



ISLAM, A MOSAIC NOT A MONOLITH:*

The Challenge of a single Muslim Authority

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*Sunlight looks a little different on this wall than it does on that wall,
and a lot different on this other, but it is still one light.*

(Jalaluddin Rumi)

Abstract

The traditional view on the clash of civilizations favors and anticipates the outbreak of wars owing to dissimilar and rigid views of other peoples and their cultural constructs. Such a view is extended to the Islamic religion, too. The basis of this widely-held misconception is ascribed to the role of shariah and its various functions in certain Muslim communities. Such an inflexible and rigid view of shariah misrepresents and defames Islam, as there have been some extremist movements here and there in Muslim communities. One of the origins of such an unfavorable depiction of Islam is its followers' religious illiteracy, often followed by self-marginalization. A major conclusion is that Muslims should realize that Islam is flexible enough to favor and promote peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: global co-existence, shariah, Islamic religious literacy, socio-religious flexibility.



Monolithic framing of Western Views of Islam and Religious Illiteracy.

In an article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled, “The Attack on Human Rights”, Michael Ignatieff wrote, “One of the challenges to the universality of human rights arises from the resurgence of Islam.”⁽¹⁾ Since the seventies, the global resurgence of Islam has been classified in the West under the monolithic category of ‘religious fundamentalism’. Following the collapse of the communist system, the West has viewed the phenomenon of Islamic revitalization primarily as a threat to its global interest. The subsequent stereotyping and demonization of Islam have continued to gain strength so that today Islam has become equated, in the West, with fanaticism, brutality, intolerance, violence, terrorism, despotism, violation of human rights, and obscurantism. The Western media has only furthered these stereotypes.

Such perspectives of Islam might have also been exacerbated and influenced by Huntington’s thesis of a ‘clash of civilizations’,

that the next war will be between civilizations, i.e., between the Islamic civilization and Western civilizations.

Historically it is significant that when the Declaration of Human Rights issued its proclamation on religious freedom, objections were raised by Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian UN representative was particularly outspoken in criticizing this provision on the grounds that Islam did not permit Muslims to change their religion.⁽²⁾ This objection has been the basis for much subsequent research and argument concerning Islam and the freedom of religion.

Contrary to the Saudi representative, a Pakistan representative to the UN voiced approval of the article in question. He spoke effectively in defense of the proposition, saying essentially, that freedom of religions (as presented in that article) was fully consonant with Islam. However, other Muslims disagreed with his opinion. The conservative Muslim opinion has been supported by state bans on conversion from Islam even with the possibility of the death penalty for apostasy, especially in Egypt.⁽³⁾

Much also has been written about the relation of Islam and Islamic culture to Western notions regarding the organization of society and human rights. But the point of much of this writing is to demonstrate that Islam and the West are at the opposite poles concerning these important issues. In other words, these scholars argue that Islam is incompatible with the idea of the human rights. Their main argument is that the provisions of the *sharia* are in conflict with this concept and that these provisions continue to control the minds of Muslims. This viewpoint is mainly derived from a monolithic perception of Islam, exclusively referring to radical Islam, especially its development in the Middle East.

Obviously, the monolithic framing of many Western observers that leads to misunderstanding Islam is due largely to their limited

knowledge of its nature. While it may be true that secular bias, as Esposito believes,⁽⁴⁾ has contributed to the failure of many non-Muslim scholars to understand Islam properly, the major pitfall lies in their ignorance of the fact that Islam is a *polyinterpretable*⁽⁵⁾ religion.

At the same time, within Muslim community itself, the diversity is not well understood even within its Islamic tradition. For example, for a decade, the diversity in Indonesia was seen as a model of harmonious country where people of different religious backgrounds and traditions within the same religion could live and cooperate peacefully. In fact, there is a long-held-near-consensus among specialists that the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims are steadily moderate in their religious views. Beginning from the American anthropologist Clifford Geerts in 1950s through the contemporary social scientists such as Robert W. Hefner, all have emphasized the pluralistic nature of Indonesian Islam, which is conducive to/for furthering a moderation process of the Muslim community in Indonesia. However, in the last ten years or so the international media and some academics have warned of rising intolerance in Indonesia. This fact shows that in the last few years the more radical expressions of Islam are prevalent in the country, which is undoubtedly a setback for harmony. It is sufficient to mention what went on recently: conflict between Shi'i and Sunni communities in Sampang, Madura, attacks on Ahmadiyah community, conflict in many areas for church building, and so forth. Here religion has become what Kimball said "a lethal force."⁽⁶⁾

Of course, there are many instances that can be accounted for the cause of those conflicts and intolerance that lead to conflict (economic, social, and political), but one of the causes seems to be what can be termed as *religious illiteracy*. It does not mean talking about the people who are actually uniformed of other

religious traditions, rather some of them are not well informed or are illiterate about their own traditions. The chairperson of the Department of Religion of Boston University, Stephen Prothero, mentioned in his article “Worshipping in Ignorance,” and in his book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know Ø and Doesn't*, how little most Americans know about the most rudimentary teachings and practices in the world religions. I am wondering that Indonesians are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religions. The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell seems right when he said “we are impoverished by ignorance.”⁽⁷⁾

According to the survey conducted by the Center for Islamic and Society Studies (PPIM) at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, most teachers of Islam in public and private schools in Java opposed pluralism, and even inclined to radicalism and conservatism. The survey reveals that 68.6 percent of the respondents are against non-Muslim school principals and 33.8 percent resisted non-Muslim teachers at their schools. Some 73.1 percent of the teachers refused their non-Muslim fellows to build houses of worship in their neighborhoods.

It seems that participants of this research “know next to nothing” about other religious traditions they are opposed to. It is common in many religious traditions that exclusivist tendencies are likely to be uninformed from within as well as from without.

The expression ‘uninformed from within’ means that they are usually deaf to alternative interpretative possibilities from inside their own tradition. On the other hand, the expression ‘uninformed from without’ means that they are usually articulated with little or no experience of genuine encounters with the other, or if there is experience of the other, it is short-lived and highly negative.⁽⁸⁾

The same condition is prevalent and can be seen in other areas

of Muslim community. We are witnessing conflict between Sunni and Shi'i in many Arab countries, or between Muslim and Sufis in many countries. Examples include destroying Sufi shrines, and the assault on Libya's mosques and mausoleums, where the League of Libyan Ulema issued a statement for the assault.⁽⁹⁾ Some Ø Muslim communities do not understand the richness and the diversity of their own traditions.

The impact of this 'religious ignorance' is actually deeper. That a great pioneer of the modern discipline of the history of religions, Friedrich Max Mueller, once expressed, "He who knows one religion knows none," perhaps largely referring in his own scholarly context to those who aspired to become experts in the study of just a particular religious tradition.

Yet, today, this dictum seems to have some significance well beyond the membership of the American Academy of Religion and similar scholarly societies. In today's increasingly religiously pluralistic social contexts, these words suggest not only that a failure to engage pluralism is an act of self-marginalization within our own social contexts; they also suggest that without some understanding of the faith of our neighbor the religious person (or community) living in a religiously plural society cannot even understand oneself (or itself).

Today, religious ignorance is pervasive, and certainly dangerous. In an era when the massive power that religions wield, something that no one can deny, we can ask ourselves whether one can understand any culture and history — political or social — without understanding other relevant religions.

Whether one is religious or not, understanding religion is a key to understanding other cultures. Religions have proved powerful forces throughout history in any country, sometimes working for good and sometimes to destroy. They have inspired some of the greatest and noblest of acts; equally they have inspired some of the most ruthless brutality. They are central to much social and

political history.

In addition, racial and religious prejudices are major issues in the contemporary world, including Indonesia. One major motive in understanding religions is to encourage knowledge and understanding between religions and cultures, based on the assumption that prejudice will be overcome if each knows more about the other.

It is hoped that the knowledge of others will result in understanding and better relations between peoples. Above all, the understanding of other religions (including diversity within religious traditions) is to enable us to “see through the spectacles” of other cultures. If someone can develop an empathetic understanding of another culture, the result will be that they are more ready to empathize with other religions as well.

Unfortunately, our world community today lacks this basic religious knowledge. As a result, many are too easily swayed by demagogues. This ignorance endangers our public life. Thus, we need to equip our community with a basic understanding of the world’s religions.

There are many reasons to expect from world’s future leaders at least minimal religious literacy, which can be cultivated in a wide variety of education, including courses in schools and universities. The most obvious is a world religions course that covers, at a minimum, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. During such a course, students would learn the basic symbols, beliefs, practices, and narratives of those religions.

We are not living in a secularized world. The world today is as fervently religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. To contribute fully to the politics of the nation or the affairs of the world, we need to foster students’ basic knowledge about the world’s religions.

Islam as a polyinterpretable religion

What does it mean to say that Islam is *polyinterpretable*? Although Islam may appear to be monolithic, its form and expression vary from one Muslim individual to another and from one group to another. Thus, there is no single interpretation for the Quran as the source of Islam. In addition, there is no concept of “church” in Islam and no one authority who can issue a religious edict and expect it to be accepted universally by all Muslims. So how is *Islam*, especially *sharia* here to be understood?

There are a number of factors which can influence the outcome of an individual Muslim’s understanding of the *sharia*. Sociological, cultural and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun describes as the ‘*aesthetics of reception*’, certainly contribute to the forms and substances of interpretation. The ‘*aesthetic of reception*’ means, ‘how a discourse, oral or written, is received by listeners or readers’, especially, in the case of Islam and Muslims reception of the Quran. More specifically, it refers to the conditions of individual perception of each level of culture corresponding to a social group in every phase of historical development.⁽¹⁰⁾

Each Quranic verse produces an appropriate meaning according to the mode in which the interpreter understands it. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī,⁽¹¹⁾ each word of the Quran – not to mention its verses and chapters – has an indefinite number of meanings, all of which are intended by God. Proper recitation of the Qur’an opens up the reader to new meanings at every reading. “When meaning repeats itself for someone reciting the Quran, he has not recited it as it should be recited. This is a proof of his ignorance.”⁽¹²⁾ And unless the text and its context are continually being reheard in the ever new texture, one is really not hearing what the text means. Rereading the scriptural sources themselves with a new eye is necessary.

Thus, no single scripture trajectory of any teaching should be

absolutized and allowed to absorb the others. The evolutionary process of interpretation that makes up the texts must continue today in the same manner in which it took place then, in continuity with what went before, preserving the past without embalming it, faithful to the past without being limited by it. We should be critically aware of the historical context in which Islam grew up when interpreting the doctrine. In the words of Hassan Hanafi, an Egyptian classic intellectual, *Turāth*/heritage/tradition is not a fixed pattern of past behaviors and institutions. Instead, it is used “to represent a concept of evolving religious tradition, prescribing norms but not necessarily reflecting words recorded in archives or practices ingrained (deep-rooted) in daily life; it is *constantly under construction*”. Thus, it can be pointed out to what Tariq Ramadan remarked as, “faithfulness to principles cannot involve faithfulness to the historical model, because times change, societies and political and economic systems become more complex and, in every age, it is in fact necessary to think of a model appropriate to each social and cultural reality.”⁽¹³⁾

Again, here one can see that all interpretations are bound by the era in which a religious scholar lives and by the degree of advancement of the human sciences in general and religious studies in specific within this era. Thus, any understanding of religion or, in this case, any understanding of the text, is time-bound, for religious knowledge is created by the application of the “knowledge of the day” to the study of the core religious text.

Various intellectual inclinations also influence the effort to understand the *sharia* and thus lead to different interpretations of a particular doctrine. Such inclinations can take the form of recovering the true meaning of the doctrine as literally expressed in the text, or finding general principles of the doctrine beyond its literal or textual expression. Thus, while accepting the general principle of the *sharia*, Muslims barely adhere to a single

interpretation of it.

The emergence of a number of different schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence and various theological and philosophical trajectories show that Islamic teachings are thus *polyinterpretable*. Throughout history the interpretable nature of Islam has functioned as the basis of Islamic flexibility. In addition, it also confirms the necessity of pluralism in Islamic tradition. Therefore, as many scholars have argued, Islam cannot and should not be perceived as monolithic. Thus as it actually exists and because of ‘the divergence in the social, economic and political context’, Islam has come to mean different things to different people.

One also has to take into account the sociological influences while interpreting a divine scripture. No interpretation, however honest, can be free from such influence. The theologians and jurists of the first century of Islam who acquired great prestige and whose opinions are taken as final in Muslim traditions were themselves not free from such influences. Their formulations and interpretations must be seen against the sociological perspective of their time, and cannot be seen apart from these limitations. Thus, any interpretation of the scripture bears marks of the ethos of its own times. It can be said that even though the text remains fixed and unchanged, its content is subject to change. Thus, the form remains fixed but its content moves. This elasticity of the text allows its readers to relate what is read directly to what is experienced in reality.⁽¹⁴⁾

Al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), also known as *ḥujjat al-Islam*, asserts that sacred texts such as the Quran and hadiths are open to interpretation on five different levels: (1) ontological-existential (*dhātī*), (2) experiential (*ḥissī*), (3) conceptual (*khayālī*), (4) intellectual (*‘aqlī*), and (5) metaphorical (*shabaḥī* or *majāzī*)⁽¹⁵⁾. Thus, everyone who interprets a statement of the text in accordance with one of the above levels of analysis has deemed such statements to be true. And anyone who engages in such

interpretation, as long as he observes the rules of hermeneutics, should not be branded as an unbeliever.

In almost the same manner, in his essay entitled, “The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: A Reinterpretation of Medieval Exegesis,” Fishbane makes reference to the four-fold typology of medieval scriptural interpretation common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. For Jewish exegetes, this typology took the form of the acronym PaRDeS, where P=*Peshat* (the literal meaning); R=*Remez* (the allegorical meaning); D=*derash* (the tropological and moral meaning); and S=*Sod* (the mystical meaning).⁽¹⁶⁾

Michael Fishbane notes that the tradition of rabbinic mystical exegesis known as *Sod* turned on the principle that the words of sacred scripture speak to the reader “without ceasing.” Thus, Fishbane asserts, “There is a continual expression of texts; and this reveals itself in their ongoing reinterpretation.”⁽¹⁷⁾ It is “in the service of *Sod* [i.e., mystical exegesis],” that mystical exegetes mediate “a multitude of interpretations” as “they resist the dogmatization of meaning and the eclipse of the divine lights of speech.”⁽¹⁸⁾

Thus, for al-Ghazzālī, everyone who interprets a statement of the text in accordance with one of the above levels of analysis has deemed such statements to be true. And anyone who engages in such interpretation, as long as he observes the rules of hermeneutics, should not be branded as an unbeliever.

It should be noted, however, that all interpretations of a canonical text are not of equal value. Some may be misguided or even completely wrong. However, wrong interpretations should not be suppressed as heresy. An interpretation is heretical only if it denies the truth of a canonical or sacred text on all five hermeneutical levels above. Epistemologically, the exegesis of a sacred text constitutes informed opinion (*ẓann*) and not absolute truth (*ḥaqq*), thus no one may claim an exclusive right

of interpretation and no single interpretation is definitive. This approach helps not only preserve alternative voices that keep the process of interpretation open-ended, its spirit conforms to the liberal ideal of freedom of speech by granting to jurists and theologians the right to be wrong.

The Quran, after all, is God's Speech (and/or Discourse); it is the self-disclosure of His infinite Essence. Diverse interpretations of the Quran answer to the diverse modes in which God discloses himself/self to the Book's readers. To use Ibn al-'Arabī's term, "The Quran is a shoreless ocean".⁽¹⁹⁾

Sharia, unlike the Quran, is full of human opinions. Correct knowledge of the history of Islam also indicates that the *sharia* law developed centuries ago, and that, due to social and political circumstances, its stipulations have not been amended to accord with new social conditions. Thus it can be said that the corpus of *sharia* is a human construct, and some of its aspects may evolve just as human thought evolves and just as some aspect of the Quran and the *sunna* were revealed over time. A remark ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad maintains thus: "God sends to this community, every hundred years, someone to renew His religion." This renewal is not a modification of the sources but a transformation of the mind and eyes that read them which are indeed naturally influenced by the new social, political, and scientific circumstances in which they live. It is for this reason that there are various schools of jurisprudence, which differ from one another on many questions. According to Abu Zaid, various schools of jurisprudence (*al-madhāhib al-Islāmī*) are nothing but the reflection of the evolution of life in the Muslim world, and these schools changed and evolved, transforming according to conditions of time and circumstance.⁽²⁰⁾

Sharia, as a human construct, proves changeable, and many of its rules and regulations are not applicable to the present social problems. Thus, the ulama should re-examine the *sharia* rules and

regulations to adapt them to the present social conditions. It is better to review the social conditions pertinent to a particular rule, and, if its application is no longer suitable, it should be replaced by a new rule inspired by Islam.⁽²¹⁾

Certain earlier Muslim thinkers, e.g., Ibn Taymīyyah, recognized the necessity of making a change in view of the changing circumstances, and it is for this reason that he came out with a doctrine that religious edicts can change according to the changing times.⁽²²⁾ Even such a person like him thought it necessary that the *aḥkām* (edicts) should change with the change in historical and sociological circumstances. Thus it can be maintained that “in practice, the ‘way to faithfulness’, teaches us that Islam rests on three sources: the Quran, the *sunna*, and the state of the world, or of our society (*al-wāqi*’).”⁽²³⁾

The above perspective is based on the fact that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad over a period of twenty-three years. Some verses, therefore, refer to specific events like the campaign at the time of the Battle of Badr, and specific acts of the Prophet, such as his marriage to Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh. (Q 33: 37). Moreover, various Quranic prescriptions relate to the practices of the pre-Islamic Arab community and were in response to the very social circumstances prevalent then, and these practices no longer have the same social implications. Over the centuries, Muslims societies have changed and have come up with new problems which require new *sharia*-based legislation.

Upon some further argument over this topic, it can be said that while the Quran was undoubtedly revealed for the whole mankind and for all times to come, it has contained that which had significance for the Arabs to whom it was revealed in order to be acceptable to and guide them in their place and time. To be acceptable to the people to whom it is revealed, a scripture must have immediate relevance for them. One might say that a scripture is contextually determined by the history, cultures, and

traditions of the communities it concerns. One cannot therefore deduce from the Quranic verses in isolation their very historical context as constitution or as a legal code. It is for this reason that the principle of *ijtihād*⁽²⁴⁾ was used right from the beginning. Ultimately, the denial of *ijtihād* appeared to imply among the Sunni followers of Islam being short of deciphering the rules stipulated by Allah that contain, inter alia, the living solicitude and the core of the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad who has since symbolized the Divine mercy to the world.

The Quran as the infinite, never-to-be-depleted reservoir of meanings

A text, including a religious text, is not a single communication to be repeated endlessly, rather it serves as a vehicle that constantly delivers new meanings based on the situation and moment of the reader. This means that there should, and appears to, be a new meaning at every reading which is an unending flow of different meanings. Ibn al-‘Arabī said:

We say concerning the senses of a verse that all are intended by God. No one forces anything upon God. . . . the reason for this is as follows: the verse of God’s speech, of whatever sort it might be—Quran, as the revealed book, the scripture, and the very Divine report—is a sign or remark signifying what the words (*lafẓ*) support in all senses and intended by the One Who sent down His speech in those words , which comprise, in that language, those senses. For He Who sent it down knows all those senses without exception. He knows that His servants are disparate in their consideration of those words. . . . Hence when someone understands a sense from the verse, that sense is intended by God in this verse in the case of the person who finds it.⁽²⁵⁾

From the above quotation we can see that the Quran (which is God’s Intact Speech) has not a single message but a variety of

messages, each one gauged to the competence and situation of its reader. One most challenging about Ibn al-‘Arabī is his insistence that the Book should “stand up” after being read. This is the best illumination of the status the sheikh gives to the Quran: “Others lift up the Book from its bed, since interpretation on the part of the learned (ulama) has made the Book lie down after it had been standing. The person to whom God has given success comes and makes the Book stand up after it had been lying down.”⁽²⁶⁾ Ibn al-‘Arabī goes further, not only that we can never finish interpreting the Book, but he also says that none of our interpretations actually has anything to do with the Holy Word.

The above discussion can be seen on the instances which demonstrate that even the same *sharia* rule was applied variously at different times and in different communities, and even the Quranic stipulations and traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad have often been suspended. The changeability of the *sharia* law, for example, can be seen in the punishment for the consumption of alcohol. Although the Quran does not directly stipulate any punishment for the consumption of alcohol, during the Prophet’s lifetime a person who committed this offence was beaten, and although the caliphs of the early Islamic history were guided by the Quran and their immediate knowledge of the teaching of the Prophet Muḥammad, they nonetheless exceeded the punishment stipulated by the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad. Abū Bakr stipulated whipping the offender with forty lashes, and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb increased this to sixty lashes. The latter also abolished time-stipulated marriage (*mut’ah*) that had been a legally accepted as an Islamic marriage contract, as it had been announced, supported, and practiced by the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

Another example showing how the Quran is contextualized is the case of hijab, in which the Quran uses the term in a different way. In the Quran, the word occurs in the Meccan period to mean

that the unbelievers are separated from God (83: 14), and to refer to the fact that when Maryam found that she was pregnant, she stayed in seclusion (19: 15-16). The word ‘hijab’ was used only once in the Medina period (33: 7), where it refers only to the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad, to whom men should speak from behind a curtain.

The debate on the subject of veiling women focuses on Sura 33: 59 and 24: 31 which specially refers to the wives of the Prophet and to the women of the believers respectively, each with its context. Sura 33: 59 says: “O Prophet! Say to the wives and daughters and the believing women that they draw their veils close to them, so it is more likely that they would be known and not hurt.” The historical circumstance of this verse was directed against the youth who followed women when they left their compound at night to go to the outskirts of Medina. Slave women who were available to men used to be dressed as free women, so the Quranic verse recommends the veiling of the wives of the Prophet so that they would then be distinguished and not hurt.

The command of Sura 24: 31 refers to the fact that women used to wear shirts which had a large opening below the neck and showed their breasts while their head-covering fell on their shoulders. Thus they were advised to draw their head-coverings over their front to cover their breasts. *These Quranic verses advise, but do not stipulate any punishment – whether in this world or in the hereafter.*

It is unfortunate that Muslim reformers who wish to reform their societies by making *sharia* the basis of their legal systems often forget that the duty of mercy applies to each and every obligation that is enjoined upon human beings in the Quran. What this means in practice is that when the performance of an obligation calls for severity (harshness), it is the duty of Muslims to temper severity with mercy.

Among Allah’s own names are *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm*

(compassionate and Merciful, respectively). A Muslim begins everything by reciting *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ* (i.e., begin in the name of Allah Who is Compassionate and Merciful). Thus a Muslim is supposed to invoke Allah the Compassionate and Merciful at every step.

In fact, Allah sent His Messenger Muḥammad *صلى الله عليه وسلم* also as the Mercy of the World *وما ارسلناك الا رحمة للعالمين* “And We have not sent you save as a mercy for all that exist” (21:107). Thus the Prophet of Islam represents universal mercy. As the Messenger of Allah, he is the very representative of His Mercy and hence the Prophet himself is known as *رحمة للعالمين* (mercy of [and/or for] the worlds). Thus a true follower of the Prophet has to be merciful and compassionate to the extent humanly possible.

A real Muslim is one who, despite being firm in his/her faith tradition, shows equal love and compassion for all human beings whether they belong to his faith tradition or not. Every faith tradition is unique and should be recognized as such but it should not become a tool of discrimination. The Quran itself declares that all human beings, all children of Adam have been honored equally (17:70) *ولقد كرّمنا بني آدم*. Thus there is no justification in showing any discrimination on the basis of faith as far as the Quran is concerned.

Conclusion

It would be better to close this paper with a quote from Muhammad Shahrur in his book *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’an, qirā’ah mu’āṣirah* [the Book and the Quran: A Contemporary Reading] in which he wants his readers to understand the Quran “as if the Prophet has just died and informed us of this Book (*ka’anna al-nabi tuwuffiya hadithan wa-ballaghana hadha l-kitab*).⁽²⁷⁾

This means that we should not go over and over again with

just one of the interpretations, but it should be continued to be interpreted according to current situations and needs. Otherwise, as Muhammed Arkoun said, we need to choose between “Islam, to reform or to subvert.”⁽²⁸⁾



Notes

1. See Michael Ignatieff, “The Attack on Human Rights”, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001, 102
2. David Little, John Kelsay, and Abdulaziz Sachedina (eds.), *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, 35-37
3. Since the 1970s, there have been continuing demands in Egypt for a reinforcement of the death penalty for apostasy from Islam. Also the widely known 1994-1996 case of the Egyptian University professor Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, who had to divorce his wife for his alleged apostasy, showed that Egypt’s court was prepared to penalize religious dissent in other ways. See Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights, Tradition and Politics*, 3rd ed.dition, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999, 154

4. See John L. Esposito, "Seculer Bias and Islamic Revivalism" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May, 1993
5. A lengthy socio-historical discussion on this issue is found among other things, in Marshall. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscienc'e and History in World Civilization*, 3 vols., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.
6. See Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Lethal, The explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Jossey-Bass, 2011. <?>
7. See Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Americans get an 'F' in religion", in *USA TODAY*, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion>, seen on February 15, 2012
8. See Syafaatun Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet, Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue*, Blue Doom Publication, USA, 2011
9. See Statement by the League of Libyan Ulema Regarding the Assault on Libya's Mosques and Mausoleums on 28 August 2012, Fatwa by the League of Libyan Ulema, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/104317849/Fatwa-by-the-League-of-Libyan-Ulema-English>, seen on August 31, 2012
10. See Arkoun, 'The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought', in Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari, eds., *Islam: State and Society*, London: Curzon Press, 1988, 58. In hermeneutics, inspired by Paul Ricoeur and Gadamer. (Gadamer, 1989), each in his ways, we knew that reading a text is not such a straightforward event. The text will disclose its meaning in interactive ways. Text means or produces meaning in many and different ways. In addition, insight and enlightenment are provided in various contexts and by various peoples. Thus, everybody has his or her rights to understand the words he/she heard or read. He/she has his/her own re-

- flection for the texts.
11. His full name is Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. al-‘Arabi al-Ta’i al-Hatimi is a greatest Sufi of Andalusia. He was born in Murcia, Andalusia, Spain, on 17 Ramadan 560 AH/ 28 July 1165. One of the great miracles of career of our Great Master was his book. Osman Yahia, in the two volumes on the biography of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the classification of his writings, accounted that Ibn al-‘Arabī might have written 700 books, short articles, and collections of his poetry which 400 of them are available. The *Meccan Revelation (al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyyah)* itself contains 17, 000 of pages in Yahia’s critical edition. The most scared by scholars is reading all *Meccan Revelation*, without mentioning others, either in the printed edition or manuscript. The problem has not been in the thickness of his book, but in its content which is difficult and demanding high understanding of Islamic knowledge. This help to understand why the Great Master (*Shaikh al-Akbar*), while his influence was worldwide, but has relatively been forgotten in modern scholarship. He died in Damascus on 22 Rabi II 638 AH/ November 1240.
 12. *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyyah*, IV, 367. 3
 13. Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 36. In addition, says Ramadan, some religious commands related to the affairs of the world naturally take on the color of the culture of various countries: “the principle remains the same, but the ways of being faithful to them are diverse. So the concern should not be to dress as Prophet dressed but to dress according to the principles (of decency/politeness/morality/respectability, cleanness, simplicity, aesthetics, and modesty) that underlay his choice of clothes.”
 14. Shahrur, cited by Andreas, 144
 15. See, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzālī’s *Faysal al-tafriqa bayn al-*

Islam wa al-zandaqa.

16. See Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989, 113.
17. Fishbane, *Garments*, 120.
18. Fishbane, *Garments*, 120.
19. Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyyah*, II, 581. 11
20. Faruq Abu Zaid, *al-Shari’ah al-Islamia baina al-Muhafizin wa al- Mujaddidin*, Cairo: n.d., 16.
21. “Sharia (Arabic *sharīah*), which means ‘the way to the source’ should never be confused with the source itself: the latter declares the absolute and the universal outside of time, but everything along the way must consider itself in time, in change, in imperfection, immersed in the reality of humankind—their rich humanity as well as their disturbing deceits. It really is a way toward the ideal, and anyone traveling along with it is invited to make a constant effort to reform in the light of the universal, without ever claiming that one has attained the Truth of the universal. See Tariq Ramadan, p. 37. In the word of Muhammad Shahrur, “no human interpreter can ever reflect the total knowledge of the Quran in his exegesis. Every interpretation reflects, instead, the standards of thinking of the time when the exegeses was written. Example : to understand the seventh century paradigm of thinking, see Ibn ‘Abbās’s commentary, for paradigm of thinking in the fourteenth century, see Ibn Kathir’s tafsir. Their understanding of the text was partial, relative, and context related, whereas the knowledge available in the text is absolute, total, and transhistorical.
22. Cited by Ashgar Ali Engineer, “Islam, Status of Women and Social change”, in *Islam and the Modern Age*, 1990, 21, 190.
23. Tariq Ramadan, 37.

24. In general usage, the Arabic word *ijtihad* denotes the utmost effort, physical or mental, expended in a particular activity. In its technical legal connotation, it denotes the thorough exertion of the jurist's mental faculty in finding a solution for a case of law. See, Wael B. Hallaq, 'Ijtihad', in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, II, 178.
25. *Al-Futūḥāt*, II, 567.19, in Chittick: 244.
26. *Al-Futūḥāt*, II, 594. 28, in Chittick, 200.
27. Cited by Andreas Christman," The form is Permanent..., p. 143-144
28. See Muhammed Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert?*, Paris: Saqi Books, 2007.



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