

# Opening Remarks: The Foundations of Islamic Unity

Considering the current Sunnī–Shi'ah conflict occurring in the Middle East, and much of the Muslim world, Luis Alberto Vittor's *Shi'ite Islam: 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 Shi'ite Islam does not reside in a denigration of Sunnī Islam**. Shi'ite Islam is great in and of itself. One does not need to criticize the Companions or the Caliphs to exalt the Twelve Imams. The Imams of *ahl al-bayt* are great in and of themselves. One does not need to criticize the Imams of the Sunnī schools of jurisprudence to exalt Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The Sixth Imam is great in and of himself, having left legions of scholars as a legacy.

Unlike some authors, who approach Shi'ite Islam from an apologetic perspective which seeks to appease Sunnī Muslims, Vittor approaches Shi'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 Shi'ite beliefs and practices and does not compromise on questions of principle. Unlike some overly enthusiastic authors, **Vittor does not exalt Shi'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 Shi'ism without Sunnism, and there would be no Sunnism without Shi'ism**.

When engaging in inter-Islamic dialogue, it is important to respect the sensibilities of one's target audience. In every instance, those who speak for Shi'ism should avoid negative marketing, which focuses on belittling one's adversary, as opposed to positive marketing, which focuses on the qualities of your candidate. Extremist sources which attack *ahl al-sunnah* only serve to drive Sunnīs away from Shi'ite Islam. As such, **casting doubt on the character of the Prophet's Companions in order to replace them with the Twelve Imams is a misguided effort of marketing**.

The Imams themselves criticized such comportment. Rather than make value judgments, it is often

better to allow the historical sources to speak for themselves. Rather than attacking individuals and beliefs, Shī‘ites should speak exclusively about the Prophet, citing the Qur’ānic verses and *ahādīth* in favor of the *ahl al-bayt*. Presented properly, by means of an intelligent, tolerant, and respectful approach, the Shī‘ite message is sure to have greater resonance among Sunnī Muslims.

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 Islamic history. Once a person is open to the divine authority, everything else will fall into place, and then, and only then, are individuals interested in Shī‘ism ready to deal with Tījan’s informative works. 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* 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-ḥadiq has said, “This affair (*amr*) [the Imāmate and the esoteric meaning of religion] is occult (*mastūr*) and veiled (*muqanna‘*) by a covenant (*mīthaq*), 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 *ahl al-bayt*. As Imām Ja‘far al-ḥadiq 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... Whoever 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... It 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-ḥadiq 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-ḥadiq 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 Emirate is a matter of opinion” (ḥadīq). 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” (ḥadīq). On one occasion, Zakariyyā ibn Sībīq was enumerating the Imāms in the presence of Imām Ja‘far al-ḥadiq.

When the Companion reached the name of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the Imām interrupted him and said,

“That is enough for you. Allāh has affirmed your tongue and has guided your heart” (Kulayn). The Imām also said that **“Verily, diplomacy (*al-riʿā*) with a true believer is a form of *shirk* (polytheism); but with a hypocrite in his own house, it is worship”** (ʿad). These traditions are not saying that Shīʿite 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 in order to avoid provocation and enmity.

**Rather than promote division and conflict, Imām Jaʿfar al-ʿadīq urged Shīʿites 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” (ʿad). The Imām also encouraged Shīʿites to treat Sunnis as their brethren: “Visit their sick, attend their funerals, and pray in their mosques” (ʿad). Since the improper behavior of followers reflects poorly on their leader, the Imām told his followers to “Become an ornament for us, and not a disgrace” (ʿad). He also called upon his Shīʿites to encourage goodwill 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” (ʿad). This Shīʿite spirit of Islamic unity was shown by ʿAlīmah Sharīf al-Dīn al-Musawī who ruled that the Shīʿites of Lebanon should celebrate the birth of the Prophet on the same day as the Sunnis. Imām Khumaynī took this a step further by declaring the entire week, from the Monday to the Friday, as Islamic Unity week.

In twenty years of Islamic activism, we have observed that works like *al-Murajaʿat* by ʿAlīmah al-Miswā, which are calm, courteous, gentle, and convincing, are far more effective than caustic criticism. We have also found that **the most effective tools in Shīʿite *daʿwah* are the works of the Imāms themselves**, *Nahj al-balaghah* by Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the *ʿaḥfah al-sajadiyyah* by Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿAbidīn, the *Lantern of the Path* by Imām Jaʿfar al-ʿadīq, as well as other biographical books such as *The Book of Guidance* by Shaykh al-Mufīd, which demonstrate the depth of knowledge of the Imāms, as well as their profound wisdom, and piety.

Many Shīʿite Muslims would be well advised to live what they learn, to exhibit the true characteristics of followers of *ahl al-bayt*, to live according to Islām, and to lead by example. **The best converts to Shīʿite Islām never received a book. They were moved by the piety of Shīʿite Muslims, and their devout love and attachment to the Prophet and his family.** It should also be understood that the formal spreading of Islām is *wajīb kifāyah*; it is the obligation of certain members of the community, and should be left to the knowledgeable, competent, and qualified. The Prophet and the Imāms warned us not to argue with the ignorant. In order to ensure that Islām was rightly represented the Twelve Imāms 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-Qurʾānic. 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 Allah, lest wrongfully they revile Allah through ignorance” (6:108). **If Muslims must not mock 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 Shites 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. 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-Shite 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” (Mufid). Without a judge or moderator to keep parties disciplined, Sunni-Shite 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 Shite communities.

The very idea of “debate” between Sunnis and Shites 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 nearly 1,500 years. **The very idea of Sunni-Shite debate should be cast aside and replaced by inter-Islamic dialogue.**

In order for Shites 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, Shite, Sunni, and Ibadis, must cease cursing Companions of the Prophet and cursing one another as such actions merely increase animosity. We have witnessed Salafis insult Fatimah, ‘Ali, Hasan, and Husayn; Sunni Muslims insult the *ahl al-bayt*, Twelver Shites insult the Sunni Caliphs, Ismailis insult Imam Musa al-Kadhim, Rafis insult Sunnis, and Ibadis insult Imam ‘Ali. Surely, such behavior must cease from all sides. As Imam Ja‘far al-‘adiq warned: “Do not revile them, lest they revile your ‘Ali” (‘adiq). What

goes around comes around, and it is time for a truce if not a treaty of perpetual peace.

As any historian of early Islam is aware, the Companions of the Prophet had their differences, cursed each other, and killed each other. Surely, the sounds 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. There is no need to express them openly in contexts that arouse undue emotion. When it comes to some matters, **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 Islamic 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 Sunnīs 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 need to be recognized. Both have wronged and 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 values and beliefs that they hold in common.

When outsiders look at Islam, 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:

**Tawḥīd: Oneness of God**

**Nubuwwah/Risālah: Prophethood and Messengership**

**Kutub: Divinely Revealed Books**

**Malā'ikah: Angels**

**Qiyāmah: The Day of Judgement**

**Qadar: Predestination**

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

**Shahādah: Profession of Faith**

**Ṣalāh: Prayer**

**Ṣawm: Fasting in Ramaḍān**

**Ḥajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah**

**Zakāh: Alms**

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

**Uḥūd al-dīn**

**Tawḥīd: Oneness of God**

**‘Adl: Divine Justice**

**Nubuwwah/Risālah: Prophethood and Messengership**

**Imāmah/Wilāyah: Imāmate or Guardianship**

**Qiyāmah: Day of Judgement**

**Furḡ al-dīn**

**Ṣalāh: Prayer**

**Ṣawm: Fasting in Ramaḡān**

**Ḥajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah**

**Zakāh: Alms**

**Khums: Alms**

**Jihād: Struggle**

**Amr bi al-ma‘rūf: Promoting good**

**Nah‘ an al-munkar: Forbidding evil**

**Tawallū: Attachment to ahl al-bayt**

**Tabarrū: Separation from the enemies of ahl al-bayt**

For all intents and purpose, 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 Ḥanafī 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:

**Wilayah: Guardianship**

**Ahrah: Purity**

**alah: Prayer**

**Zakah: Alms**

**awm: Fasting in Ramadan**

**hajj: Pilgrimage to Makkah**

**Jihad: Struggle**

‘Ibadiyyah theologians have organized their beliefs into the following Five Pillars:

**Tawhid: Oneness of God**

**‘Adl: Divine Justice**

**Qadar: Predestination**

**Wilayah/Tabarr: Attachment to Muslims and separation from infidels**

**Amr/Nah: Promoting good and forbidding evil; implementing the Imamate when possible**

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

**Tawhid: Oneness of God**

**Nubuwwah/Risalah: Prophets and Messengers**

**Qiyamah: The Day of Judgement**

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

The ‘Ibadiyyah and some of the Sunnis adds *qadar* or predestination to their articles of faith while other groups insist on free will. Along with Shi’ite groups, the ‘Ibadiyyah focus on *‘adl* or divine justice, whereas some of the Sunnis insist on *qadir* or omnipotence. This difference is the result of philosophical differences in which the Sunnis stress Allah’s Omnipotence over His Justice, while the Shi’ites stress Allah’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 *tawḥīd*, he is outside the fold of Islam. If a Muslim does not believe that Muḥammad is the Final Messenger of Allāh, he is outside the fold of Islam. If a Muslim does not believe in angels or in the Day of Judgement, he is outside the fold of Islam. 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 ‘Ibādiyyah all believe in *imāmah* although their chains of Imāms are different as are their qualities, attributes, and qualifications. In many respects, the Shā‘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, Shā‘ite, and even Ḥanafī Muslims believe in some form of religious authority, both spiritual and political, which should rule the Ummah and establish the *shar‘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 Judgement. They all believe in angels and revealed books. They all pray, fast, make the pilgrimage to Makkah, and pay charity. Although the Sunnīs do not list *khums*, the 20% tithe, *jihad*, promoting the good and forbidding evil, in their creed, all Sunnīs accept these as religious obligations. Although the Nizārī 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 Sunnī loves and blesses the Prophet and his Family. Evidently, every true Muslim follows the *shar‘ah*, be he Sunnī, ‘Ibādī, Shā‘ah Ithnā ‘Asharī, Shā‘ah Ismā‘īlī, Shā‘ah Zaydī, or Ḥanafī.

Although most Sunnīs and many Twelver Shā‘ites consider all the Ismā‘īliyyah outside the fold of Islam based on the erroneous belief that they all fail to perform *sa‘dah*, fast during the month of Ramaḥḥān, or perform the *hajj*, the Ismā‘īliyyah as a whole cannot all be condemned as *kuffār*.

The Nizārī or followers of the Ḥaghī Khān, who are approximately 90% of Ismā‘īlīs, do indeed believe that the *shar‘ah* has been abrogated. Like some Ḥanafī sects which believe Islamic law no longer applies, the Nizārī are misguided and, in many regards, outside the fold of Islam. Still, as they profess the *shahādah*, they should be encouraged to mend their ways, complete the five daily prayers, fast in Ramaḥḥān, and perform the pilgrimage in order to integrate entirely into the Islamic Ummah.

It should also be remembered that there are Twelver Shā‘ites, Sunnīs, and Ḥanafīs who do not pray, do not fast, do not eat *sa‘dah*, and commit all sorts of *ḥarām*, insisting that faith is sufficient for their salvation. Muslims should be careful to cast all Ismā‘īlīs in the same light as the Aghī–Khānīs since the Musta‘alī and their off–chute the Dāwūdī Bohras, who follow the Fāḥimīd school of jurisprudence, all observe the *shar‘ah* and are very close to the Ithnā ‘Asharī in belief and to Ja‘farī jurisprudence in practice.

If there are any differences between Sunnī, Shā‘ite, ‘Ibādī, and Ḥanafī Muslims, they are relatively minor and revolve around aspects of religious practice. Muslims need to recognize and respect their tiny

technical differences. They need to remember that jurisprudence is not a goal in and of itself but a means to a goal, namely, the remembrance of Almighty Allāh. 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, and that jurists have differences of opinion, based on different interpretations of the Qur’ān and Sunnah and on 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 *ḥalāl*, *makrūh*, and *ḥalāl* [forbidden / reprehensible / permissible]. In Islām, 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-kitāb* [People of the Book]. According to most Sunnī scholars, it is permissible for a Muslim to eat meat from animals slaughtered by Christians or Jews. They base themselves on the Qur’ānic 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 *ḥalāl* 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 *ḥalāl*, and that there is no guarantee that the meat in non-Muslim countries was even slaughtered by a Christian or a Jew. A secular liberal, an agnostic, an atheist, a heathen, a Satanist or another unbeliever may easily have slaughtered the animal. And rather than having its throat slit in the name of Allāh, it was likely killed incorrectly through an electric bolt, a gunshot, a blow to the head, a spike to the brain, a knife to the back of the skull, toxic gas or other brutal methods.

Twelver Shī‘ite scholars have always been unanimous that the meat of Jews and Christians is *ḥarām*. The reason for this position is lexical hermeneutics. As we read in Mir Aḥmed ‘Alī translation of the Qur’ān:

According to Imām Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥadiq the word *ḥarām* 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 Muslims. “Whosoever denies 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 Judgement.

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 Islamic attitude towards the meat of Christians and Jews ranges from *ḥalāl* to *makrūh* and *ḥarām*, which are all equally valid opinions. As *muqallid* of *mujtahid* [followers of jurists], Muslims 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 Qurʾān and Sunnah.

In many areas of Islamic 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 the most learned. Since all people are different, they have different levels of *dīn* [religion], different levels of faith, and different levels of understanding. There is no coercion when it comes to conforming to certain rulings.

In the absence of *ḥalāl* 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 Qurʾān, “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. Allāh judges actions according to intentions and judges all people according to their intellectual abilities. As far as we are concerned, the arguments allowing the consumption of *ahl al-kitāb*’s meat are weak and the Shīʿite argument is the strongest. This does not mean that we wish to impose the Jaʿfarī 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 about Nāḥiyya M. Keller’s belief that the references to the “hands” of Allāh mentioned in the Qurʾān (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 says otherwise is a *kāfir* [infidel]. This is exactly the type of outrageous behavior that is unacceptable in Islām.

**If the Salafiyyah wish to follow the Qurʾān literally, they have the freedom to do so. They do not, however, have the right to denounce others as unbelievers because they believe the Qurʾān contains allegorical and metaphorical meanings.** Not only do Muslims need a lesson in moderation and tolerance, they need a lesson in basic manners.

The role of Islamic law is to set the limits of the permitted and the prohibited. When differences of opinion exist among Muslim jurists, it is the least restrictive ruling that becomes the law. If some *fuqahāʾ* [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 Islam, alienating Muslims and non-Muslims from the Islamic 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 should not be enforced until unemployment and poverty are eradicated. The punishment for adultery should not be enforced until temptation has been eradicated through modesty and marriage. **Proper conditions need to exist for Islamic 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 Islam, becoming multi-dimensional Muslims far removed from the fundamentalist fallacy. They need to embrace Islamic pluralism and Islamic diversity in accord with the Oneness of Allah and the Qur’anic message brought by the Messenger of Allah, an Islam which includes rather than excludes, an Islam which enriches rather than impoverishes, a centrist, middle-road Islam (2: 143), which opposes extremism, for as Almighty Allah says, “Do not be excessive in your belief” (4: 165; 5:81).**

While Islam rejects religious relativism and exoteric religious pluralism, it does accept that all revealed religions share the same esoteric spirit. Whether it is Judaism, Christianity or Islam, all revealed religions believe in One God, the Prophets, the Day of Judgement, and the Ten Commandments. However, **before Muslims can unite socio-politically with the true *ahl al-kitab*, they must unite with themselves, embracing Islam as a totality, accepting the entire Islamic pie rather than a single slice. If the Europeans say, “All roads lead to Rome,” we say, “All roads lead to Allah,” and this is precisely what the Qur’an teaches: *Tawhid* is one, but the number of paths to Allah is equal to the number of human souls.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. Author’s Note: For a series of studies addressing this subject, see: Morrow, John Andrew “The Image of the Road in Islamic Literature.” Proceedings from the Image of the Road Conference. Eds. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan. Pueblo: SSSI, Colorado State U–Pueblo, 2005: 329–336; Morrow, John Andrew “Arabic Instruction in France: Pedagogy or Politics?” Humanities Journal 4:6 (2006): 17–24; Morrow, John Andrew “The Persian Alphabet in Peril.” Iran Daily (May 27th, 2006): 2; Morrow, John Andrew “La enseñanza de idiomas y la política exterior.” Revista Cultural Ariadna (April 2004); “Language Study as an Indicator of Foreign Policy.” Iran Daily (Dec. 7th, 2004); “Amoo Sam beh madreseh miravad: Defense Language Institute Program as an Indicator of U.S. Foreign Policy” (Dec. 7th, 2004) Iranian.; Morrow, John Andrew “El idioma árabe en camino de convertirse en un arma contra el Islam.” Revista Cultural Ariadna (Oct. 2003).

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