

Islam and Judaism: Juridical and Theological Perspectives*

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Introductory Remarks

No issue has harmed, and continues to harm, the Muslim world's relations with the West as much as the latter's stance on Israel. The West's unquestioning economic and military support of a militant, expansionist, Zionist state which flouts the ideals of democracy and justice and the charter of the United Nations is deeply problematic. Israel is the foremost practitioner of state terrorism today, and a thorn in the body and soul of more than one billion Muslims. Muslims are askance as to which member of the UN has violated its charter more often than Israel, and has done so not only with impunity, but with overt and unwavering support of the United States! This state was imposed on the Muslim world by force in a process that resulted not only in loss of life, but also in the homelessness, oppression, and loss of basic human rights of millions of Palestinians.

I. Synopsis

This essay begins with a review of the Qur'anic references to the *ahl al-kitab* (People of the Book), and then the special affinity, indeed a substantial unity of purpose and doctrine, that the Qur'an exhibits throughout its references to Torah and Bible. The discussion proceeds to then highlight the Qur'anic critique of the Jews and how they deviated from many of the original doctrines of their faith through their exaggerated claims that compromised the transcendence of God and the integrity of His revelations. The discussion proceeds with a review of the Covenant of Madinah, and then how the Jewish violations of that Covenant marked a negative trend in Muslim –Jewish relations. The much longer pattern of relations through the ensuing centuries provide, however, evidence of good relations between the Muslims and Jews. The ensuing discussion on juridical themes looks at the common features of the laws of Islam and those of Judaism, and the extent to which Jewish law can be said to be valid within the rubric of the Shariah of Islam. This is followed by a review

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respectively of political Zionism that is spearheaded by the state of Israel, and Christian Zionism that has taken a common causes with it. The essay ends with a conclusion.

II. Ahl al-Kitab in the Qur'an

It will be noted at the outset that unlike the common misconception that views the term *ahl al-kitab* as derogatory and unflattering, it is on the contrary indicative of an overall attitude of amity and respect in the Qur'an for the followers of monotheist religions. Religious disputation (*jadal*) in the Qur'an began with the pagans of Makkah, the arch enemies of the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, and the new faith he propagated in their midst. In order to distinguish the monotheists, mainly the Jews and Christians, from the pagans and idolators of Makkah, as a mark of respect, the Qur'an began to refer to them as *ahl al-kitab*, or People of the Book. To say that it is a term of distinction is entirely in consonance with numerous other references that the Qur'an makes to Torah and Bible, as I shall presently elaborate. Yet *ahl al-kitab* is neither a rigid nor well-defined, as the Qur'an also uses other equivalent terms that introduce a measure of flexibility in the meaning and application of *ahl al-kitab*.¹⁾ The Qur'an names the Jewish people as *yahud* and employs other equivalent terms²⁾ on a total of 53 occasions - the most frequent of which is *Banu/Bani Israil*, which occurs 40 times in the text, in the context mostly of the Madinan surahs. It seems that *yahud* and its equivalents are used in reference to followers of the Jewish faith, whereas *Banu Israil* signifies a Jewish descendancy and race.³⁾ The Qur'an also mentions two other groups, namely the Sabeans, in three places, and the Zoroastrians (*majus*) in one place. Although the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, had no personal contact with the Sabeans, there is a hadith advising that Zoroastrians should be accorded the status of the People of the Book.⁴⁾ Yet it is safe to assume that a distinctive status is given to the Jews and Christians due to their religious beliefs, and not because of any ethnic or ancestral considerations. Furthermore, there is no recognition in the Qur'an of the superiority of any group of people, *ahl al-kitab* or otherwise, and that includes the Muslims themselves. The only criterion of superiority known to the Qur'an is righteous conduct and piety (*taqwa* - Q. 49:13), which is an attribute mainly of the individual, not of a group or a collective entity as such.

The renowned Covenant of Madinah (*dustur al-Madinah*, also *mithaq al-Madinah*), which was signed between the Jews of Madinah, the Immigrants and the Helpers in the first year of the *hijrah*, granted to the Jews freedom of religion and autonomy in a clause, which actually rehashes a Qur'anic verse to the same effect. "unto Jews their religion and unto Muslims their religion." (cf. Qur'an verse in *surah al-Kafirun*, 109:5). The Jews have more importantly been declared as an integral part of the newly established ummah in Madinah. (Art.25)⁵⁾

The Qur'an maintains an affirmative outlook on all the revealed religions prior to the advent of Islam and strikes a note on the essential unity of them all in the essence of belief in Divine Oneness (*tawhid*), the worship of God, and the need for divine guidance to regulate human conduct in conformity with a set of principles: "And We have sent to every people a messenger that they may worship God."(16:31) The substance of this verse is endorsed in several other places. Thus the text provides in an address to the Prophet Muhammad:

God has established for you as religion that which He enjoined upon Noah, and We revealed to you that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, namely, that you remain steadfast in religion and scatter not regarding it. (42:13)

And We never sent a messenger before thee save that We revealed to him saying, "There is no God but I, so worship Me." (21:25)

Some verses even imply that the content of all revealed messages is one and the same: "Nothing has been said to you save what was said to the messengers before you." (41:43) Belief in One God and worshipping Him thus constitute the common theme of all the revealed religions, and signifies the essence of unity among the *ahl al-kitab*.

III. Judaism and Islam: A Close Affinity

The Qur'an exhibits a stronger sense of affinity with Judaism than with other revealed religions, so much so that many of the laws and tenets of Islam are expressly declared to represent a continuity of their Judaic antecedents. This affinity is borne out by the fact that Judaism has a sacred language, Hebrew, like Arabic in Islam, and it has a sacred law, the Halakhah, corresponding to the Shariah. Furthermore, they share an opposition to all forms of idolatry and to the creation of iconic sacred art, which would allow an image of the divinity to be painted or sculpted. In certain other respects, Islam is closer to Christianity, as both emphasise the immortality of the soul, eschatological realities, and the accent on the inner life. Then there are basic principles upon which all three religions agree: monotheism, prophecy, sacred scripture, basic ethical norms. Islam is an inalienable part of the Abrahamic family of religions that relates closely to Christianity and Judaism. Islam views itself the complement of those religions and the final expression of Abrahamic monotheism, confirming the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, but rejecting any form of exclusivism.⁶⁾ In reference more specifically to Torah, the Qur'an confirms it as a source of inspiration and guidance: "We revealed the Torah in which there is guidance and lights (*hudan wa nur*); and prophets who submitted to God's will have judged by the standards thereof." (5:44)

Thus it is observed that Muhammad, being one of the prophets of the Abrahamic family, is bound by the guidance that is found in the Torah. Furthermore, in a reference to the leading figures among the previous prophets, the Qur'an directs the Prophet of Islam to follow their guidance: "...Those are the ones to whom God has given guidance, so follow their guidance." (6:90) Based on these and similar other Qur'anic proclamations, Muslim jurists and commentators are unanimous that all the revealed religions are different manifestations of an essential unity.⁷⁾

This sense of common identity in monotheism was also reflected in the living experiences of the Muslim community in Madinah, when they became neighbours, for the first time, with the Jewish residents of that city. In the event where no ruling could be found in the Qur'an on a religious or customary matter, the Muslims assimilated the ways of the Jews and Christians and followed their example. For instance, the Muslims followed the hair-style of the Jews in preference to that of the pagan Arabs,⁸⁾ and faced Jerusalem in their prayers for a period of about 16 months.⁹⁾ Also, when the Prophet knew that the *ahl al-kitab*, especially the Jews, observed fasting on the day of 'Ashura (tenth of Muharram), he ordered the Muslims to fast on that day. The Prophet used to stand up whenever he saw a Jewish funeral procession.¹⁰⁾

Islam recognises God's conferment of special favours on the Jews: "O Banu Israil, Remember the blessing I have conferred upon you, the special favour I have shown you." (Q. 2:47, & 122) But Islam understands this as a fulfillment of the covenant between them and God, their part of which is to serve God and do the good works. The covenant grants to the Jews the rewards of children, land, prosperity and happiness, and imposes upon them worship of God, charity, justice and righteousness conduct (Q. 5:12). The covenant equally stipulates that if the Jews fail to keep their obligations, God will inflict upon them His punishment: Defeat, dispersion, suffering and unhappiness could be their lot (Q. 3:112, 17:2-8).

IV. Qur'an's Criticism of the Jews

Islam knows nothing of the "Promise," that is, the doctrine that God the Most High bound Himself to love, favour, and bless the Jews forever, regardless of whether they observe their part of the covenant, allegedly because they are His sons and daughters, whose evil conduct would not affect their status as His children (Deuteronomy 9:5-6; Hosea 11: 8-9). The Qur'an refutes such assertions: We saved those who forbade evil and inflicted punishment on those who practiced injustice. We have dispersed them into groups all over the world. Some are righteous and others are not. After them there came generations who paid lip service to the scripture, assuring themselves that God would nonetheless forgive them (Q. 7:165, 169).

Islam views such doctrines as blasphemous, regardless as to whether the beneficiaries are Jews or Muslims. The Jews ascribe such arbitrariness to God in order to maintain their otherwise unjustifiable election. Judaism asserts that God chose Abraham and ordered him to leave his city and people and emigrate; but it gives no reason for the choice (Genesis 12:1). This election of Abraham is nowhere justified, and it is asserted to be 'in the flesh' (Genesis 17: 10), and made to pass biologically to his descendants regardless of their piety or conduct (Isaiah 9:6; 63:1-16).¹¹⁾ The Qur'an was the first to proclaim Abraham's emigration as due to his conversion from the idolatry of his people to the true religion of God revealed to him, and to their attempted persecution of him from which God saved him (Q. 21:51f).

Flowing from this arbitrary election is the Jews' description of God as their Father and themselves as His children. Islam condemns this as a threat to God's transcendence. The Qur'an says: 'The Jews claim: We are the children of God and His favourite.' Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins? Rather, you are people to whom God is related as He is to any other people.' (Q. 5:18) – "If you do good, it will be reckoned for you; and if you do evil, it will be reckoned against you." (Q. 17:6f)

Islam further criticised the Jews for tampering with the texts of revelation and suffering the originals to be lost through neglect, edition and outright falsification (Q. 7: 162; 2: 41-42, 75, 79, 174; 4:46; 5:41). This criticism marked the beginning of Biblical textual criticism, which was later developed by Muslim historians of religion such as Ibn Hazm, Shahristani, and others. Another point of criticism Islam directs to the Jews is that of failing to live up to the norms and imperatives God had revealed to them. The language of such criticism is as strong as any the Jews had heard from their own prophets: "Those who were entrusted with the Torah but did not trust its imperatives, are like the donkey carrying a load of books (Q. 62:5).

And then again: Certainly Moses brought the revelation but the Jews took to calf worship and injustice...woe to them that rewrite the revelation with their own hands for a mean price and claim for their composition divine status (Q. 2:92). The Jews are also criticized the Jews for their hostility toward the Angel Gabriel (2: 97), for their claim that Ezra/'Uzair was God's son (9:30); their belief in the revelations made to them, but their denial of God's other revelations or all revelations (2: 91; 69:91).¹²⁾ They claimed that fire would touch them for only a limited number of days (2:80); and made blasphemous statements about Mary, the mother of Jesus, and also rejected other prophets, especially Jesus (Q:4:156).

V. The Covenant of Madinah and Subsequent History

Upon arrival in Madinah in 622 C.E, the Prophet signed the Covenant of Madinah with the Jews, Immigrants and Helpers, which laid down the basis of the nascent Islamic polity. This document protected the religion, culture, socio- economic livelihood and the properties of the Jews, provided they renounced two things: war against the new order, and isolationism. Their entry into a pact with the Muslims meant cessation of war with them by definition. In the event of an attack by outsiders against any of the signatories of the covenant, the whole of the new community were to rise like one body in its defence, for the peace of the believers and those who joined them and laboured with them was indivisible.¹³⁾ The Jews were allowed to set up their own law courts and to judge themselves by the standards of the Torah, for the Jews were followers of a revealed religion who had then also entered the Covenant of the Prophet.

The Jews of Madinah did not, however, abide by the terms of their commitments. From the beginning, some of their leaders began to plot against the nascent state even as they paid lip service to it. Barely two years had passed when, seizing the opportunity of a military relapse of the Muslims at the Battle of Uhud and other lesser encounters with the Makkans, they openly challenged the Muslims. With the bigger threat of the Makkans on his mind, the Prophet confronted the guilty clans or houses – not the Jews as a whole – and forced them to leave Madinah, while allowing them, in the meantime, to carry their wealth away with them. In the same year another Jewish clan was caught plotting to murder the Prophet. It was meted out the same judgment of banishment, however, this time without allowing them to carry their wealth with them - and a fresh appeal was made to the rest to honour their part of the Covenant. A year later in the Battle of the Ditch when Madinah nearly succumbed to the onslaught of a major alliance of the Arab tribes with the Qurayshites of Makkah, the Jews played a treacherous role, on which occasion they were charged with treason and breach of treaty. Many were executed in the process after an arbitrator whom they had accepted had pronounced judgment against them. The judgment had *ipso facto* nothing to do with Judaism, the religion. Others, Muslim and non-Muslim had been found guilty of similar crimes and received the same judgment.¹⁴⁾

The majority of world Jewry lived throughout the centuries within the Muslim world by choice. Nowhere has Judaism found a haven as sympathetic and protective as among the Muslims. For most of the Middle Ages, the Jews who lived in Christian Europe were a minority, and a relatively unimportant one at that. According to Bernard Lewis, “With few exceptions, whatever was creative and significant in Jewish life happened in Islamic lands. The Jewish communities of Europe formed a kind of cultural dependency on the Jews of the

far more advanced and sophisticated Islamic world, extending from Muslim Spain in the west to Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia in the east.”¹⁵⁾ Islam remained, in Ismail Faruqi’s phrase “the best friend Judaism has ever had.” It recognized Judaism as a religion *du jure* which no other religion or political system ever did. It not only tolerated the observance of the Torah but demanded it; and it placed its executive power at the disposal of the rabbinic court. Per contra, in the United States, supposed by most to be the ideal prototype of tolerance, any application of Jewish law where it differs from positive, secular, law would land the parties concerned in court as violators of American law. It is remarkable that Christian tolerance of the Jews came only in the age of rampant secularism when Christians had themselves surrendered to the secularist mandates of Enlightenment, whereas Islam’s tolerance of them came as Islam dominated the life of its adherents.¹⁶⁾ To quote Lewis again:

Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often made to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in re-conquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in pre-modern Europe.¹⁷⁾

The Muslim did not, in the meantime, give up his duty to call the Jews and others to Islam. But his call was to be conducted “with wisdom and elegant presentation,” (Q. 16:125). No one was to be coerced to renounce or change his religion and embrace Islam by force (Q:2:256). Any recourse to coercion in violation of this norm, or when confession to Islam is obtained under duress thus vitiates the confession in question and renders it null and void.

VI. Juridical Themes

Due to frequent Qur’anic references to the laws of the previous revelations, both generally and in more specific terms, the question arose as to whether the laws of Judaism and Christianity remained valid for Muslims. To put it differently, do the laws of previous revelations constitute a recognised source and part of the Shariah, side by side with such other sources as are known to the science of *usul al-fiqh* (sources of *fiqh*), such as general consensus (*ijma’*), analogy (*qiyas*), or the decision and fatwa of the Prophet’s Companions!¹⁸⁾

We have already examined the more general references the Qur’an has made to Torah and Bible as sources of guidance, and references also which instructed the Prophet Muhammad to adjudicate on the basis of those laws. Does it then mean that the laws of Torah and Bible constitute an integral part of the Shariah of Islam? A brief answer to this question is in the affirmative. The Shariah has retained and validated many of the previous laws while it has,

in the meantime abrogated or suspended others. For example, the law of retaliation (*qisas*) and some of the prescribed penalties (i.e., the *hudud*) that were prescribed in the Torah have also been prescribed in the Qur'an. The general rule to be stated here is, however, that the Shariah is self-contained for the Muslims; notwithstanding their validity in principle, the laws of the previous revelations are not directly applicable to them. Yet bearing in mind the manner and frequency in which the Qur'an refers to those laws, the issue requires further scrutiny, which is attempted as follows.

Three varieties of references to such previous laws can be ascertained in the Qur'an:

1. The Qur'an (or the *hadith* for that matter) may refer to a ruling of the previous revelation and make it simultaneously obligatory on the Muslims, in which case there remains no doubt that the ruling so upheld becomes an integral part of the Shariah of Islam. An example of this is the Qur'anic text on the duty of fasting during Ramadan: "O believers, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who came before you." (2:183) A similar example of this is found in the *hadith* with reference to sacrifice by slaughter of an animal on the occasion of the Muslim *'id al-adha*, or the festival of sacrifice, which marks one of the major events of the Muslim religious calendar. The believers are thus ordered in a *hadith* to: "give sacrifice for it is the tradition of your ancestor, Abraham, peace be upon him – *duhu fa'innaha sunnatu abikum Ibrahim 'alayh al-salam*."¹⁹⁾ The language of the text in both these examples leaves little doubt that fasting and sacrifice of *'id al-adha* are upheld and made obligatory on the Muslims.
2. The Qur'an or the *hadith* may refer to a ruling of Torah but at the same time abrogate and suspend it, in which case the ruling in question is abandoned and discontinued. An example of this occurs in the Qur'an (6:146), which refers to certain animals and animal parts that were prohibited for the Jews, but which are no longer so. Their prohibition was thus suspended and brought to an end, and were therefore made lawful for Muslims. An example of this is the *hadith* is where the Prophet declared: "Taking (war) booty has been made lawful to me, but it was not lawful to anyone before me."²⁰⁾
3. The Qur'an or the *hadith* may refer to a ruling of the Torah without providing further clarification as to its continued validity or otherwise. Unlike the preceding two situations, this manner of reference gives rise to different interpretations. For instance, the Qur'an provides in reference to certain aspects of the law of retaliation that were validated in the Torah, but does not specify whether the same must be observed by Muslims. Thus it is provided: "We ordained therein for them (in Torah for the Jews) life for life, eye for

eye, nose for nose, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal.” (5:48; see also 5:32 on another aspect of the law of just retaliation). Scholastic details and interpretations will not be recounted here, but only the prevailing view of the leading schools of law, which holds that these laws are also a part of the Shariah of Islam, as otherwise there will be little reason for the Qur’an to recount them in this way. The majority view on this also adds that the Shariah only abrogated the rulings of Torah that were objectionable to its own teachings. Since the Qur’an generally endorses the Torah and Bible, when there is a reference to their laws, which are then not specifically abrogated, they become an integral part of the Shariah.²¹⁾

Furthermore, Muslim are allowed under the rules of Shariah to marry Jewish or Christian women, and it is not necessary for those women to embrace Islam. This has been stipulated in a general and unqualified text (Q. 5:5), which means that any woman from the *ahl al-kitab*, be she a widow, a divorcee etc., may be lawfully married by a Muslim male. The woman so married may continue to live in accordance with the tenets of her own faith and practice it, and the Muslim husband may not obstruct her from doing so. The wife is entitled to the same rights in respect of dower, maintenance, and inheritance as a Muslim wife. It is reported that many of the Prophet’s Companions, including the fourth caliph ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan, Talhah b. ‘Ubaydullah, Hudhayfah al-Yamani, Mughirah b. Shu’bah and others had Jewish or Christian wives.

The reason as to why a Muslim woman may not *marry* a man of the *ahl al-kitab* is: a) that the husband in Islam is the head of the family unit and a non-Muslim husband is deemed to influence the choice of religion for the children; and b) while Islam recognises Judaism and Christianity as valid religions, the latter do not accord the same recognition to Islam.

On a similar note, the food of the *ahl al-kitab* and their slaughter has been made lawful to Muslims and vice versa (Q.5:5). Muslims may thus invite the *ahl al-kitab* and accept their invitation for food and also maintain amicable relations with them. Since the Qur’anic permission in respect of eating the food of the *ahl al-kitab* is once again unconditional, Muslims need not enquire as to the specifics of their slaughter, and whether or not they actually recited the name of God on it. There are some difference of opinion among the leading schools of Islamic law on this issue, which will not be recounted here, but only the prevailing position, which is in line with the unqualified permission that the Qur’an has granted over it.²²⁾

VII. Zionism, and Christian Zionism

As a concept, Zionism emerged in late 19th century among Jewish intellectuals out of the ferment of the nationalist and socialist ideas that swept through Europe at the time. The Zionist movement demanded the founding and development of a Jewish homeland (now Israel) in Palestine, then a part of the Ottoman Empire. The Zionist assertions essentially give Israel a free hand to violate the essence of justice in both the Torah and Bible, in its justification especially of Israel's demolition of homes, targeted assassinations, and continued transfer of Palestinians from their homeland.²³⁾ Zionism developed as a reaction to the oppressive methods used by Christian Europe to persecute the Jews. It was because of the anti-Semitism of the Christian states of Europe and events such as the Holocaust that the Zionist enterprise justified the oppression of the Palestinians. Thus according to David Ben Gorion, the first Prime Minister of Israel:

If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country. It is true God promised it to us, but how could that interest them? Our God is not theirs. There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing: we have come and we have stolen their country. Why would they accept that?²⁴⁾

Ever since its occupation of Palestine, the state of Israel has spearheaded political Zionism that brought it in direct violation of international law and numerous UN resolutions.²⁵⁾ In all of this Israel has been emboldened by the unflinching support of the US government, which has also influenced the UN in support of Israel. For instance, while the UN resolution 3379, passed in 1975, condemned Zionism "as a form of racism and racial discrimination," sixteen years later the US used its new found influence following the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union to coax the UNGA to rescind its earlier resolution. Only 25 member states of the UN, including Malaysia, voted to retain the equation between Zionism and Racism.

It is not surprising then that the UN Review Conference held from 20-24 April 2009 in Geneva to assess progress made since the 2001 World Conference of Durban against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance "adopted a protective attitude towards one of the most racist states on earth today. It was obvious long before the conference that the United States and the European Union would not allow any honest scrutiny of Israel's racist laws and policies vis-à-vis non-Jews."²⁶⁾

The late Professor Israel Isahak, one of Israel's outstanding human rights advocates

considered Israel a racist state in the full sense. For instance, Israel's 'Law of Return' which encourages Jews from any part of the world to settle in Israel and acquire citizenship is blatantly discriminatory when the Israeli state denies five million Palestinian refugees their right to return to their land, as provided for in international law. There are also policies on land and house ownership which are biased against Palestinians and other Arabs. Even in the use of water in the West Bank, Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Jews in Israel are allotted almost 12 times as much water per person as the Palestinians who also pay more for the precious commodity. There are roads which are for exclusive Israeli use just as the wall that separates Jewish settlements in the west Bank from the Palestinian population.²⁷⁾

It would be well to distinguish, perhaps, political Zionism linked to the state of Israel from Zionism as a cultural and spiritual movement concerned with the sufferings of the Jewish people in history. Indeed, Israeli racism and its apartheid in the contemporary period do not diminish the truism of Jewish sufferings or of the Holocaust as the culmination of centuries of Europe's racial discrimination against the Jewish people.²⁸⁾ What is lamentable, however, is that the descendants of the victims of racism in an earlier period have now become the perpetrators of the same abuses against their Palestinian neighbours.

Palestine had historically been inhabited by Arabs. In 1917, the Arabs of Palestine owned 97.5 per cent of the land, of which Israel now occupies over 80 per cent. Since then, Israel has continued its policy of expansion and illegal settlements on Palestinian territory. This has naturally shaken the conscience of many fair-minded intellectuals within and outside Israel. In February 2002, for instance, several thousand orthodox Jews gathered in front of the Israeli Consulate in Canada to denounce the existence of the state of Israel. They were organized by the Central Rabbinical Congress, who stressed that "the Jewish role ... is to humbly serve the Creator, remaining always patriotic and seeking peace with all men. Zionism, on the other hand seeks to exacerbate Jewish-Gentile animosity at every opportunity."²⁹⁾

The most important message that runs through "the entire Torah can be summarised in two statements: love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself."³⁰⁾ When this is compared with the Zionist injustices against their neighbours, the difference between the teachings of Torah and Zionism becomes strikingly clear. The Torah advocates compassion, justice and dignity (*kavod habriyot*) for all human beings. It also asserts that the whole of mankind "are members of a single extended family."³¹⁾ It is the same in Islam. Because of God's love of humankind, God "bestowed dignity on the children of Adam... and conferred upon them special favours." (17: 70) This divine favour is without qualification, inalienable and applies to the whole of mankind.³²⁾

In a poll conducted in 2003, 59% of fifteen European Union countries saw Israel as “the greatest threat to world peace.”³³⁾ The Pew Center commentary on the results of this poll acknowledged that “For Muslims, it has become an article of faith that the US unfairly sides with Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians: 99% of Jordanians, 96% of Palestinians, and 94% of Moroccans agree. And So do most Europeans. “Even in Israel, more respondents view US policy as unfair than those who say it is fair.”³⁴⁾ Yakov Rabkin has tersely observed that “Zionists have disdained the ‘old Jew’ whom the tradition of Judaism expects to be bashful, compassionate and charitable.”³⁵⁾

Various Jewish organizations were set up to fight Zionism, such as *Agudath Israel* (Union of Israel) established in 1912 to represent Jews around the world. Under its auspices, Jews who were living in Palestine obtained permission from Britain to declare in writing that they did not wish to be represented by the Zionists. Rabbi Amran Blau, a critic of Zionism and someone who had never left Palestine, stressed that the Jews and Arabs lived in harmony in the Holy-Land until the advent of political Zionism.³⁶⁾

The myth that Israeli-Palestinian conflict is due to “a mindless Arab hatred of the Jews” has been repudiated by works mostly carried out by Israeli academics and journalists. They conclude that the conflict is not rooted in “mindless Arab anti-Semitism but in Zionism’s insistence that a Jewish state must be created in Palestine, despite the fact that over 1,300 years it has been overwhelmingly inhabited by Arabs.”³⁷⁾

The emergence of Christian Zionism in Britain and the US in late 20th century further exacerbated the problem of invasive Zionism. Christian Zionism is a theo-political movement primarily within Protestant Christian fundamentalism that promotes the political platform of Jewish Zionism. Christian Zionists believe that the state of Israel is the fulfillment of divine promise God made to Abraham in the Bible pertaining to the Jewish people. Based on their interpretation of Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” Christian Zionists support the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine, not only religiously but also through provision of political and economic assistance.³⁸⁾ Early Christian Zionists in England and the US anticipated, or intentionally advocated a political programme of Jewish Zionists in their quest for political sovereignty, and military conquest of Palestine. It is no accident then that Christian Zionists, in concert with the Likud Party in Israel, have opposed the previous two peace proposals (the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap); they also supported the Iraq war and accelerated militarization of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From his Jerusalem office, Bishop Munib Younan, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church wrote that “Christian Zionism is the enemy of peace in the Middle East.”³⁹⁾

Christian Zionists may identify themselves as Evangelical Christians, but not all Evangelical Christians agree with their uncritical support of Israel. In July 2002, for instance, about 60 prominent evangelical theologians wrote to the President in support of the two states solution. They asked the President vigorously to oppose injustice, including their continued unlawful and degrading Israeli settlement movement, which they characterized as “the theft of Palestinian land.” They also wrote that the great Hebrew prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, declared in the Old Testament that ‘God calls upon all nations and all people to do justice one to another, and to protect the oppressed, the alien, the fatherless and the widow.’⁴⁰⁾

Conclusion

There are obvious departures in political Zionism and the behaviour of the state of Israel from many of the central teachings of Torah on justice, fair dealing, and dignified treatment for all human beings, especially one’s neighbours, which, given a different set of dynamics and a desire for change could well provide the basis of reflection and possible return to normalisation of Israel’s behaviour and relations with its Arab neighbours. Serious questions of essential justice, destruction of homes, crass discrimination and loss of innocent life hardly provide the prospects of a desirable future for the people of Israel. There is a groundswell of opinion among the fair-minded intellectuals and thought leaders within and outside Israel over its blatant violations of essential justice and basic human rights of Palestinians that can hardly be ignored. Furthermore, The fact that the Jews lived amicably among Muslims throughout the longer stretch of history is a manifestation of the receptivity within Islam that lends support to the prospects of a peacelike pattern of future relations between them. These essential questions of conscience present everyone, including the US and British government leaders, Christian Zionists, and the advocates of political Zionis in Israel with the same moral and legal dilemmas that call for a decisive change of direction.

A prominent Jewish academic, Daniel Barenboim, recipient of the Wolf Prize that honoured outstanding individuals that worked “in the interest of mankind and friendly relations among nations” said in his acceptance speech in May 2004 that the state of Israil should be founded on the principles of freedom, justice and peace, guided by the visions of the prophets of Israel. Barenboim added:

Is there any sense in the independence of one at the expense of the fundamental rights of the other? Can the Jewish people whose history is a record of suffering and relentless persecution allow themselves to be indifferent to the rights and suffering of a neighbouring people.⁴¹⁾

President Obama's recent overtures to turn a new page in the US-Muslim world relations, as articulated in his Cairo speech of 4 June 2009 has generated a degree of optimism for a new beginning that could hopefully usher a more constructive pattern of these relations. Initial responses to Obama's initiatives also encourage the prospects of peace in the Middle East and an end to the US belligerent policies of the Bush era. An earnest engagement in the substance of these overtures has yet to be seen, of course, and it seems premature to draw conclusions, but there is hope and a welcome development to justify a modicum of optimism for the future of peace in the Middle East.

NOTES

- 1) Equivalent terms to *ahl al-kitab* that occur in the Qur'an include: *alladhina utu'l-kitaba, ataynahum al-kitaba, utu nasiban min al-kitab, alladhina yaqra'un al-kitab, wa man 'indahu 'ilm al-kitab, and ahl al-dhikr*. In a literal sense, one might say that Muslims are also *ahl al-kitab*, evidenced by the fact that the Qur'an in numerous places refers to itself as *Kitab*, and its more common name, that is, *Qur'an* (lit. a recitation, or a reader) also integrates the essence of *Kitab* within its meaning. *Ahl al-kitab*, in other words, signifies a term of respect, and not the opposite of that.
- 2) These include *hudan, alladhina hadu, and banu Israil*. By contrast the term *nasara* which occurs exclusively in reference to Christians occurs 14 times in the Qur'an mostly in Madinan *surahs*; *hawwariyyun* five times, and *ahl-al-injil* only once.
- 3) Cf., Ismail Albayrak, "The People of in the Qur'an," *Islamic Studies* 47:3(2008), 302.
- 4) Hadith recorded in Malik b. Anas, *al-Muwatta*, Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari, 1992:1:244.
- 5) Whether by virtue of this clause (i.e 25) the Covenant of Madinah established a political community, as opposed to a religious community is, perhaps, moot and open to interpretation.
- 6) Cf., Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam's Attitude Toward Other Religions in History," in ed. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008, 123-24.
- 7) Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Usul al-Fiqh*, Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1377/1958, 241.
- 8) The pagans of Arabia used to part their hair when they combed, whereas the Jews did not, and the Muslims followed the latter. Later when relations between the Jews and Muslims took a negative turn, the Muslims differentiated themselves in another respect: while the Jews grew their moustache and shaved their beard, the Muslims did the opposite by shaving their moustache and keeping their beards.
- 9) Muhammad b Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari, kitab al-siyam, bab siyam yawm 'ashura*.
- 10) However, the Prophet later instructed the Muslims to fast on the 9th and tenth of Muharram to differentiate themselves from the Jews.
- 11) See for details Ismail Raji al Faruqi, *Islam and the Problem of Israel*, Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2003 (reprint of 1980 ed.), 78.
- 12) Faruqi, *Islam and the Problem of Israel*, 79-80; Ismail Albayrak, "The People of the Book," *Islamic Studies*, 311.

- 13) Cf., Faruqi, *Islam and the Problem*, 83.
- 14) Id., 86-87.
- 15) Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, The Routledge Library Edition, vol.25, London and New York, 2008, 67.
- 16) Faruqi, *Islam and the Problem*, 90-91.
- 17) Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 8.
- 18) See for details Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: the Islamic Texts Society, 2003, chapter on "Revealed Laws Preceding the Shariah of Islam," 306-313.
- 19) Muhammad b 'Abd Allah al-Khatib al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, ed. Muhammad al-Albani, 3vols, 2nd ed. ed. Muhammad al-Albani, 3vols, 2nd ed. Ut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1399/1979, I, 466, *hadith* no. 1476.
- 20) Muslim b Hajjaj al-Nishapuri, *Mukhtasar Sahih Muslim*, ed., Muhammad al-Albani, 4th ed., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1402/1982, *hadith* no. 1137.
- 21) Cf. Abu Zahrah, *Usul*, 242.
- 22) See for details of the scholastic rulings, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Halal Industry within the Islamic Principles: a Shariah Perspective on Halal and Haram," *The Halal Journal* (Kuala Lumpur), serialised article in 3 issues August to December 2008; see also Khurshid A. Nadim, "Islam and Muslim non-Muslim Relations," in ed. Suheyl Umar, *The Religious Other*, 414f.
- 23) Cf. Donald Wagner, "Christian Zionism in US Middle East Policy," in ed. Aftab Malik, *With God on Our Side*, 240 - as in the following note.
- 24) Quoted in ed. Aftab Ahmad Malik, *With God on Our Side: Politics and Theology of the War on Terrorism*, Bristol, U.K: Amal Press, 2005, 146.
- 25) See a 4-page list of the UN resolutions and vetoes in condemnation of Israel's violations Aftab Malik, *With God on Our Side*, Appendix II, 317-320.
- 26) Chandra Muzaffar – as in the following note at p. 7.
- 27) See for details, Chandra Muzaffar, "Israel, Racism and Zionism," *Just Commentary*, vol.9, No.5(May 2009), 7.
- 28) Cf. Chandra Muzaffar, "Israel, Racism and Zionism," p. 8.
- 29) Aftab Malik, "The Betrayal of Tradition," in Aftab Malik ed., *With God on Our Side*, 140.
- 30) Hamza Yusuf, "Religion, Violence and the Modern World," *Seasons*, Hayward, California, vol.1, No.2, 2003-2004, p.5.
- 31) Rabbi Jonathan Sacs, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilisations*, London: Continuum, 2003, esp. chapter six quoted in Aftab Malik, *With Go on Our Side*, 151.
- 32) See for details Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: an Islamic Perspective*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2002.
- 33) Quoted in Aftab Malik, *With God on Our Side*, 148.
- 34) Id., 161.
- 35) Quoted in id., 148.
- 36) See the following websites that seeks to distinguish Judaism from Zionism: <http://www.jewsnotzionists.org/index.htm>; <http://www.nkusa.org/index.cfm>; <http://www.jewsagainstzionis.com>.

- 37) Jerome Salter, "What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.116, No.2 Summer 2001, 172-173.
- 38) Id., 224.
- 39) Quoted in Corrine Whitlatch, "The Christian Zionist Distortion," in ed. Aftab Malik, *With God on Our Side*, 261.
- 40) Quoted in Corinne Whitelatch, "The Christian Zionist Distortion," in ed. Aftab Malik, *With God on Our Side*, 260-261.
- 41) Daniel Barenheim "On Israel," <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?1=20040607&s=baronboim>