is faulty and imperfect he has been given adequate direc-

tives in the divine scripture—Al Qur’an al-hakim. Whoever follows the guidance shall have no fear nor grief (Q2:112). Thus, political survival or otherwise is hereby guaranteed by the provisions of the holy Qur’an. The rich were neither extolled nor the poor despised. Both the strong and the weak were considerably treated according to the law of equity based on the Qur’an.

Closely related to the above is the issue of responsibilities of political functionaries. Although the ruler is chosen and appointed by the people, his responsibility is to God and then to people. His office is not just symbolic nor is his role simply abstract; rather he or she has clearly defined roles to perform. Stewardship is a public trust, to which the administrators are entrusted, and should therefore be constrained both by the word of God as well as by the consent of the subjects. He or she must exercise powers on behalf of the people for their best interest in accordance with the divine law. On the basis of this manifestation, the Qur’an is the first and primary constitution of an Islamic state while the prophetic tradition is secondary. However, where there are no clear injunctions in both the Qur’an and Hadith, Muslims are ordained by God to handle their common affairs by mutual consultation.<sup>3</sup> This makes room for legislative councils and consultive bodies to discuss matters affecting the people and society.

### **3.0 Nigerian Politics And Nigerian Constitution**

The constitution of Nigeria spells out very clearly the procedure for practicing politics. In the Nigerian constitution, for instance, Nigeria’s basic social and political objectives are divided into two major parts, namely political objectives and foreign policy objectives. When one goes through some of these objectives, more light is shed on the idea of the good governance to both individual and community in general.<sup>4</sup> In the realm of politics, rigorous pursuit of unity and faith, peace and progress is highly emphasized. In the same vein, national integration shall be actively encouraged, while discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion and ethnic groups shall be an entity without any fear of the above. Another important ideal spelled out is to abolish all forms of corrupt practices, abuse of power, money laundering and above all to encourage good leadership.<sup>5</sup>

It seems to argue that in order to have good government, good leadership would be inevitable. Therefore, to have political stability

in Nigeria, leaders as well as the governed are urged to frown at social vices such as tribalism, greed, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, corruption and other vices in order to have the desired good life for all Nigerians and to make political stability a reality. What, then, is the role that Islam can play in the effort to develop political stability in Nigeria?

#### **4.0 Recipe from Islam towards Political Stability in Nigeria**

To some people, religion and politics do not go together. Some believe that only religion of the two deals with moral concerns. In other words, some consider politics to be dirty, and many religious types feel that political life should not be indulged in by a religious person. But this is not correct. Islam and politics should not be seen as at odds in principle from one another. Religious and spiritual life should be seen as two sides of the same coin. What Islam recommends, according to some passages of the Qur'an are examined in this paper. In the main, Islam should take part in the effort to rid politics of its "dirtiness." This should be completely washed off.

From the following, it is evident that Islam has much to accomplish in the political life of the country on the following precepts.

##### ***4.0.1 The Concept Of Accountability***

A Muslim leader is not appointed as a tyrant over his or her people but as a guardian who is responsible for their welfare. He or she will be called to account on the Day of Judgment for how he discharged that responsibility. The glorious Qur'an therefore reads:

"It is He who has made you His agents, Inheritors of the earth, and has raised you in ranks some above others, so that he may try you by means of what he has bestowed upon you."(Q6:165).

The inference we can draw from this Qur'anic verse is that a Muslim ruler or leader should be fully conscious that he or she is undergoing a trial and that his or her actions (good and evil) are being monitored and recorded against the day when he or she will account before his or her Lord. Still on accountability, the glorious Qur'an is unequivocal about this matter of accountability in human societies. The Qur'an says:

"And follow not that of which through has no knowledge. Surely the hearing and the sight and the heart of all these it will be asked."<sup>6</sup>

The inference we can draw from this verse is that if this injunction is followed to the letter, all societal vices most especially gossip, would immediately cease, thereby relieving many innocent men and women of the evil they suffer from slander and unfounded reports. The verse also forbids entering into discussions without accurate knowledge or proffering uncertain opinion. In fact, peace and contentment would reign supreme in the society, instead of mutual strife and hatred if this simple injunction were observed. It should be noted that one of the political instruments that make mockery of democracy in Nigeria is blackmailing of political opponents. The above verse, therefore, serves as warning in order to have stable government.

#### ***4.0.2 Bribery And Corruption***

Another political malpractice that threatens Nigerian political stability under the present democratic dispensation is bribery and corruption. Bribery and corruption are social vices that spoil society and destroy the political system of a country. These terms refer to situations in which someone tries to obtain what is not his or hers through unlawful means. This can be in the court of law, in the ministry, at a roadblock, or even in the school. In all the cases, people use money, materials and influence in order to get favors they do not deserve.

There are various injustices that emanate from these vices. These include such phenomena as favoritism, as applicable to the treatment of students in schools or Universities. Coupled with this is victimization or total neglect of the poor in the court of law. Other incidents include adulteration of commodities in the market, cheating during examinations and the like.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, Islam condemns bribery and corruption. In the Qur'an and the Hadith of the prophet (S.A.W), bribery and corruption have been described as evils. Bribery has been made unlawful by Allah as enunciated in the Glorious Qur'an.

“And swallow not up your property among your selves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know.”<sup>8</sup>

The verse is an antidote against bribery and corruption in all its ramifications. The issue has degenerated into political violence which erupts occasionally in such states. Violence is one of the political instruments that threaten democracy under this democratic dispensation.

With this, the political stability that we are clamoring for will be a mirage if the situation is not brought under control. But if the above verse of the Qur'an is practiced, political violence will find its way out from our society.

Moreover, in the tradition of prophet Muhammad, he cursed both the giver and the taker of a bribe. Islam disapproves of giving bribe to people in authority because that may influence their action, thereby affecting political stability in a community. The prophet, for example, makes it clear that anybody employed by the government and receives salary should not take a bribe from any one. The Hadith says "He whom we have appointed a salaried official, if he takes anything bribe after that he is a wrong doer" (Hadith from Abu Dawud). This tradition also warns that we should shun bribery.

The harmful effects of bribery and corruption in the political system cannot be overemphasized because these social ills are like diseases that disable the body, make it weak, and paralyse it, thus rendering it useless. To this end, some of the effects of bribery and corruption on the political stability of the nation include: poor people lose their rights because they have no money with which to bribe, thus the gap between the rich and the poor grows wider daily and honest people lose their rights because they refuse to offer bribes. Furthermore, people get into the habit of refusing to do their legitimate work which they are employed and paid for without additional bribes, and, above all, the cost of the every commodity goes up because the bribes have to be paid out of production and distribution costs. Invariably, the country would not be able to compete economically with other nations. It cannot import goods because prices are too high. On the contrary, the products of other nations are imported into the country, at cheaper prices; smuggling in of foreign goods becomes rampant and the currency loses its value. The country thus falls into economic and political decline, thereby the political stability of the country is at stake.

#### ***4.0.3 Stealing and Fraud***

The downfall of any political government that is characterized by stealing and fraud is certain, and such government soon goes into limbo. It is on this that the Glorious Qur'an warns in the following words:

"Woe to the cheater whom when they take the measure from men take it fully. And when they measure out to others or weigh out for

them, they give less than is due. Do they not think that they will be raised again?"<sup>9</sup>

From this verse of the Qur'an, we can deduce an idea that the price that an honest person pays for being non-active in politics, is to be ruled by dishonest people. If others play politics in a dirty way that is enveloped with fraudulence, this should represent a challenge that rather encourages Muslims to become involved and lead in harmony with the proper tenets of Islam. Politics has hitherto been characterized by unimaginable vice but Muslims with guidance from the Qur'an should bring sanity to the system in order for there to be political stability in Nigeria.

#### ***4.0.4 Leadership and Justice***

The Glorious Qur'an says clearly what the qualities of a righteous leader are in ruling the State. It enjoins thus:

"Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them and that when you judge between people you judge with justice. Surely, Allah admonishes you with what is excellent. Allah is over hearing, seeing."<sup>10</sup>

This verse of the Qur'an not only lays down principles of morality and ethics, but also gives guidance in the political and equal treatment of citizenry by those at the head of affairs of the State. In line with this Qur'an verse, the Hadith of the prophet lends support to matters relating to leadership and justice. Prophet Muhammad was reported to have said:

"When the trust is wasted, wait for the hour of the doom" it was said how will the trust be wasted O messenger Allah? The prophet said, "When Government is entrusted to those unworthy of it, then wait for the doom."<sup>11</sup>

The leader should therefore not abuse his position to commit injustice towards those under his leadership and care. A leader should seek the truth, uphold the truth and tell the truth, and he should not favour his own tribe to the detriment of others. Injustice in a leader causes hatred, jealousy, and distrust among his followers. The Glorious Qur'an warned the people about justice in the following words:

...Do not, then, follow your own desires lest you swerve for justice. But if you distort the truth, behold Allah is indeed aware of all that you do. <sup>13</sup>

#### ***4.0.5 The Concept Of Shura-Consultation***

On the issue of the concept of Shura i.e. consultation, and its relevance to the political stability of any country, the glorious Qur'an says:

“Those who respond to their Lord and establish regular Prayer, who conducts the affairs by mutual consultation.”<sup>14</sup>

From this verse of the Qur'an, in his commentary, Yusuf Ali describes consultation as the ideal way in which a good man should conduct his affairs, so that on one hand, he may not become too egotistical, and on the other, he may not abandon the responsibilities which devolve on him.<sup>15</sup> This principle was applied to its fullest extent by the Holy prophet Muhammad in his private and public life.

The concept of Shura is similar to that of the National conference constituted by the Nigeria government under President Olusegun Obasajo in (2005). In this conference, all ethnic groups of Nigeria were represented to voice out their views on how to move the nation forward and have political stability. The extent to which the conference has achieved this objective is not the subject of this paper. Nonetheless, a Muslim ruler is to seek advice from his people in administering the affairs of the state in accordance with injunctions of the Qur'an thus:

“And take council with them in all matters of public concern then, when you have decided upon a course of action, place your trust in Allah, for verily, Allah loves those who place their trust in Him.”<sup>16</sup>

From this excerpt of the Qur'an, the means of seeking advice from his people may be informal and individual or in form of setting up an advisory council or any other acceptable body appointed to look into issues and recommend actions to be taken. It applies not only to a national level but to all levels of decision-making. Essentially, the principle to be understood is that a leader is not to rule arbitrarily by his own whims and caprices. Even if he is wise, he is not to regard himself as the only source of wisdom but consult others for their views. To some extent, Nigeria, at the national, state and local levels adopts the policy of consultation by having political advisers for their views on matters relating to the state but the functionality and sincerity of the appointees-cum-executive is questionable.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have noted that politics and religion are intertwined and can be integrated effectively for political stability in Nigeria. The constitution of the country spells out the procedural guidelines for the creation of good political behavior in Nigeria, behavior that could bring peace and stability to the country. Instead of this, human factors have brought into the politics of Nigeria unimaginable vices, which threaten the stability of the political system in Nigeria.

Islam, from the Qur'anic point of view, calls Muslims to play their proper role in the politics of the nation, and to abide by Islam's divine laws and golden rules. This is the way Muslims should participate in politics. If this were followed strictly, impediments would dissolve, and it would become possible to contribute meaningfully to the country's political system and in this way contribute to political stability in Nigeria.

If the political vices such as cheating, election malpractices, examination malpractices in higher education institutions, political god-fatherism, bribery and corruption, stealing and fraud that render impossible political stability, were avoided, political stability in Nigeria would follow. This paper, therefore, advocates total adherence to the injunctions of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the prophet as discussed herein to facilitate the political stability and survival of the present democratic dispensation.

## ENDNOTES

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### ***Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice***

By Curtiss Paul DeYoung.

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007. 186 pp. Paper. \$15.00 ISBN 978-0-80063-841-2

Curtiss Paul DeYoung offers a view of three twentieth-century leaders whom he terms “mystic-activists,” by which he means persons who seek personal experience of the spiritual/divine and at the same time are driven to activism in the social realm. He depicts the two aspects of spirituality as reinforcing each other: experience of intimate union propels persons to action for justice and reconciliation and the demands of action drive them to reach inward toward the divine (p. 7). The leaders he focuses the middle chapters on are from three religious traditions: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran minister who was executed for taking part in a plot on Hitler’s life; Malcolm X, whose faith began in prison with the Nation of Islam but who became a Sunni Muslim during the year prior to his assassination; and Aung San Suu Kyi, a Buddhist woman who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her struggle for human rights in Burma which she has continued to the present.

The author sees each of the three as “inspired, guided, shaped, consoled and empowered by their religious faith” (p. 12). But he also relates their way of being with seventeen other religious figures who also are woven throughout the book and who are given single paragraph biographies in an appendix (among them Gandhi, Thomas Merton, Winona LaDuke, Elie Wiesel). Mystics are deeply rooted in their faith traditions, but they are not limited by them (p. 143). Many of the social activists he writes about are inspired by those of other faiths (e.g. Martin Luther King, Jr. by Ghandi, Aung San Suu Kyi by King and Gandhi, Daniel Berrigan by Thich Nhat Hanh). The author hopes that the twenty-first century will be a time when “many more choose mystic-activism and take a journey of faith in the inner regions of the soul and at the outer regions of society,” especially to the margins where the struggle against injustice is most visible (p. 149).

The chapter devoted to Dietrich Bonhoeffer is followed by a thematic chapter on how mystic activists choose to take a “worldview from the margins.” Bonhoeffer was led to analyze the oppression of the Jews in Germany and from that perspective began to find God in new ways; his religious insights deepened further as a prisoner of the Nazis and they continue to challenge Christians today. The author relates all three of his main figures and several of the others to this choice to identify with the oppressed and a willingness to share in their risks. He argues that the ability to see life from more than one perspective makes it more likely that the person can act to reconcile alienated communities.

The chapter on Malcolm X is followed by a thematic chapter on “identity rooted in humanity.” Here the author follows Malcolm X’s struggle with the dehumanization of the marginal by the powerful who claim to define who is fully human. Malcolm’s hard-won ability to identify himself primarily as human near the end of his life (as a result of his experience of Sunni Islam) brings about a healing too quickly brought to a close by his assassination. Bonhoeffer sees that those who attack Jews as attacking Christ, who in Jesus took on human form. Aung San Suu Kyi argues against those in power in Burma who claim that human rights concerns are foreign imports and that Buddhism, the root of Burmese culture, values human life and dignity.

The chapter on Aung San Suu Kyi is followed by a thematic chapter on the ethics of a “revolution in spirit.” Each of the three figures is depicted as prophetic in both the denunciation of societal structures and the annunciation of an alternative future. These people wanted not only changes of social structures, but revolution in the assumptions and the values of society and of individuals. On a personal level, they were/are deeply challenged by the risks and demands of their personal engagement in social justice issues.

The book gives an introduction to these three twentieth century prophets. It could work well in discussion groups or in introductory religion classes. One wants much more by the end of the book—especially more insight into how Islam and Buddhism nurture the desire for justice and for unity with the divine/spiritual.

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***Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity***

By Jennifer Wright Knust.

New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005, 279+xviii pp. Hardcover. \$45.00. ISBN 978-0231136624

This book discusses the ways in which early Christians from Paul forward used sexual slander as a means of drawing boundaries between themselves and non-Christians, and other Christians with whom they disagreed. This was in part a reaction to Christians themselves having been accused of conducting nocturnal rites involving orgies, incest and cannibalism. But Christians were not the only group accused of sexual immorality and heinous crimes by members of the dominant Roman culture. Jews, Greeks, Egyptians and Persians were at various times accused of similar practices. Roman politicians also used charges of sexual misconduct in attempts to discredit their rivals, a practice found in earlier Greek culture as well. Thus, as Knust demonstrates with numerous examples, allegations of moral turpitude were standard fare in ancient rhetorical invective.

But it was not only in Greek and Roman culture in which this took place. “Throughout much of the Bible, idolatry—worship of any God other than YHWH—was described in sexual terms as ‘fornication’ or ‘prostitution’.” (p. 7) Knust agrees with Phyllis Bird and a number of recent scholars that such attacks were not as much reports about actual Canaanite practices as they were polemical attempts to discredit them. Knust therefore argues that when “early Christian authors deployed sexual slurs to similar ends, consistently claiming virtue for themselves alone...while vilifying their competitors as utterly vice-ridden, most often in terms of lack of sexual self-control,” (p. 8) they stood in a long line of using sex as a means of discrediting opponents.

The value of Knust’s book does not rest solely on the general theses for which she argues but on the detailed discussions she provides in support of them, discussions of how Paul and early Christians, such as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and the authors of the pseudo-Pauline works, used sexual invective and accusations of immorality in an attempt to discredit both outsiders, and fellow Christians who disagreed with them.

Although I agree with her overall theses, one with which I disagree is her claim that “by employing slavery as a positive as well

as a negative metaphor, Paul partially undermined ideological apparatuses that supported slavery.” (p. 69) I would argue to the contrary that metaphorical appropriation of language without challenging its primary usage almost always reinforces the practices it describes, and that the fact that both speeches attributed to Jesus in the Gospels and Paul letters appropriate the language of slavery without challenging actual slavery was a central reason that slavery was not condemned by Christians until the modern period. Knust’s claim that although “Paul did not advocate the abolition of slavery, he challenged the presuppositions that made this hierarchical structure possible” (p.70) is flat-out contradicted by the remarks of Paul urging slaves to not be concerned with their status and directing all people to obey the ruling governors because they would not be in power if it were not God’s will.

On the other hand, I agree with her and other recent scholars that early Christian remarks about false prophets and claims of persecution were frequently polemical in nature rather than accurate historical reports, and that historians who have uncritically taken them as accurate historical reports are naive. But unlike her I do not consider this a recent discovery since it had already been pointed out by Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century.

One area in which Knust’s book is deficient is in not tying the early Christian use of sexual slander more closely to the exclusionist claim that there is but one way to God and that all other ways must necessarily be false, a claim found in the Gospels. Although she hints at this connection in her discussion of how early Christian writers demonized their opponents, she does not develop the thesis in any detail.

In my opinion, the assumption that one has a monopoly on truth and virtue necessarily leads to the use of invective toward other traditions and people in one’s own tradition who disagree with you. The exclusionary Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions may be contrasted here with the Buddhist parable of the blind men and the elephant, which implies tolerance on the grounds that no one has the entire truth with regard to the divine. There is an important lesson here for people committed to inter-religious dialogue and I highly recommend Knust’s book as demonstrating why we need the lesson.

**Gene G. James**

*University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee*

***Does Human Rights Need God?***

Edited by Elizabeth M. Bucar and Barbra Barnett.

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005. 391 pages. Paper. \$38.00. ISBN 978-0802829054

This book successfully contributes to Eerdmans' series edited by Jean Bethke Elshtain and John D. Carlson exploring the intersections of religion, ethics, and public life. The intended audience of academics, journalists, clergy, and public officials is treated to an impressive book on human rights that is now part of "the new *lingua franca* of global civil life vying regularly for a place along side traditional 'realistic' talk of national security."

Barnett and Bucar, editors of *Does Human Rights Need God?*, have selected essays (some of which arose from a University of Chicago lecture series funded by the Pew Forum) which extend the interfaith conversation about human rights theory and practical enforcement. Their excellent "Introduction" is a model for texts of edited essays: they briefly summarize each essay; highlight the theological, historical, and cultural methodologies; and incisively identify and analyze five major themes that criss-cross throughout the essays. As editors, they have orchestrated pluralistic voices arguing for and against religion (broadly interpreted) as a necessary source of human rights and supplemented the conversation four concluding essays which demonstrate the practical importance of religion and human rights in political hot spots. The editors' "Introduction" itself is a significant contribution to the discussion on religion and human rights.

In Part One: Religious Appraisals, five authors argue from their own traditions "why human rights needs God." Max Stackhouse comes to the question from a Protestant position emphasizing the importance of religion, generally, and specifically, the unique contributions of Christian theology and scripture. Vigen Guroian argues that it is not the Enlightenment but Eastern "Orthodox Christology and the vision of redemption . . . [that] identify what is normatively human and necessary [viz., repentance, humility, and forgiveness] for the freedom and flourishing of human beings." David Novak draws on Talmudic tradition and the Hebrew Bible for an account of human rights which can nevertheless be supported by secularists. Khaled Abou El Fadl's brilliant essay on Islam and human rights explains that

“God’s sovereignty lies in the fact that God is the source and authority that delegated to human beings the charge to achieve justice on earth by fulfilling the virtues that are approximations of divinity” which he identifies as mercy, justice, and freedom. Human beings are the “vicegerents” of God with “immutable” rights of “physical safety and moral dignity.” The last essay in this section is an insightful analysis of Confucianism by Anthony Yu who argues that “the reality of self-affirmation and thus self-love, self-interest, and self-preservation” is implied by what is truly human—an individual’s desire for self-fulfillment and for the self-fulfillment of others. This “virtue of life productive of life” may be “the seminal motif in developing a Confucian understanding of human rights.”

The second section of *Does Human Rights Need God?* contains three essays on the importance of non-religious sources for human rights. Robert George’s chapter is an interview with the book’s editors through which he explains that human nature and human communities embody generally recognizable rights and conduct. Even though he is himself a theist, he does not believe that theological reflection is an essential prerequisite to determine or affirm human rights. In his essay, Louis Henkin notes that even though it is possible for religious and nonreligious proponents of human rights to work together to promote human dignity, their sources, authorities, forms, and codes of conduct differ so dramatically as to render cooperation difficult. For Henkin, human rights are rooted in contemporary societies within national and international political systems. Courtney Howland’s feminist analysis demonstrates that religious fundamentalism in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism is growing and has discriminated against women. Fundamentalists across this religious spectrum have institutionalized “the obedience rule” in civil law thus rendering women vulnerable to abuses of every kind. The United Nations Charter, not religion, is a better guarantor of women’s dignity, equality, and freedom.

The book concludes with four essays that draw on particular historical situations for insights into the relationship between religion and human rights. The President of Al Quds University in Jerusalem, Sari Nusseibeh, examines the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; Charles Villa-Vicencio analyzes the role of religion in colonial South Africa and in the new South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation process;

Martin Palouš, the Czech Ambassador to the United States, adduces the growing emphasis on human rights for the existence of God; and Robert Seiple, the first U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom, argues that national security and international peace require that America, no less than all the countries of the world, embrace religious tolerance and freedom of conscience.

*Does Human Rights Need God?* is an important literary forum for a theoretical and practical discussion of human rights by secular thinkers and by devotees of the world's great religions. Bucar and Barnett have provided a valuable service to those who seek interfaith contributions to the debate. This book is worthy of an audience.

**Paul Parker**

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***Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian***

By David Novak

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005. 269 + xiv pp. Paper: \$25.00. ISBN 978-0802828422

This important collection by noted Professor David Novak, containing a number of recently published pieces as well as three unpublished essays, will prove valuable for those interested in Jewish-Christian dialogue and the philosophy of religion. The topics engaged range from a thoughtful reading of Martin Buber and Paul Tillich to an essay on "Maimonides and Aquinas on Natural Law." Most of this volume presents Novak's latest 'musings' on Jewish-Christian relations from both a theological and a philosophical perspective.

Novak, who is the Chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, offers a somewhat controversial approach to interfaith dialogue which is grounded in his understanding of what constitutes or is required of a "faithful Jew," and how Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity should be read as parallel religious traditions which "emerged at roughly the same time, and were both responses to the imminently future or imminently past destruction of the Temple as the center of the covenant between God and Israel" (20). In other words, according to Novak, Judaism is not the pure religion to which Christianity represents an aberrant direction ('counter-supersessionism'). Along

this same line, Christianity should not be viewed as the successor to Judaism (i.e., the ‘New’ testament, ‘supersessionism’).

Novak grounds Jewish-Christian dialogue in this parallel history, emphasizing that “true dialogue requires of each side to constitute a theological vision of the other that carefully avoids the theological dangers of hostility, capitulation, syncretism, and relativism” (26). Novak desires some form of relationship which avoids disputation and serves to respect and preserve each tradition’s truth claims. The work of building a dialogue instead of discussion of theological differences, allows a common defense against the threats of secularism. The stark contrast Novak draws between secular culture and Judaism and Christianity is reminiscent of Stanley Hauerwas’ work. Perhaps this clash is what motivates some part of Novak’s calls for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

The Judaism which Novak presents is of a particular type, which must avoid any trace of relativistic secularism. It includes belief in divine election, a form of messianic hope, and a willingness to martyr oneself, described as “the most serious of all the commandments” (28) which “represents the personal affirmation of public, universal, and perpetual truth” (5). The similarities with Christianity include worship of the same God, a claim made explicitly and implicitly throughout the collected essays, and the stand against relativism and the liberal religious traditions which “have become a form of popular psychology, having lost [their] own interest in public questions of truth and justice by ceding them to secularist criteria” (196).

The correlation between retaining the public truth claims of a religious tradition and morality are made most strongly in “Jewish-Christian Relations in a Secular Age,” “The Moral Crisis of the West: The Judeo-Christian Response,” and “Jews, Christians, and Civil Society.” Here, as elsewhere, Novak makes use of evaluative terms such as “authentic,” “faithful,” and “thoughtful” in a normative manner (3, 9, 15, 205, 207, 213). By “authentic” Novak means that “a Jew who is committed to the Torah as the word of God cannot in good faith criticize anything taught within the Jewish tradition based on external criteria” (174). This connects with his understanding of liberal Judaism(s) as tantamount to secularist, in that it recognizes concerns, criteria, or standards which, according to Novak, it places higher than the tradition. In the end, he asks “how could a tradition that admits of

external justification require her members to die as martyrs rather than exchange her for any other identity in their lives, as does Judaism (and Catholicism)?" (174).

The Judaism which Novak describes is exclusive, but not necessarily so. That is, Novak's monopolistic Judaism gives short shrift to Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism and the many strands of each which have contributed to the multi-vocal reality which is Judaism. Along with many others, I would argue that a Jew may very well not believe in divine election nor "anticipate God's redemption," but still be considered "authentic" (209). I would maintain this stance in the face of Novak's charge that "it is very important that serious Jews and serious Christians stand up" to the "concerted attack on the traditional notion that marriage is a heterosexual union" (215). Many, including but not limited to Novak's secular foils, have taken to serious consideration of this matter. Many of these serious Jews and serious Christians disagree with Novak, and do so based on their findings within a given tradition. I wonder if rejecting homosexual marriage is a fundamental tenet of 'Judeo-Christian morality' or just fundamentalist.

These significant essays along with the statement published by Novak and others, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, and responses to it (most notably Jon D. Levenson's "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue" published in *Commentary* and followed four months later with an extended section of correspondences) are central to the current discussions on Jewish-Christian relations. Disagreements (do Jews and Christians worship the same God?) are bound to arise. Novak's essays are thoughtful, well-argued, and reflect a deep commitment to interfaith dialogue. They will provide an essential starting point for anyone interested in the subject.

**Randy L. Friedman**  
*SUNY, Binghamton, New York*

***Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible***

Edited by Melody D. Knowles, Esther Menn, John Pawlikowski, and Timothy J. Sandoval

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007. 260pp. Hardcover. \$29.00. ISBN 978-0800638429

The essays in this book result from a conference sponsored in 2005 by four Christian seminaries in the Chicago area. Participants were Jewish and Christian academics all of whom, with three exceptions, work in the Chicago area. In an informed and sensitive manner all of the authors explore the ways that Jews and Christians have interpreted both Testaments including abuses in such readings, lessons that can be learned, and practical suggestions for dialogue that will lead to better understandings of sacred scripture.

Four Christian authors edited the book and wrote the introductory chapter. With justification, they highlight a history of persecution of the Jews and the ensuing anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, they give at least seven cautions concerning anti-Semitism, but do not mention what change of heart and mind Jews might experience. This is a curious omission in a book dedicated to dialogue. In the subsequent chapter, David Novak is more aware of the need for mutual soul searching, and provides some practical examples.

David Novak enquires into the meaning of authority, if any, that the Bible contains as a revelatory document. He clearly connects this concern with “Dabru Emet,” the Jewish statement on Christians and Christianity, signed by over 150 Jewish scholars and religious leaders, which Novak co-authored, a concise statement of which is contained in the appendix to this volume. Ralph Klein treats promise and fulfillment in both Testaments while providing a creative approach to understanding fulfillment without lapsing into supersessionism. Treating the theme of apocalyptic violence and politics, Barbara Rossing shows how language such as is found in the book of Revelation has been misinterpreted by a fundamentalist reading of apocalyptic literature, and has unfortunately been used to cast Judaism into a dangerously negative light. Along the same lines, Steven Weitzman treats martyrdom in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, showing that faulty exegesis of texts concerning martyrdom easily leads to distortion of its real meaning, not to mention fostering at times religious hatred.

Religious identity and the other in the New Testament is a theme treated by three authors. Barbara Rowe explores self-definition, conflict theory, and vilification as tools which can be used to define the other, often in a deleterious way. Sarah Tanzer provides an overview of the historical presentation of Jews and Judaism in the gospel of John. These interpretations range from condemnation to milder uses of literary expression, and usually have been understood by Christians as rejection of Judaism. Tanzer sees John's gospel as a challenge to dialogue between Christians and Jews, and suggests a broader, more pastoral approach to mutual understanding between the religions. For Laurence Edwards, the gospel of Luke was part of a fairly long transition and struggle of Christians with their Jewish heritage, and the image of Pharisees in this gospel is not as negative as has been supposed.

The final section of the book looks to the present and the future. Walter Brueggemann provides a perceptive essay on how Jews and Christians can hope for a positive future despite the negativity which we see around us. He calls for imaginative readings of texts which illustrate why and how we can rely on the promises made by God in scripture. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite provides a Christian response to the preceding messages and then David Fox Sandmel presents an afterward.

All of the authors write in a clear, respectful, and informed manner. Opinions are backed by reference to contemporary scholarship and reputable authors. Some common themes surface throughout the book. Biblical studies provide a common frame of reference and common language for both Jews and Christians. Scholarship and dialogue go hand in hand. Both religions should establish historical and theological commonalities before treating differences. The New Testament is descriptive not prescriptive of the way that Jews and Christians relate. Supersessionism, i.e. that Judaism has been replaced by Christianity, is no longer tenable. Despite their theological and biblical differences, Jews and Christians have come to a new era of mutual respect and advancement.

**Richard L. Schebera**

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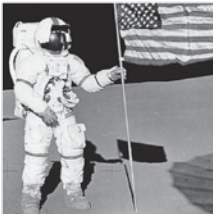
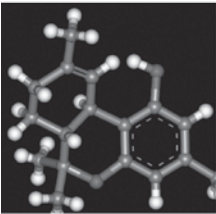
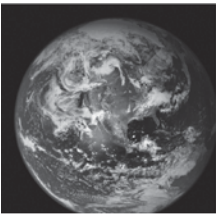
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### ***Christians and a Land Called Holy: How We Can Foster Justice, Peace, and Hope.***

By Charles P. Lutz and Robert O. Smith.

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006. 168 + x pp. Paper. \$15.00. ISBN 978-800637842

The piece of land known as the Holy Land for those of the Abrahamic faiths is only about the size of the state of New Jersey, yet it has seen as much if not more violence than any other place on earth, and, as the authors of this book point out, all in the name of God! Visiting this area in 2002, the authors recognized that not only do Christians continue to make pilgrimages to this area and thus have a faith-based interest in seeking a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians, they also have a role to play in pursuit of that peace.

Fair-minded and sympathetic to Jewish, Muslim, and Christian concerns, Lutz and Smith provide a clear account of the Israeli-Palestinian situation and a compelling plea for Christian involvement in the area. Carefully sorting out the tangled historical and religious roots of the problems, they reveal the strong forces at work in the conflict and lay out the driving biblical notions of election and covenant, the historical causes of the bitter and divisive clashes of the last 50 years, the complex demographic and political issues today, how Palestinians (particularly Christians) have been affected by the turmoil, and how, finally, Christians must engage the future of justice and peace.

As the authors note, Saint Francis of Assisi invited all Christians to ask, in the words of the prayer attributed to him, "Lord, make us instruments of your peace." This volume is their attempt to encourage more people to work harder to bring about peace in this land called holy.

### ***Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.***

Edited by James L. Heft.

New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006. 240 pp. Paper. \$22.00. ISBN 978-0823226481

Transmitting religious identity from one generation to the next has been an issue of the greatest concern for the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—from their inception. The challenge today in a secular, skeptical culture is even greater. The fruit of a historic gathering of scholars and religious leaders across three faiths and many disciplines, this significant book reports on the religious lives of young people in today's world. It is also a unique inventory of creative and thoughtful responses from churches, synagogues, and mosques working to keep religion a vital force in those lives.

The essays in this volume explore fundamental issues that have an impact on religion—from the cultural effects of global consumerism and personal technology to pluralism and individualism. Studies of religiosity among young people and college students in the United States illuminate the gap between personal values and organized religion—and the emergence of new, different forms of spirituality and faith. How religious institutions deal with these challenges forms the heart of this book.

Filled with real-world wisdom, this volume offers descriptions of practices developed to revitalize traditional institutions, as well as discussing broader perspectives on the future of religious beliefs and practices in our changing world. It is a valuable resource for those seeking to understand what religions must, and can, do to inspire a vigorous faith in the next generation.

***The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament—An East-West Conversation.***

By John J. Thatamanil.

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006. 231 pp. Paper. \$25.00. ISBN 978-0800637934

This book engages the reader in a conversation between the Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta as taught by the eighth-century master, Sankara, and the Christian theology of Paul Tillich. Through this dialogue, John Thatamanil creatively shows how the two theologies mutually enrich each other, and together bring us closer to understanding both our human nature and the divine.

Thatamanil uses the medical model in his comparative theology, suggesting that each religious tradition offers a diagnosis for the human predicament, an etiology, a prognosis, and finally a course of

treatment. In this way he brings about a conversation between East and West in which he draws the reader into understanding both the Hindu nondual immanence, in which human beings are not separated from Brahman, and Christian ecstasy, in which we can be reunited with divinity. The result is a new voice able to engage fundamental and wide-reaching human and religious issues, inviting a fresh look at what ails us as human beings and offering hope for our healing.

***Christianity Looks East: Comparing the Spiritualities of John of the Cross and Buddhaghosa.***

By Peter Feldmeier.

Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006. 166 pp. Paper. \$18.95. ISBN 978-0809143313

This fascinating book takes a fresh look at interreligious dialogue with St. John of the Cross and Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa as representatives of Christian and Buddhist paths to liberation. As the world is increasingly experienced as a global village, dialogue with other religious traditions is widely regarded as possibly the greatest modern (or post-modern) challenge, and the distinctive journey of our time. Dialogue not only informs our understanding of various expressions of holiness, it also can inform one's own religious faith and practice.

What is often lacking in the history of dialogue is its lack of appreciation for distinctive religious paths and the experiences described therein. Without laying assumptions on the nature of religious experience, this book allows the classic texts of these two spiritual masters and their representative religions to speak for themselves. This form of interaction offers a model for future dialogues.

The dialogue in this volume reveals both similarities and differences between Christianity and Buddhism, allowing the reader to deepen their understanding of the universal aspects of the spiritual journey, while maintaining the distinctions between the two paths forged by these major religions. Through this comparison, ways in which each can contribute to the other are also brought to light.

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## Contributors

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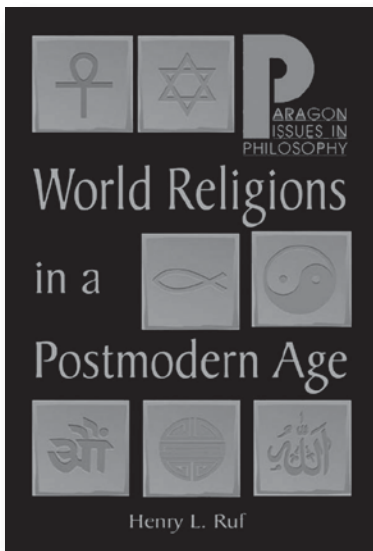
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—Gene G. James, Professor of Philosophy,  
University of Memphis



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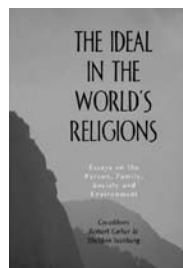
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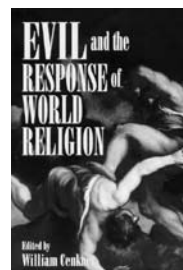


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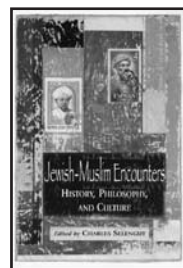


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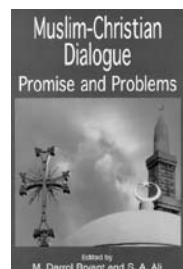
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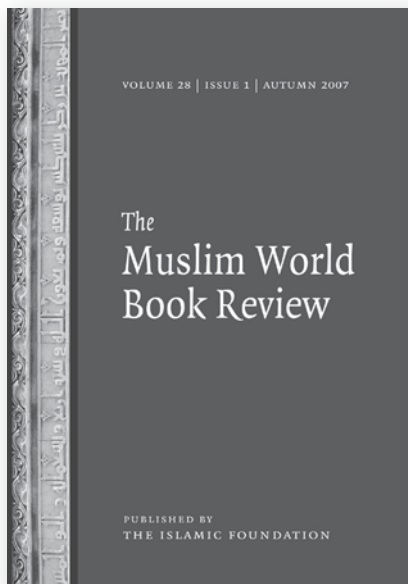
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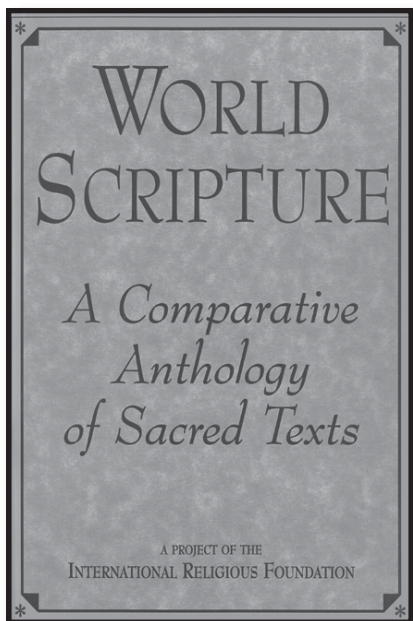
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