

Exclusive and Inclusive Islam in the Qur'an: Implications for Muslim-Jewish Relations¹⁾

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Introduction

Among non-Muslims both in the West and in the East Islam is widely perceived today as an exceptionally intolerant religion. It is viewed as intolerant of other religions, cultures, ways of life, and points of view. It is also viewed as critical of modern civilization. Muslims are generally seen as inclined to violence. "Islam has bloody borders!" claimed the late Samuel Huntington many years ago in his controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.³⁾ What he has sought to capture in these four words is the widespread belief in the West that Islam and Muslims somehow cannot coexist peacefully with other people of different beliefs and ways of life. Wherever Muslims seek to organize themselves as a distinct religious community alongside non-Muslim communities they are sure, as the claim goes, to be drawn into bloody conflicts with their non-Muslim fellow citizens. It is further claimed that the source of **Islam's intolerance of the other is ultimately traceable to its holy book, the Qur'an.**

In the post-September 11 world there have been in fact many voices claiming that both the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, generally considered as the two most fundamental sources of influence on Muslim beliefs and behaviour, are the real explanatory factors of Muslim religious violence and Islam's intolerance of the other. These voices have been heard from the pulpits of certain churches and synagogues and in the writings of some media columnists. Islam's intolerance of the other is often explained as largely emanating from its strict exclusivist religious worldview. According to this explanation, Islam claims to be the only valid religion. Being so, it wants to impose its beliefs and way of life on all non-Muslims. It is this aggressive attempt to impose its religious points of view and its life styles on others that has landed Muslims in troubled relationships with non-Muslims. To those who have a sound understanding of Islam, the Qur'an, and the life and thought of its Prophet – both Muslims and non-Muslims – all these negative perceptions of the religion are not only dismissible as erroneous but may also be viewed as totally unhelpful in promoting inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue and understanding, the very consideration that has led to the above kind of criticism of Islam in the first place. On both accounts, therefore, there is a necessity to explain the position of Islam in relation to the issue of exclusivity and inclusivity

in religious beliefs and practices.

The importance of Judaism as Islam's 'religious other'

The idea of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious terms pertains very much to the issue of a religion's attitude toward the other. From Islam's own theological point of view, there is no 'religious other' that can be considered as more important than Judaism and Christianity. This is because these are Islam's sister religions within the monotheistic Abrahamic family.⁴⁾ Through its Prophet Muhammad, a descendent of Abraham through the family lineage of his son Ishmael, Islam claims a common spiritual ancestry with Judaism and Christianity.⁵⁾ Islam also claims to be a reassertion of absolute monotheism in the tradition of Abraham. "Abraham was indeed a model,"⁶⁾ says the Qur'an. He was "devoutly obedient to God, true in faith (*hanif*), and he joined not gods with God." Two verses after this verse, the Qur'an urged the Prophet and his followers to "follow the ways of Abraham, the true in faith, and he joined not gods with God."⁷⁾

The importance of Judaism and Christianity as Islam's religious other is indeed well illustrated in the Qur'an. Many of its pages are devoted to the religious history of the Jewish *ummah* (people) and its prophets and to Jesus Christ and Christianity. Historically as well, Islam's most fateful encounters with its religious other were perhaps with Judaism and Christianity, although as the world's youngest revealed religion and also as its most universal, it was Islam's destiny to be religiously and civilizationally engaged with practically living religion in the world.

In this essay, I will try to address the position of Islam pertaining to the issue of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious beliefs and practices with specific reference to Judaism and the Jewish *ummah*. The importance of this issue for the contemporary world cannot be overemphasized. Due to numerous reasons mostly political rather than religious, particularly the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Muslim-Jewish relations are at their worst level and most critical juncture during the entire history of their encounters and interactions. While it is true that religion may not be the main factor contributing to the growing enmity between Jews and Muslims in modern times, their largely erroneous religious perception of the other nonetheless contributes to the complexity of the problem in their worsening relationships. In light of these deplorable circumstances, any initiative to bring about a better understanding between Judaism and Islam is most laudable. It could well happen that a better understanding between the two religions would have the effect of lessening the tension and animosity between their respective followers in the other areas of conflict, particularly the outstanding Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Exclusivity and inclusivity in religion: some theoretical reflections

The idea of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious beliefs and practices has been understood in various different ways. The most popular understanding of the idea pertains to the issue of the possibility of post-humus spiritual salvation outside one's own faith system. The popular Muslim way of posing the issue is to ask the question whether or not non-Muslims can enter heaven in their life after death. In this context, it is said that if one agrees with such a possibility then he or she is considered as adopting an inclusive religious belief. If on the other hand one denies such a possibility, then one's religious belief is said to be exclusive. Exclusivity and inclusivity in the sense just defined are not unique to any particular religion. In any religion we may observe the presence of exclusivists among many of its followers. Likewise, in every religion are to be found believers who are inclined to adopting inclusivity.

For the exclusivists their fear of inclusivism is as though they are in danger of losing their own faith if they were to admit the possibility of spiritual salvation outside their religion. Upon casual observation of the religious scene it appears to be too obvious that in any religion believers in exclusivity far outnumber believers in inclusivity. The issue before us is how we can explain this phenomenon of the presence of both types of believers within the same religion. Of special interest to us in this discussion is the answer to the question of whether the existence of both types of believers has something to do with factors external to the religion such as theological influences from another religion, or it is a consequence of the religion's intrinsic teachings. In the latter case we need to see which group of believers has a better claim of having their theological position well grounded in the teachings of the religion.

In exploring the possible link between spiritual exclusivity and inclusivity within a particular religion and its inherent teachings we are therefore concerned with the phenomenon not just as an issue of choice and preferences in beliefs that are subjectively personal in nature but also as a collective expression of a common mindset shared by a particular human group. In other words, we are looking at religious exclusivity and inclusivity within a religion as the product of shared spiritual perspectives that are rooted in the sacred scripture of the religion in question. In this essay I will be addressing the issue from the perspectives of the Qur'an. This way of looking at the typology of religious beliefs may be said to constitute another understanding of the idea of exclusivity and inclusivity in the religious sense.

Yet another important understanding of the idea of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious beliefs and practices, but which is still not well understood by many people, pertains not to salvation in post-humus life but to societal salvation here and now in this earthly life. In this context, what we are having is a broadening of the idea of salvation in relation to the issue of inclusivity and exclusivity. Salvation is usually understood to refer to the post-humus human

state. But here the word 'salvation' is used to refer to terrestrial human life as well. As in my earlier reference to post-humus salvation, likewise in referring to salvation in present human life I am not limiting my consideration of the idea to the domain of personal beliefs and views. I am also interested in the collective human response to the idea of 'terrestrial' and 'societal' salvation⁸⁾ especially as a prelude or prerequisite to post-humus salvation. The intention here is again to show that even in extending the idea of salvation to terrestrial human life at both personal and collective or group levels it is still possible to speak of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious terms.

It is Islam that has inspired my present position on salvation. As I understand it, Islam as a religion is very much interested in inviting human beings to both the ideas of terrestrial salvation and post-humus salvation. As I shall explain shortly, Islam has its own distinctive ways of interconnecting the two types or phases of salvation to the point of being able to offer humanity in its current last cycle of existence a comprehensive and holistic view of salvation within a spiritual framework. Islam argues for the idea of unity of life in which there is spiritual continuity between terrestrial human life and post-humus life and in which spiritual laws govern their causal relations without, however, implying in any way an undermining of the notion of discretionary divine mercy as the ultimate saviour of human souls as insisted by the Qur'an.

In the context of terrestrial salvation itself, Islam seeks to provide a harmonious balance between the pursuit of individual life and that of community life. Describing itself in the Qur'an as the community of the middle path (*ummatan wasatan*),⁹⁾ Islam offers a balance between two extremes as so clearly illustrated in its individual and communal rites and institutions embodied in its revealed law (*shari'ah*). One extreme goes for the pursuit of communitarianism without paying due heed to the identity and the legitimate rights and interests of the individual. This particular societal tendency has the impact of dissolving individuality in the sea of communal life. Muslims have generally criticized the ideology of communism as of being such an extreme. The other extreme is to go for individualism that negates the legitimate interests and healthy aspirations of community life. In the name of individual freedom and individual rights the rights of the community are often sacrificed or trampled upon. Many Muslims consider capitalism as embodying such a kind of extreme tendency.

Islam in its teachings seeks to inculcate the spirit of moderation (*wasatiyyah*)¹⁰⁾ in its way of life. In its view, both individual terrestrial salvation and societal salvation are best guaranteed through the pursuit of moderation in life styles. It is also through the pursuit of moderation that both the individual and the community can find the necessary societal space and the opportunities to develop their respective unique identities. As to what constitutes moderation in the Qur'anic sense this may be largely accessed from the traditional Islamic treasury of practical wisdom (*al-hikmah al-'amaliyyah*)¹¹⁾ as contained in the teachings of the

Shari'ah.

Islam's insistence on the unity of terrestrial salvation and post-humus salvation puts it at odds with the modern secular notion of societal salvation. Insofar as the issue of salvation is concerned, Islam and modern western secularism have moved in opposite directions. As if in anticipation of the growing importance of societal life in modern human history as the key shaping factor of the success and the failure of each human individual and thus as a key determinant of his or her moral worth as a citizen,¹²⁾ Islam right from the beginning of its history took the very significant step of spiritualizing terrestrial life with the view of bridging terrestrial salvation with post-humus salvation. This spiritual bridging has the objective of furnishing society with a broader context for estimating and judging the real worth of the human individual that would transcend the purely societal considerations. The Qur'anic message "verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you"¹³⁾ is to remind humankind of their real need to look at the meaning of human worth on the basis of spiritual and moral considerations.

With these "giant" steps it has taken toward the unification of human life and thought Islam as the religion of unity (*al-tawhid*) in its newest form succeeded to a large extent in erasing the distinction between the religious and the secular, between the sacred and the profane, and between the spiritual and the temporal in Muslim private and public life. Modern western secularism, on the other hand, took the step of reducing the meaning of human life to the earthly domain alone and of emptying it of its spiritual content. All the ideals of human perfection and human happiness which religion in general and Islam in particular associate with the post-humus life became transferred at the hands of secularism to terrestrial life in the now familiar form of societal quest for progress and peace. A contest for influence between the two notions of societal salvation, one religious and the other secular thus became inevitable.

The foregoing discussion brought to the fore the issue of how exclusivity and inclusivity need to be understood in relation to societal salvation. It seems that whether in the Islamic or in the secular notion of societal salvation the issue of exclusivity and inclusivity raises necessarily the questions of otherness and identity and of the kinds of responses deemed appropriate to deal with the problem at hand. These are precisely the issues pertaining to societal salvation which the award-winning Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf, dealt with in his book *Exclusion and Embrace*.¹⁴⁾ The book's immediate background is the ethnic wars in the Balkans following the disintegration of Communist-ruled Yugoslavia. Volf is interested in formulating a theological response to the newly emerging and also deeply disturbing cultural phenomenon of ethnic identity affirmation on the basis of hatred of the other.

He contends that exclusion of the other has taken a dangerously new turn in the history of modern nation-states to the point of becoming the "primary sin" of our times. He calls 'embrace' his theological response to the problem of exclusion. His idea of embrace is of

much relevance to our discussion of societal salvation and the closely related issue of exclusivity and inclusivity. Volf's analytical study of exclusion and inclusion as a modern socio-cultural phenomenon may be grounded in a particular geo-cultural region, that is, the politically volatile Balkans, and his response inspired by his own Christian theological tradition. But there are universal moral lessons to be learnt from his case study.

Islam and societal salvation

I understand 'societal salvation' to mean a society's state of wellness that is deemed necessary and sufficient to serve as a socio-cultural or civilizational (*hadari*) context for the ordinary human being or the average citizen of the state to attain his or her post-humus salvation. In other words, I am asserting the view that there exists a close relationship in one form or another between post-humus salvation and societal salvation in terrestrial human life. The close relationship between the two types of salvation is particularly highly visible in Islam. In the Islamic context, this close relationship has been described in various ways. The Qur'an and prophetic hadiths use as many metaphors or parables as there are occupations or professions of man earning a living to illustrate this close causal relationship. There are metaphors from agriculture, man's perennial occupation. For instance, there is in the Qur'an the metaphor of a high and fertile garden.¹⁵⁾ "Those who spend their earnings to please God and to strengthen their souls" are likened to such a garden: "heavy rain falls on it but makes it yield a double increase of harvest, and if it does not receive heavy rain light moisture suffices it. Allah sees well whatever you do."

There is the metaphor of a grain of corn. Likened to it are those who spend their incomes in the way of God: "it grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whoever He pleases. And God cares for all and He knows all things."¹⁶⁾ Another metaphor is the goodly tree (*shajarat tayyibah*), which is described in the Qur'an as one "whose root is firmly fixed and its branches (reach) to the heavens; it brings forth its fruit at all times by the leave of its Lord."¹⁷⁾ Likened to it is the goodly Word (*kalimat tayyibah*). The goodly Word may be interpreted not only as specifically referring to the divine Word or message as contained, for instance, in the Qur'an but also in the general sense as a word of truth and a word of goodness or kindness which religion holds dearly. Yet another parable in the Qur'an is the seed sown in the ground. Those who "bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer) seeking grace from God and His good pleasure" are likened to "a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick and stands on its own stem (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight."¹⁸⁾ This metaphor, as the Qur'an itself acknowledges, is also to be found in the Gospel.¹⁹⁾

In one of the prophetic hadiths there is the metaphor of earthly life as an agricultural land to be tilled by man only to be rewarded with an unimaginable successful harvest in the

next post-humus life. Significantly, the Qur'anic word *aflaha* which conveys the meanings of to prosper, win through, be victorious, succeed, and achieve salvation from sorrow and evil and which the holy book uses to describe the success accomplished by the believers is etymologically related to the word *falah* for agriculture. By 'planting' meritorious works in this life in the Name of God the believers will reap the sweet fruits of their labour in the next life. According to the Qur'an, the believers will lead a good and successful life in this world if they follow divine guidance, and with the spiritual and moral success in this world, they will enjoy an even better and more successful life after death. Their success in post-humus life to which the Qur'an refers as the supreme achievement and by the Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi as the supreme happiness, is best symbolized by their inheritance of the eternal paradise. Says the Qur'an:

The believers must win through (*aflaha*)— those who humble themselves in their prayers; who avoid vain talk; who are active in deeds of charity; who abstain from sex except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess, for (in their case) they are free from blame: but those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors; those who faithfully observe their trusts and covenants; and who (strictly) guard their prayers. These will be the heirs who will inherit Paradise: they will dwell therein.²⁰⁾

The Qur'an's parables and metaphors of the two related human successes — success in this world and the next — are also drawn from the human world of economic, business and trade activities. Righteous acts (*al-'amal al-salih*) performed in this world are regarded by the Qur'an as a form of spiritual investment which will yield manifold rewards in the post-humus life. But regardless of the way in which it has been described the principal idea sought to be emphasized is one and the same, namely, individual salvation through societal salvation is the main determining factor of post-humus salvation. Islam is emphasizing here the teaching that as a religion it is offering every individual man or woman the possibility of post-humus salvation through an active and meaningful participation in societal salvation. The issue that interests us here is to what extent Islam is prepared to provide space and opportunities for others outside the Islamic faith system to have an active and meaningful participation in societal salvation.

The attainment of societal salvation is a collective human endeavour. But an individual person's contribution to this salvation has its own intrinsic value in the divine economy or spiritual scheme of things. Somehow, thanks to the spiritual scheme of things provided by religion, what appear outwardly in a person's contribution as material goods and services become transformable into spiritual goods that help to make post-humus salvation possible. Islam's chief instrument for the realization of societal salvation is the twin ideas of the *ummah*

(“community”) and the *shari’ah* (“divine law”). Like all twins the ideas of *ummah* and *shari’ah* are inextricably linked to each other. In the quranic view the two ideas are mutually inclusive. Each stands in need of the other. I have maintained elsewhere that “one of the core ideas in the Quranic conception of the *ummah* is that of social organization grounded on mutual interdependence and in conformity with the divine laws meant for that particular community.”²¹⁾

The quranic *ummah* is in need of a *shari’ah* without which it would be a community without an identity. That the *shari’ah* is a defining element in the identity of the *ummah* is quite clear from the following verse in the Qur’an: “...To each (*ummah*) among you We have prescribed a law (*shir’ah*) and an open spiritual way (*minhaj*).”²² Conversely, a shari’ah is in need of an ummah that would serve as a human instrument for the practical realization of its goals in human society. Without an ummah playing such a role, a shari’ah would become reduced to nothing more than an ethical legal document devoid of any practical worth to contemporary human needs. Indeed, a divine law without a human community who believes in it and practices it is like a dead or obsolete law. From the point of view of the believers, however, the intrinsic relationship between a shari’ah and the ummah destined to receive it is much more profound than what we have tried to express so far given the fact that the ultimate origin of the shari’ah is divine.

Islam’s spirit of inclusiveness in societal salvation: Judaism as the religious other

In Judaism, at least as the Qur’an sees it, the divinely revealed law or shari’ah given to the Jewish people, or a series of them throughout their religious history, is inextricably linked to the identity of the Jewish ummah viewed as God’s chosen people. We know very well that the idea of God’s chosen people has raised contentious issues between Jews and Muslims. And of course the idea of a chosen people has immediate implications for our discussion of exclusivity and inclusivity in religious beliefs and practices. We may ask, for example, is the quranic position on the religious laws of the various religious communities of the world exclusive or inclusive in nature? this question we may well respond by referring to the specific case of the Jewish ummah and their shari’ah. In principle, I think it is quite clear on the basis of the quranic verse earlier cited that the Qur’an’s position on the shari’ah is inclusive. God has given a shari’ah to every community together with a set of spiritual beliefs. This means that there have been many divinely revealed shari’ah’s in human history. The Qur’an is thus presenting here an inclusive view of the shari’ah. It universalizes the phenomenon of divine revelation of which shari’ah forms a major component. In its view, no people or ummah has been deprived of the privilege of receiving a shari’ah from God. This view seems to negate the notion of God’s chosen people.

The Qur`an's inclusive view of the shari`ah is an important component of what may be considered as inclusive Islam. This view finds support in other verses of the Qur`an. For example, the Qur`an says: "The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Each one believes in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers."²³⁾ This is one of the verses, not to mention the further support extended by the prophetic hadiths, that serve as a basis for the formulation of the Islamic creed as constituted by the six fundamental articles of faith (*arkan al-iman*). We may say that the Islamic inclusive idea of the shari`ah is also a corollary of its inclusive beliefs in sacred scriptures and prophets and messengers. This is so because, in the quranic perspective, all the prophets and messengers of God, from Adam until Muhammad, respectively the first and the last of them, have received revelations, the two most important components of which are *shari`ah* and a belief system.

Despite the too clear an inclusive position the Qur`an has taken on *shari`ah* pluralism, a good number of Muslims today tend to take an exclusive view of it. The favourite argument this group uses to justify this exclusive view is abrogation (*nasakh*). According to this line of thinking, the coming of Muhammad as the last prophet and of Islam as the last revealed religion abrogates or nullifies all previous revelations and therefore all previous *shari`ahs*. But this way of justifying abrogation has been shown by many eminent Muslim scholars to be weak and even problematic. It is a weak position because there are many verses in the Qur`an pointing to the contrary. For example, the following verse clearly supports the possibility of salvation outside the Islamic faith: "Verily those who believe [i.e. the Muslims] and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve."²⁴⁾ The Jews are mentioned in this verse as one of the religious groups who are offered the possibility of salvation as long as they believe in God and life after death and perform righteous acts. Inclusive Islam appeals to this kind of verses in support of its theological position.

Muslims who are pro-exclusive Islam reject this by arguing that it is the Qur`an itself which supports their view. They are of course referring to the abrogation of one verse by another as is truly mentioned in the Qur`an. But they understand abrogation in the sense of nullification or rendering invalid. Such an understanding of abrogation is problematic, not least to Islamic theology itself. To say that a part of the Qur`an is no longer valid, no matter how small that part is, is to invite a host of theological and even logical problems that this group does not seem to appreciate. Inclusive Islam which is based on an alternative theory of abrogation that helps it to keep intact verse 2:62 and the like in terms of their truth-claims validity is able to offer a more coherent picture of the unity of the Qur`an.

Proponents of exclusive Islam are also fond of justifying their theological position by appealing to the following verse in the Qur`an: "Truly the religion (*al-din*) with God is Islam. Those who were given the scripture (i.e. Jews and Christians) did not differ except, out of

mutual jealousy, after knowledge had come to them.”²⁵⁾ They argue that this verse clearly shows God only accepts Islam as the true religion. But believers in inclusive Islam maintain that such a view is based on a misunderstanding of the word Islam in the verse. The word ‘Islam’ there simply means the religion of submission to God. There are many ways and forms of submission to God. In this sense it may be said that there are many Islams. The religion of every prophet and messenger of God is Islam understood as a true way of submission to him. It is in this sense that we understand the Qur`an’s reference to Abraham as a Muslim.

There is both one Islam and many Islams. Each Islam, that is, the Islam of each prophet (numbering 124,000 according to a prophetic hadith) is comprised essentially of a *shari`ah* and a *minhaj*, a spiritual belief system the core of which is *al-tawhid*, meaning divine unity. But there have been many Islams precisely because the *shari`ahs* vary from prophet to prophet in accordance with the changing needs of both physical and cultural space and time. Also, the divine message of *al-tawhid* varies from prophet to prophet in its theological and linguistic expressions. All these factors explain for the diversity in religions when even all these religions or Islams come from the same God.

The Qur`an claims that it is God Himself who gave the name ‘Islam’ to the religion revealed to Muhammad. This appears to be the Qur`an’s way of presenting the Islam of Muhammad as an inclusive religion in the most universal sense of it. The way adopted is to identify the particular religion revealed to Muhammad with the generic name of the religion of true submission to God, which in Arabic is ‘Islam.’

The verse “verily the religion with God is Islam” is cited during the sermon in every Friday congregational prayer in mosques throughout the world. But members of the congregation who listen to the verse understand it differently. Some understand it in the inclusive sense of Islam I have just explained. Others understand it in an exclusive sense. The two understandings of Islam coexist in the mosque and in the community and society outside with all the implications these have not only for intra-Islamic relations but also for interfaith and inter-religious relations in general.

NOTES

- 1) This essay is based on a paper which I presented at a workshop dialogue between Judaism and Islam held at Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan on 2-4 July 2009. The event was organized by the University’s Center for the Study of Monotheistic Religions (CISMOR).
- 2) The author is concurrently Deputy CEO, International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS), Malaysia, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Science, Department of Science & Technology Studies, University of Malaya, and Senior Research Fellow, Center of Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions, Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan
- 3) The late Samuel Huntington first coined the much severely criticized phrase *Islam has bloody borders* in his article “The Clash of Civilizations?” published in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), which he later developed into the book presently quoted. He gave to one section of the book

the heading "Incidence: Islam's Bloody Borders." See *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 254-258. Huntington replied to critics of his claim by saying that "quantitative evidence from every disinterested source conclusively demonstrates its validity."

- 4) Western Jews and Christians are divided in their acceptance of Islam as one of the three members of the Abrahamic faiths. A group of them is active today in the United States in mounting an opposition against groups claiming Islam as an Abrahamic religion. But for Muslims in particular, both divine revelation and history lend strong support to the claim. As argued by Martin Lings, the well-known English Sufi and scholar of Islam, even the Book of Genesis gives support to the Quran's claim (2:124-29; 36:6) that God has chosen Muhammad as a prophet and blessed his spiritual community (*ummah*) in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. The divine promise was in response to Abraham's prayer for his elder son, Ishmael and his progeny. Lings refers to the following prayer of Abraham in the Book of Genesis: "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" And God said to him: "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold, I have blessed him....and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." (17:20-1) Commenting on these verses, Lings remarks: "Not one but two great nations were to look back to Abraham as their father – two great nations, that is, two guided powers, two instruments to work the Will of Heaven, for God does not promise as a blessing that which is profane, nor is there any greatness before God except greatness in the Spirit. Abraham was thus the fountain-head of two spiritual streams..." See Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 1
- 5) The Book of Genesis too has references to Ishmael and his mother Hagar, Abraham's second wife, the first being Sarah, the mother of Isaac. See Genesis, 15:5; 16:10-11; 17:20-1; 21-17-20. There is also an indirect praise of Ishmael and his mother in the Psalm, 84:5-6: "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts." "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well" Baca is the old name of Mecca and mentioned in the Qur'an. As for the well it refers to the well-known Zamzam in Mecca.
- 6) *The Qur'an*, 16:120
- 7) *The Qur'an*, 16:123
- 8) I have offered some of my thoughts on the idea of societal salvation in one of my earlier writings on dialogue. See Osman Bakar, "Challenges to dialogues of civilizations and ways of overcoming them," Thomas W. Simon and Azizan Baharuddin, eds., *Dialogue of Civilisations and the Construction of Peace* (Kuala Lumpur, Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, 2008), pp.23-39.
- 9) Addressing the first Muslims, the Qur'an says: "Thus we have made of you an *ummah* justly balanced (*ummatan wasatan*) that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves." (2:143)
- 10) It was this spirit of moderation which moulded the first generation of Prophet Muhammad's followers into a community of the middle path. For a good introductory discussion of the Qur'anic doctrine of *wasatiyyah* or moderation, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "The middle

grounds of Islamic civilization: the Qur'anic principle of wasatiyyah," *IAIS Journal of Civilisation Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 7-41.

- 11) The Qur'an has many names, one of which is *al-hakim* meaning the wise. It describes itself as a book full of wisdom (36:2) extolling the immense benefits of wisdom to man. Many religious scholars including Imam al-Shafi'e, a founder of a major Islamic legal school of thought, identified *hikmah* in the Qur'an with the *Shari'ah*. Muslim philosophers divided *hikmah* into two types: *al-hikmah al-nazariyyah* (theoretical wisdom) and *al-hikmah al-'amaliyyah* (practical wisdom). They identified practical wisdom with the *Shari'ah*, which I think is a more reasonable position to take even if we were to understand the term *shari'ah* in its most comprehensive sense. Theoretical wisdom includes dealing with spiritual and philosophical truths that transcend the concerns of the *shari'ah*. Given its purposes (*al-maqasid*) the *Shari'ah* of Islam is of great relevance to the human concern for societal salvation.
- 12) The citizen of the modern state is a secularized version of the '*abd-khalifah* of the classical Islamic state, which was neither totally theocratic nor democratic. A more fitting descriptive term for the exemplary early Islamic state as led by the Prophet Muhammad and his so-called rightly-guided caliphs would be theo-democratic.
- 13) The full Qur'anic verse reads: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things)." (49:13)
- 14) See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996).
- 15) *The Qur'an*, 2:265
- 16) *The Qur'an*, 2:261
- 17) *The Qur'an*, 14:24-25. In his commentary on this verse 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali emphasizes that the goodly tree is known for four things. These are: (1) its beauty: it gives pleasure to all who see it; (2) its stability: it remains firm and unshaken in storms, because its roots are firmly fixed in the earth; (3) its wide compass: its branches reach high, and it catches all the sunshine from heaven and gives shade to countless birds in its branches and men and animals beneath it, and (4) its abundant fruit, which it yields at all times. See 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009).
- 18) *The Qur'an*, 48:29
- 19) "The seed should spring and grow up, he knows now how; for the earth brings forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark, 1v, 27-28
- 20) *The Qur'an*, 23:11
- 21) Osman Bakar, "Cultural symbiosis and the role of religion in the contemporary world: an Islamic perspective," *Katha, Journal of Dialogue of Civilizations*, vol. 4 (2008), p. 33.
- 22) *The Qur'an*, 5:48.
- 23) *The Qur'an*, 2:285
- 24) *The Qur'an*, 2:62
- 25) *The Qur'an*, 3:19