

Opening Remarks

Considering the current Sunnī–Shī'ah conflict occurring in the Middle East, Luis Alberto Vittor's *Shī'ite Islām: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy* could not come at a more opportune time. Radically departing from the confrontational polemicist propaganda of the past, Vittor demonstrates that the greatness of Shī'ite Islām does not reside in a denigration of Sunnī Islām.

Shī'ite Islām is great in and of itself. One does not need to criticize the Companions or the Caliphs to exalt the Twelve Imāms. The Imāms of *Ahlul Bayt* are great in and of themselves. One does not need to criticize the Imāms of the Sunnī schools of jurisprudence to exalt Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq. The Sixth Imām is great in and of himself, having left legions of scholars as a legacy.

Unlike some authors, who approach Shī'ite Islām from an apologetic perspective which seeks to appease Sunnī Muslims, Vittor approaches Shī'ism from a position of strength, examining the religious tradition independently, in and of itself, from within, and on its own terms.

He makes no apologies for Shī'ite beliefs and practices and does not compromise on questions of principle. Unlike some overly enthusiastic authors, Vittor does not exalt Shī'ism at the expense of Sunnism. As an honest, objective, and open-minded academic, he treats both of his subjects with respect, viewing them in complement rather than opposition: there would be no Shī'ism without Sunnism, and there would be no Sunnism without Shī'ism.

Although the works of Muhammad Tājir have their value, they are viewed by many readers, both Sunnī and Shī'ī, as an example of negative marketing, which focuses on belittling one's adversary, as opposed to positive marketing, which focuses on the qualities of your candidate.

In our experience, works like *Then I was Guided*, *Ask those who Know*, *To be with the Truthful*, and *The Shī'ah are (the real) Ahl al-Sunnah* are not the most effective tools used in Shī'ite *da'wah*. Although these books have brought many Sunnis into Shī'ite Islām, we would argue that they have driven as many Sunnis away from Shī'ite Islām.

Had the author spoken exclusively about the Prophet, citing the Qur'ānic verses and *ahādīth* in favor of

the *Ahlul Bayt*, his books would have had an even greater resonance among Sunnī Muslims. Casting doubt on the character of the Prophet's Companions in order to replace them with the Twelve Imāms is a misguided effort of marketing. The Imāms themselves criticized such comportment. Had Tijānī allowed the historical sources to speak for themselves, that would have been enough to make his point.

In order to guide an interested Sunnī into Shī'ite Islām, all one has to do is cite the Qur'ān, repeat the words of the Prophet, and demonstrate the wisdom of the Imāms, and that will be sufficient. One must address issues of faith, and the importance of the *imāmah* and *wilāyah*, before tackling controversial issues from the early days of Islāmic history. Once a person has accepted the divine authority, everything else will fall into place, and then, and only then, are converts to Shī'ism ready for the informative works of Tijānī. His works certainly have an important place, but not necessarily in the first line of *da'wah*.

Many Shī'ite Muslims seem to forget that *taqiyyah* is a form of tact and every educational endeavor must proceed by stages. As Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq has said: "This affair (*amr*) [the Imāmate and the esoteric meaning of religion] is occult (*mastūr*) and veiled (*muqanna'*) by a covenant (*mithq*), and whoever unveils it will be disgraced by Allāh" (Kulaynī). Certain things are better left unsaid when dealing with people who are potential enemies of *Ahlul Bayt*. As Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq warned:

Keep our affair secret, and do not divulge it publicly, for whoever keeps it secret and does not reveal it, Allāh will exalt him in this world, and put light between his eyes in the next, leading him to Paradise...[W]hoever divulges our affair publicly, and does not keep it a secret, Allāh will disgrace him in this world and will take away light from between his eyes in the next, and will decrease for him darkness that will lead him to the Fire...*Taqiyyah* is of my religion, and of the religion of my father, and who does not observe *taqiyyah* has no religion...[I]t is necessary to worship in secret and it is necessary to worship openly...the one who reveals our affairs is the one who denies them. (Kulaynī)

Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq also condemned those who spread the secrets of *wilāyat Allāh* among the common people, saying: "Our secret continued to be preserved until it came into the hands of the sons of Kaysān and they spoke of it on the roads and in the villages of the Sawād" (Kulaynī).

Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq warned his Shī'ites to: "Fear for your religion and protect it (lit. veil it) with *taqiyyah*, for there is no faith in whom there is no *taqiyyah*" (Kulaynī). He also advised his followers to: "Mix with the people (ie., enemies) outwardly, but oppose them inwardly so long as the Amirate is a matter of opinion" (Sadūq).

The Imām always avoided controversy and conflict, saying: "Verily, when I hear a man abusing me in the mosque, I hide myself behind a pillar so that he may not see me" (Sadūq). On one occasion, Zakarīya ibn Sābiq was enumerating the Imāms in the presence of Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq. When the Companion reached the name of Muhammad al-Bāqir, he was interrupted by the Imām who said: "That is enough for you. Allāh has affirmed your tongue and has guided your heart" (Kulaynī).

The Imam also said that “Verily, diplomacy (*al-riʿāʿ*) with a true believer is a form of *shirk* (polytheism); but with a hypocrite in his own house, it is worship” (Sadḡq). These traditions are not saying that Shʿite Muslims should not be sincere, and that they form some sort of secret esoteric sect. They are simply saying that they should not be stupid and that they should only share their beliefs with a receptive audience so as to avoid provocation and enmity.

Rather than promote division and conflict, Imam Jaʿfar al-Sʿdiq urged Shʿites to pray with Sunnis: “He who prays with them standing in the front row, it is as though he prayed with the Prophet in the first row” (Sadḡq). The Imam also encouraged Shʿites to treat Sunnis as their brethren: “Visit their sick, attend their funerals, and pray in their mosques” (Sadḡq). Since the improper behavior of followers reflects poorly on their leader, the Imam told his followers to “Become an ornament for us, and not a disgrace” (Sadḡq).

He also called upon his Shʿites to encourage good-will among all Muslims, saying: “May Allāh have mercy on a person who inculcates friendship towards us among men, and does not provoke ill-will among them” (Sadḡq). This Shʿite spirit of Islāmic unity was shown by ʿAlīmah Sharḡf al-Dīn al-Musawḡ who ruled that the Shʿites of Lebanon should celebrate the birth of the Prophet on the same day as the Sunnis. Imam Khumaynḡ took this one step further, declaring the entire week, from the Monday to the Friday, as Islāmic Unity week.

In twenty years of Islāmic activism, we have observed that works like *al-Murajaʿat* by ʿAlīmah al-Mḡsawḡ, which are calm, courteous, gentle, and convincing, are far more effective than caustic criticism. We have also found that the most effective tools in Shʿite *dawah* are the works of the Imams themselves, *Nahj al-balḡghah* by Imam ʿAlī ibn Abḡ Tḡlib, the *Sahḡfah al-sajadiyyah* by Imam ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿAbidīn, the *Lantern of the Path* by Imam Jaʿfar al-Sʿdiq, as well as other biographical books such as *The Book of Guidance* by Shaykh al-Mufḡd, which demonstrate the depth of knowledge of the Imams, as well as their profound wisdom, and piety.

Many Shʿite Muslims would be well-advised to live what they learn, to exhibit the true characteristics of followers of *Ahlul Bayt*, to live according to Islām, and to lead by example. The best converts to Shʿite Islām never received a book. They were moved by the piety of Shʿite Muslims, and their devout love and attachment to the Prophet and his family.

It should also be understood that spreading Islām is *wḡjib kifḡyah*, it is the obligation of certain members of the community, and should be left to the knowledgeable, competent, and qualified. The Prophet and the Imams warned us to never argue with the ignorant. In order to ensure that Islām was rightly represented, the Twelve Imams trained Muslim missionaries to propagate the faith properly.

As any business professor can explain, attacking a rival is never good marketing. An advertiser should never point out the faults of others. It is not permitted in the best of mediums and is never good policy. The selfish purpose is always evident. It is unfair, impolite, unbecoming of a Muslim, and counter-

Qur'anic. As Almighty Allāh says:

“Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way” (16: 125).

The Most High has also said:

“Revile not those who invoke other than Allāh, lest wrongfully they revile Allāh through ignorance” (6: 108).

If Muslims are forbidden from making a mockery of the beliefs of polytheists, the prohibition is even greater when it comes to the beliefs of other Muslims.

While negative advertising has some advantages, it can evoke aggressive responses towards the source of the advertising. While it can motivate base support, verbal assaults against the opponent can alienate non-sectarian Muslims and outrage committed Muslims from the other camp, radicalizing rhetoric.

What is worse, negative advertising often produces a backlash, which can result in violence, destruction, and death. While some Sunnis and Shī'ites may pledge to refrain from negative marketing when discussing their differences, the pledge is often soon abandoned when the opponent is viewed as “going negative,” inciting a series of retaliatory remarks.

Negative advertising is also entirely un-academic as campaigners from one camp present twisted or spun information under the guise of bringing hidden negatives into the light. Such individuals have no place in the Sunni-Shī'ite debate as they have the wrong intention from the onset. Their goal is not to unite, but to divide. They come to the table with a closed mind.

They are not genuinely interested in inter-Islamic dialogue. They prepare their cases like lawyers. They are concerned with winning the case, rather than searching for truth. They concentrate on being quick, witty, and winning the argument, rather than analyzing the issues at hand. They use rhetorical devices such as straw man or red herring arguments to insinuate that an opponent holds a certain idea.

The Sixth Imam was highly critical of the superfluous debates of skilful verbal gymnasts: “When you debate, the nearer you are to truth and tradition on the authority of the Prophet, the further you are from it: you mix up the truth with what is false. A little truth suffices for what is false” (Mufīd). Without a judge or moderator to keep parties disciplined, Sunni-Shī'ite debates soon degenerate into slander, libel, and defamation of character. Such efforts are of no benefit to the Islamic Ummah as they increase tension between the Sunni and Shī'ite communities.

The very idea of “debate” between Sunnis and Shī'ites is misguided as “debate” implies opposition with each party trying to defeat the other. It is foolish to believe that any party could actually “win” such a debate considering that Muslims have been polarized into two camps for over 1,400 years. The very idea of Sunni-Shī'ah debate should be cast aside and replaced by inter-Islamic dialogue.

In order for Shī'ites and Sunnis to move towards reconciliation they need to recognize that any extreme polar position is only going to aggravate the conflict. For starters, all Muslims, Shī'ite, Sunnis, and 'Ibadīs, must cease cursing Companions of the Prophet and cursing one another as such actions merely increase animosity. We have witnessed Salafīs insult Fātimah, 'Alī, Hasan, and Husayn; Sunnī Muslims insult the *Ahlul Bayt*, Twelver Shī'ites insult the Sunnī Caliphs, Ismā'īlīs insult Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim, Sūfīs insult Sunnis, and 'Ibādīs insult Imām 'Alī.

Surely such behavior must cease from all sides. As Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq warned: “Do not revile them, lest they revile your 'Alī” (Sadq). What goes around comes around, and it is time for a truce if not a treaty of perpetual peace.

As any historian of early Islām is aware, the Companions of the Prophet had their differences, cursed each other, and killed each other. Surely, the sound of mind do not seek to perpetuate such belligerent behavior *ad-eternam*. Questions of who was right and who was wrong are a matter of personal belief and need not be professed publicly in contexts which arouse undue emotion. Muslims need to let differences die with those who differed.

Over the course of 1,400 years of Sunnī and Shī'ite sectarianism, positions have become polarized and differences have become deeply entrenched. Muslims need to leave a little room for ambiguity. Despite what most Muslims would like to believe, early Islāmic history was not black and white, and not everything was cut and dry. Muslims need to open up to uncertainty, move from the black areas into gray areas, and creative processes will emerge.

If Shī'ites and Sunnis are sincere in seeking reconciliation, if they are honest about starting a dialogue, then they must agree to talk with respect. Both sides of the conflict must be recognized. Both have wronged and both have been wronged. Muslims need refrain from belligerence and leave room for forgiveness. They need to set emotion aside or moderate it with intelligence. They need to stop trying to prove each other wrong. They must unite on the basis of the values and beliefs that they hold in common.

When outsiders look at Islām, all they see are Muslims. They do not distinguish between various sects. If they were to examine issues of *'aqidah* between the various Muslim groups, they would be hard-pressed to find grounds for division. The Sunnī Muslims believe in:

Tawhīd: Oneness of God

Nubuwwah/Risālah: Prophethood and Messengership

Kutub: Divinely Revealed Books

Malā'ikah: Angels

Qiyāmah: The Day of Judgment

Qadar: Predestination

They are also fond of combining both faith and belief in Five Pillars of Islām, consisting of:

Shahādah: Profession of Faith

Salāh: Prayer

Sawm: Fasting in Ramadan

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah

Zakāh: Alms

The Twelver Shi'ite theologians prefer to separate creed from practice, presenting two lists, the Foundations of Faith, and the Branches of Faith.

Usūl al-dīn

Tawhīd: Oneness of God

'Adl: Divine Justice

Nubuwwah/Risālah: Prophethood and Messengership

Imāmah/Wilāyah: Imāmate or Guardianship

Qiyāmah: Day of Judgment

Furū' al-dīn

Salāh: Prayer

Sawm: Fasting in Ramadan

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah

Zakāh: Alms

Khums: Alms

Jihād: Struggle

Amr bi al-ma'rūf: Promoting good

Nahy 'an al-munkar: Forbidding evil

Tawallū: Attachment to *Ahlul Bayt*

Tabarrū: Separation from the enemies of *Ahlul Bayt*

For all intents and purposes, the Zaydiyyah share the same beliefs of the Ithnā 'Ashariyyah. The main difference between both groups is in their concept of the Imāmate, and the fact that Zaydiyyah *fiqh* is closer to Sunnī Hanafī and Sunnī Shāfi'ī *fiqh*, with some elements of Shā'ah Ja'farī elements.

The Ismā'īliyyah theologians have organized their beliefs into Seven Pillars of Islām, consisting of:

Wilāyah: Guardianship

Tahārah: Purity

Salāh: Prayer

Zakāh: Alms

Sawm: Fasting in Ramadan

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah

Jihād: Struggle

'Ibādīyah theologians have organized their beliefs into the following Five Pillars:

Tawhīd: Oneness of God

'Adl: Divine Justice

Qadar: Predestination

Wilāyah/Tabarr': Attachment to Muslims and separation from infidels

Amr/Nahy: Promoting good and forbidding evil; implementing the Imāmate when possible

As can be appreciated from this overview, all Muslims believe in the following articles of faith:

Tawhīd: Oneness of God

Nubuwwah/Risālah: Prophets and Messengers

Qiyāmah: The Day of Judgment

Although non-Sunnīs do not list the divinely revealed books (*kutub*) or the angels (*malā'ikah*) in their creeds, these are fundamental aspects of beliefs for all groups. If they are not cited as individual items it is because they are assumed to form part of the belief in God and His Prophets.

The 'Ibādīyah and some of the Sunnis adds *qadar* or predestination to their articles of faith while other groups insist on free will. The 'Ibādīyah, along with the Shī'ite groups, focus on *'adl* or divine justice whereas some of the Sunnī insist on *qādir* or omnipotence. This difference is the result of philosophical differences in which the Sunnī stress Allāh's Omnipotence over His Justice, while the Shī'ites stress Allāh's Justice over his Omnipotence.

In practical matters, the hierarchical differences between divine attributes are inconsequential and do not make or break a Muslim. In fact, the majority of Muslims are completely unaware of such philosophical subtleties. If a Muslim does not believe in *tawhīd*, he is outside the fold of Islām.

If a Muslim does not believe that Muhammad is the Final Messenger of Allāh, he is outside the fold of Islām. If a Muslim does not believe in angels or in the Day of Judgment, he is outside the fold of Islām. If a Muslim prioritizes the attributes of Allāh differently, he is a complete and total Muslim: he merely follows a differently philosophical school.

The Shā'ah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah, the Shā'ah Zaydiyyah, the Shā'ah Ismā'īliyyah, and the 'Ibādīyah all believe in *imāmah* although their chains of Imāms are different as are their qualities, attributes, and qualifications. In many respects, the Shī'ite and 'Ibadī belief in *imāmah* is similar to the Sunnī belief in *khilāfah*.

Whether it is an Imām or a Caliph, whether he inherits his title or is elected, whether he is a righteous leader or an infallible Imām, Sunnī, Shī'ite, and even Sūfī Muslims believe in some form of religious authority, both spiritual and political, which should rule the Ummah and establish the *sharā'ah*.

As can be seen, all Muslims share the same creedal concepts and religious practices. They all believe in

one God, the Prophethood, and the Day of Judgment. They all believe in angels and revealed books. They all pray, fast, make the pilgrimage to Makkah, and pay charity. Although the Sunnis do not list *khums*, the 20% tithe, *jihad*, promoting the good, and forbidding evil, in their creed, all Sunnis accept these as religious obligations.

Although a *Nasibi* would reject the obligation to love the Prophet's Family, and the prohibition of dealing with those who hate the Prophet's family, every true Sunni loves and blesses the Prophet and his Family. And evidently, every true Muslim, follows the *shar'ah*, be he Sunni, 'Ibadi, Shi'ite, Ashari, Shi'ite, Ismaili, Shi'ite Zaydi, or Sufi.

Although most Sunnis and many Twelver Shi'ites consider the Ismailiyah outside the fold of Islam because they do not perform *salaah*, fast during the month of Ramadan, or perform the *hajj*, the Ismailiyah as a whole cannot be condemned as *kuffar*. The Nizari or followers of the Ghilani, who are approximately 90% of Ismailis, do indeed believe that the *shar'ah* has been abrogated.

Like some Sufi sects which believe Islamic law no longer applies, the Nizari are misguided and should be encouraged to mend their ways, complete the five daily prayers, fast in Ramadan, and perform the pilgrimage so as to integrate entirely into the Islamic Ummah. It should also be remembered that there are Twelver Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Sufis who do not pray, do not fast, do not eat *halal*, and commit all sorts of *haram*, insisting that faith is sufficient for their salvation.

Muslims should be careful to cast all Ismailis in the same light as the Musta'ali, and their off-chute the Dawood Bohras, who follow the Fatimid school of jurisprudence, all observe the *shar'ah* and are very close to Ja'fari jurisprudence in practice.

If there are any differences between Sunni, Shi'ite, 'Ibadi, and Sufi Muslims, they are relatively minor and revolve around aspects of religious practice. Muslims need to recognize and respect their tiny technical differences, remembering that jurisprudence is not a goal in and of itself but a means to a goal, namely, the remembrance of Almighty Allah. As important as proper observation of Islamic practices may be, far too many Muslims focus on the form of worship as opposed to the essence of worship.

Islamic unity certainly does not mean uniformity. It does not mean that all schools of *fiqh* [jurisprudence] should merge into one. It merely means that there is more than one "right way" to do things, that jurists have differences of opinion, based on different interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah, and different methodologies. Every ruling is "right" according to the jurist who derived it. Every opinion is "correct" depending on one's point of view.

All jurists agree on the issue, but they view the issue from a different perspective. One issue can be viewed as *haram*, *makruh*, and *halal* [permissible / reprehensible / forbidden]. In Islam, every issue can be seen from a 360 degree angle and there is ample room for a wide range of opinion.

Take the issue of consuming the meat of *ahl al-kitab* [People of the Book]. According to most Sunni

scholars, it is permissible for a Muslim to eat meat from animals slaughtered by Christians or Jews. They base themselves on the Qur'anic verse:

“The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them” (5:5).

Some Sunnī scholars say that while it is permissible to eat the meat of Christians and Jews, it is preferable to eat *halāl* meat if available. Yet other Sunnī scholars forbid the consumption of the meat of the Christians and Jews. They argue that the Christians and Jews of today are not truly “People of the Book,” that they no longer slaughter animals in the name of Allāh, which is a condition for the meat to be *halāl*, and that there is no guarantee that the meat in non-Muslim countries was even slaughtered by a Christian or a Jew.

It could easily have been slaughtered by a secular liberal, an agnostic, an atheist, a polytheist, a heathen, a Satanist, or other unbelievers. Twelver Shī'ite scholars have always been unanimous that the meat of Jews and Christians is *harām*. Their reason, however, is based on lexical hermeneutics. As we read in Mir Ahmed 'Alī translation of the Qur'an:

According to Imām Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sādiq the word *ṭaym* implies food made of grains not containing flesh of permitted animals. The Jews and the Christians do not follow the prescribed method of slaughtering the animals, nor do they seek Allāh's pleasure before killing the animal, therefore, to eat flesh of any animal offered by them is not lawful for the Muslims. “Whosoever denies the faith, his deeds will be rendered useless” clearly lays down the principle that good deeds cannot be of any use unless one believes in Allāh, His Messengers and guides appointed by Him, and the Day of Judgment.

According to Ayatullāh Pooya Yazdī: “This verse gives permission to the Muslims to eat the food (made of grains) offered by the people of the book.”

As can be seen, the Islāmic attitude towards the meat of Christians and Jews ranges from *halāl* to *makrūh* and *harām* opinions which are equally valid. Muslims, as *muqallidīn* of *mujtahidīn* [followers of jurists], are free to follow any of the rulings of their particularly *madhhab* [school of law] with confidence that they have acted correctly, complying with a valid interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

In many areas of Islāmic law differences of opinion are mainly differences of degree. These differences are a mercy and a blessing from Allāh. No Muslim is obliged to submit to one set of rulings. Each Muslim is free to follow the rulings of the *mujtahid* [jurist] of his choice, to leave the *taqlīd* [emulation] of one *faqīh* [jurist], and to commence the *taqlīd* of another he deems to be more learned. Since all people are different, they have different levels of *dīn* [religion], different levels of faith, and different levels of understanding. No Muslim is subjugated or coerced to act a certain way.

In the absence of *halāl* meat, a meat-loving Sunnī Muslim who cannot find meaningful sustenance out of salad is free to feed himself the meat of *ahl al-kitāb*. As Almighty Allāh says in the Holy Qur'an:

“No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear” (2:233).

For another Sunnī Muslim, being a part-time vegetarian while traveling in *dār al-kufr* [the land of the unbelievers] is not a hardship, and he may wish to abstain from the meat of *ahl al-kitāb*. Merely because one is stricter does not make one better as all actions are judged on intention, and Allāh judges all people according to their intellectual abilities.

As far as we are concerned, the arguments allowing the consumption of *ahl al-kitāb* meat are weak and the Shī'ite argument is the strongest. This does not mean that we wish to impose the Ja'farī ruling on others, nor does it imply disrespect to some of the Sunnī rulings. They are opinions we respect, but opinions we do not share. When a Salafī Shaykh was asked regarding Nāḥ Ha Mām Keller's belief that the references to the “hands” of Allāh mentioned in the Qur'ān (38:75; 48:10; 51:47) were figurative, representing the power of God, the Shaykh said that Allāh indeed has literal hands and anyone who said otherwise was a *kāfir* [infidel].

This is exactly the type of outrageous behavior that is unacceptable in Islām. If the Salafīyah wish to follow the Qur'ān literally, they have the freedom to do so. They do not, however, have the right to denounce others as unbelievers because they believe the Qur'ān contains allegorical and metaphorical meanings. It is clear that many Muslims need a lesson not only in moderation and tolerance, but in basic manners.

The role of Islāmic law is to set the limits of what is permitted and what is prohibited. When differences of opinion exist among Muslim jurists, it is the least restrictive ruling that becomes the law. If some *fuqahā'* [jurists] believe that women can show their faces and hands, and others believe that they must veil their faces, the most accommodating ruling becomes the law of the land, and veiling the face becomes an issue of personal choice.

Attempts of extremists in Afghanistan, Iraq, and abroad, to impose the most severe interpretation of the *shar'ah* have been detrimental to the public image of Islām, alienating Muslims and non-Muslims from the Islāmic religion. It should also be recalled that the implementation of the *shar'ah* by the Prophet was gradual and progressive, an example which must be emulated by any Muslim state.

The punishment for theft cannot be enforced until unemployment and poverty are eradicated. The punishment for adultery cannot be enforced until temptation has been eradicated through modesty and marriage. Proper conditions must exist for Islāmic punishments to be administered. The creation of socio-economic and spiritual justice is a necessary precursor to *shar'ah* law.

In closing, we would like to encourage all Muslims to unite on the basis of their common beliefs, remembering that unity does not imply uniformity. Muslims may come from various legal, theological, and philosophical traditions, but they are all one in the Oneness of God. Muslims must reject absolutist literalist attitudes and embrace a Universal Islām, becoming multi-dimensional Muslims far removed from the fundamentalist fallacy.

They need to embrace Islāmic pluralism and Islāmic diversity in accord with the Oneness of Allāh and the Qur'ānic message brought by the Messenger of Allāh, an Islām which includes rather than excludes, an Islām which enriches rather than impoverishes, a centrist, middle-road Islām (2: 143), which opposes extremism, for as Almighty Allāh says:

“Do not be excessive in your belief” (4: 165;5:81).

While Islām rejects religious relativism and exoteric religious pluralism, it does accept that all revealed religions share the same esoteric spirit. Whether its Judaism, Christianity or Islām, all revealed religions believe in One God, the Prophets, the Day of Judgment, and the Ten Commandments.

However, before Muslims can unite with Jews and Christians, they must unite with themselves, embracing Islām as a totality, accepting the entire Islāmic pie rather than a single piece. If the Europeans say: “All roads lead to Rome,” we say that “All roads lead to Allāh.” And this is precisely what the Prophet said: “The numbers of paths to Allāh is equal to the number of human souls.”

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