

Islamic Theology of the 21st Century Enlightened Islam

Fundamental Aspects of Islam: To Provide Guidance in Topical Questions

**Introduction I
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Fundamental Aspects of Islam: To Provide Guidance in Topical Questions

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Editor's Introduction

1. Religion and Belief

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that in order to build and develop human relationships more knowledge and understanding about religion in general, and Islam in particular, is necessary.

There is no substitute for the motivation that religion provides to achieve a better coexistence between human beings, animals, and nature. However, achieving such harmonious relations will also require efforts to further the development of the religion of Muslims and of others.

Indeed, the spirit of our humanity finds substance and satisfaction through the visions of faith. Because our mortal lives have a beginning and an end, the perspectives provided by our physical existence have their limits. In order to overcome these limits, we require the dimensions of faith. The collective experience of humankind demonstrates that religion has been and continues

to be an elementary part of human existence, although, naturally, our relationship with religion differs on an individual basis and differs across time.

Faith makes us strong and supports us with the kind of hope that offers a connection to the mystery of the infinite. Faith is essential for the elevation of a person from the banal and in order to control ones impulses which feeds from our instincts, aggression and intelligence.

On the other hand belief and religion lead without scale and critical instance to an irregular amorality i.e. to extremes.

Although science is an integrated component of Islamic religious philosophy and the Koranic path unites reason, knowledge and the message of belief, the disciplines and methods of natural and social science have not found their way much into general theology. Theology remained quite untouched by the clearing impulse of the term "factor ratio," which has grown through progress and learning. In any case, this is the reflected picture of the majority of today's Muslims towards Islam.

Therefore, there is a need for individual and institutional engagement in order to raise awareness of religion's scope, its positive message, and its positive content.

Every religion has norms and conventions. What we choose to emphasize about a religion, and how we rank its different aspects, depends upon our degree of knowledge and on our opinion. A healthy dose of common sense is indispensable in spiritual matters, just as it is in earthly matters.

It is quite human that our thinking and doing, regarding us and others, is very much influenced by clichés. Our interests and endeavours should be to dig deeper underneath the surface. Only thusly do we gain understanding about the mechanisms behind anything and acquire evidence about them.

In the vacuum after the era of the cold war and political ideologies religion has advanced. A political Islam presence has obtruded: Islamism. Based on a war- and state theology which has grown out of the trauma of colonial time, Islamism promotes Islamic fascism and totalitarianism. This is a wrong development and a threat for all of us.

Koranic Islam, by contrast, is based on believing; or stated more precisely, it is based on faith, prayer, and ethics. That is the original purpose, reason, and aim of religion according to Islam. The sayings of the Koran and their interpretation are not arbitrary. Koranic exegesis follows certain rules. These

rules shall be presented following a short introduction to Islam. Additionally the issue of legal order in Islam discusses further questions which must be answered in a pluralistic society.

2. Islam - The Denomination of God

He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. His are the Beautiful Names; whatever is in the heavens and on earth glorifies Him. He is the Almighty, the Wise. (Koran 59:24)

We have sent to you (Mohammed) a revelation, as We sent revelations to Noah and the prophets after him. And We sent revelations to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes; and to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon; and to David We gave a Book. [We sent forth] some messengers We have already told you of, and some We have not told you of... (Koran 4:163-164)

All God's messengers have brought one religion. And it is this religion - the surrender to God (Islam). And I am your God, so arise only to me. (Koran 21:92)

Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. (Koran 2:136)

These clear messages in Koran do not need much further explanations. They are clear and basic in the aspect of what Islam, Islamic belief and religion means - the belief in the one God “surrendering oneself to God, and, besides, doing good deeds, “ (Koran 4:125).

The development of humankind due to the diversification of scientific achievements and due to the civilizing disposal has complicated our requirements of and relationship to religion, God, faith, and Islam in general. Simply listing of commandments or enumerating Islam's pillars and articles of faith does not provide answers to essential questions. The arguments and explanations of former centuries don't necessarily meet today's criteria and

demands. More differentiated views – tempered by logic, reason, science, and the criteria of our times – are necessary to reflect and reproduce the Koran in the sense of its foremost interpreter, Mohammed.

The Koran is a book of guidance, a book of faith, a book in which God communicates and reveals himself. Over 90% of the Koran's sayings point out the truths of the faith in different ways and illustrate them. The Koran is explanation and interpretation of creation and an exhibition of the sense of all existence and a display concerning these aspects and dimensions. Four main topics of Koran can be summarized. These are, that there is just one God, that there will be a life after death, a resurrection of life and the end of days, that God has charged certain human beings to be His envoys; and prayer (*Ibadet, Ibada*), including the principles of justice and mercy for people. These are the same topics which all of God's envoys have marked out. The Koran confirms them, reminds us of what has been lost and forgotten, builds upon it, and completes it.

Let's allow ourselves to embark on a mental journey into the past to the beginning of humankind, in order to compare the way things were in those days with human society as we find it today. As Muslims, we believe in Adam as the first human being and the first of God's envoys. In the past, a few indications about prayer, about acknowledgement of the creator, and a handful of commandments were enough to ensure general harmony in human life. Since then, humankind has undergone continuous development in all aspects of life; nevertheless, our needs, as human beings, have remained the same as they once were. Due to the increasing size of various societies and the diversity of peoples which scattered themselves and developed in isolation, many messengers of God have emerged, in accordance with the verse of the Koran which states, "And We let from the middle of every community an envoy rise." (Koran 16:36) and the verse, "We will call to account only those who have received the knowledge about Us." (Koran 17:15)

All of God's messengers have followed the same path, have made the same demands, and have emphasized the same themes. What was said by one prophet was not negated by another prophet. In one *hadith* Mohammed¹ states that all prophets were like brothers who shared a common father, yet

¹ Bukhari

had different mothers. He also says that they are united and only differ in some detail, and that all religions are of one God. The difference in some details is rooted in the state of development and civilisation of each people. Due to this it was necessary that the requirements and rules of religion were suited to the life circumstances and the general level of society. Moreover it was necessary to change or to broaden those rules during the changing times. During the two decades of his activity, Mohammed's main message was this: "People, there is one God and creator. Believe in Him. I do not tell you something new. I am just confirming what my predecessors have said. Save your eternal happiness. Testify the one God."

The fundamental task of Mohammed as somebody, who confirms, reminds, completes and broadens the teachings of the past, can be seen in many different passages of Koran, like for example:

He has revealed the Book to you in truth, confirming what came before it; and He has revealed the Torah and the Gospel, as a guidance to humankind. He has also revealed the Criterion ... (Koran 3:3-4)

This Koran could never have been created but by God. It is a confirmation of that [which was revealed] before it and an exposition of the Book... (Koran 10:37)

Islam acknowledges all revelations.

In the Koran God gives us a definition about himself so that human intelligence is more able to understand. The belief in God is the most important aspect of Islam, the all-determining foundation.

The original purpose of existence, according to Islam, is the cognition and acknowledgement of God and the feeling of gratitude towards God which results from this.

The consequence of the acknowledgement and the gratitude towards God lies in the respecting of the commandment, to do good things in life and to reject doing evil things. Here true gratitude towards God is based in love towards our fellow men and women.

Religion- according to Islam- is the advice of God to the thinking people.

Each individual is free to decide whether or not to believe. The world is a place where we are tested, and freedom is a fundamental precondition for such testing as well as a precondition of faith.

3. The Koran and Its Key for Understanding

Praise be to God, who revealed to His servant the Book in which nothing is included what is distant from correctness (which is free of all obliquity). (Koran 18:1)

Easy have We made the Koran to understand: Is there, then, any one who will understand? (Koran 54:40)

There was the Book of Moses before this, a guide and a mercy; and here is this Book confirming it in (Arabic) tongue, dissuading those who (do wrong), and giving happy tidings to those who do good deeds. (Koran 46:12)

The Koran is accessible to everybody; everybody can read in it and can benefit from it. However, the text often does not disclose itself so easily.

In order to achieve a better, objective understanding of the Koran one ought to heed several points when approaching the text.

Some Koran verses are ambiguous or the meaning is not clear at first sight. Since the outset, advice and differentiated information in general and on the aspects and questions of their time have been gathered by Islamic scholars on these passages in the Koran.

At this point it should be mentioned that there are different assessments between the Sunnite and Shiite schools.

To be able to form a healthy judgment and in acquiring proper knowledge one must know the criteria which applies in the Koran exegesis. The clarification about the exposure to certain Koran verses is also the way which prevents abuse.

In consideration of religious matters, each era has its main focuses. The answers associated with one era or another were usually provided by Islamic thinkers who enjoyed recognition in the Islamic world for their comprehensive knowledge and sharp minds. Consequently, such thinkers play also a key role in contemporary interpretation of the Koran.

Indeed, though the basic principles of religion are timeless, as humanity's knowledge grows, some religious statements acquire new, multilayered meaning.

Unfortunately, it is tradition to carry out social grievances and power interests over religion. Thus Koran verses also played a role on the

spearheads during the first Internal-Islamic war between the Muslims Muawiye and Caliph Ali.

3.1. Forms of Interpretation

For a Muslim the Koran is God's revealed word, a prayer book, a continual request for goodness, mercy, justice and prayer.

In this country, however, quite a different image of Islam and another perception of the Koran often prevail, reinforced by the terrorism debate. In relation to this picture, certain verses from the Koran are often quoted which are unknown in this form to many Muslims and which they do not accept in such a way.

It is obvious that because of these insinuations, conspiracy theories, on the other hand, find fertile ground. It requires skill to be able to reply to these problems. If one deals more thoroughly with the aforementioned Koran passages, and in addition reads the different Koran comments and explanations, the sense and the contexts become clear. For example, there is the oft-quoted Koranic verse 47:4.

In Paret's German translation (formulated in English) we can read:

"When ye meet (on a campaign) the unbelievers, strike them on the nape (with your sword)! Once you have completely defeated them, lay (them) in chains, in order (to release them) later by pardon or for ransom! (Swing your sword) until the war has released (you) of its weight (giving way to peace)!"

Additionally Henning's German translation (formulated in English):

"When ye meet the unbelievers, down with the head, until you have arranged a slaughter among them; then lace the bonds. And then either mercy afterwards or redemption, until the war has laid down its loads."

This version already contains a contradiction in itself: first down with their heads, then the choice - either mercy or ransoming!

What is really meant by this verse? At first sight, this Koranic verse contradicts countless other Koranic passages and the Koran's principles regarding dealings and encounters with others; by paying attention to the other passages, this verse can be relativized, and from there it is possible to find an objective approach which results in a correct translation.

In today's speech, the obvious meaning of this Koranic verse would be:

“If you find yourself at war, then fight as long as it takes to defeat your enemies. Once you have taken them prisoner, release them either out of mercy or for ransom. Act thusly – mercy or ransom – until the war is finished.”

A word-by-word reproduction and transferal is impossible. Every language has words, phrases, and nuances of meaning for which there are no equivalents in another language. However, every translation must take pains to maintain the appropriate sense of a given word or phrase. Hence, in correspondence with each other, Islamic scholars have said of Koranic translation:

Those which one calls translations are in reality recapitulatory and incomplete explanations. Between them and the true, life-bringing verses, whose meanings encompass various branching out beside the visible sense, no parity can exist.

In the aforementioned Koranic verse a concrete event was addressed, to which the verse was revealed. The reflection to the future or to the present is a question of interpretation. In the interpretation certain valid rules should always be followed, so that the interpretation does not dwell on speculations. The interpretation must be correspondent in all its facets with the forever principles

pursuit of peace, mercy, justice

– which are independent of place, time and society – additionally it must be concerned with knowledge, logic and reason. All commentaries on the Koran and any exegeses must begin with Mohammed a.s.v.; must consider any event relevant to the appearance of the revelation (historical background); must consider it in relation to all other Koranic verses on the same subject (context), and, moreover, must consider how Mohammed himself behaved thereafter. Mohammed is the first interpreter of the Koran; following him, in order of authority, come the Sahabin², who were Mohammed's fellow

² On account of their authenticity, their direct connection (i.e. the fact that they themselves experienced Mohammed a.s. directly, and because of their great service on behalf of the faith), the circle of acquaintances known as the Sahabin

companions, and then those (generation) who preceded the Sahabin, i.e., the Taabin. Areas for details and temporary adaptations, various gaps between the Koran, the Sunnah, the Sahabin and Taabin, are filled by the Islamic Schools – beside their function of the arrangement, classification, categorisation etc.

With this sequence the priorities are also given how they are obligingly positioned for the religion and Koran interpretation. There is no ambiguity.

There are two types of interpretation of the Koran. In one case, one may seek to explain the meaning of the words and sentences contained in the Koran. The interpretations of Hamdi Yazır and Ömer Nasuhi fit in this category. The other type of interpretation explains the religious truth of the Koran with understandable arguments and logical proofs and displays a treatise of the essence of the faith, of which the *Risale-i Nur* of Said Nursi is the modern, most significant interpretation.

3.2. The Criteria of Koranic Exegesis

Fundamentalists and Islamists are often described as those who take the Koran word for word. The opposite is the case.³ They are masters of perverting, omitting, and qualifying those passages and statements unsuitable to their ideology and worldview. No notice of the whole context is taken. Everything is adapted to their ideology.

Thus, above all, verse 44 of the Sura 5 "... Whoever does not judge according to what God has revealed – those are the unbelievers"⁴ is often quoted by politically oriented Islamist groups and is used as a base of their ideology and for their fight and their refusal of constitutions, laws, forms of government

follow Mohammed a.s. as the highest authorities on Islam. They are placed before the Islamic Schools.

³ Cf. "... those who have got stuck in the Koran and the Sunnah with the meaning of single words according to the dictionary and have not understood their actual sense." Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyati, Divan Harb-i Örfi*, p. 1934.

⁴ The occasion of this revelation was a group of Jews coming to Mohammed in order to ask him to solve a dispute in their favor. As a result, verses 42-47 of Sura 5 were revealed.

and state, economic systems etc. which, in their opinion, are not in line with this verse.

The first interpreter of this verse Ibnī Abbas, both Sahābin and cousin of Mohammed a.s., sums up:

"The verse is to be understood in the sense of: 'Those who do not recognise who do not believe what God has revealed, these are the disbelievers.' "

According to Ikrim⁵ this passage should also be interpreted in this sense. Accordingly after comparison Fahreddin Razi highlights this interpretation as most excellent in his large commentary on the Koran. With it Sunnite scholars have defined unequivocal meaning.

Today contemporary Islam thinkers like Said Nursi ⁶ recall it, whereas the mentors of political Islamism like Sayyid Qutb, Hasan al Banna or Maududi absent themselves here from the right measure in understanding of this verse which appears in the commentary on the Sahābin.

By way of illustration, Sayyid Qutb comments on the verse as follows: "Whosoever judges on a basis other than that of divine revelation, that individual denies God his divinity, for the privilege of judicial legislation belongs to the divine. Thus, that person also denies, on the one hand, Allah's divinity and rights, and on the other hand, he or she ascribes such divinity and rights to him or herself. Whatsoever would represent unbelief, if not this?"⁷

Which way opens up, if the right measure is not laid to the right understanding. Sense and purpose are steered in wrong paths.

⁵ Ikrim, son of Ebu Dschehil, fought many years against Mohammed and against Islam, later, however, he confessed and gained respect and great merits in Islam. He is counted among the Sahābin.

⁶ See e.g. p. 1955, *Münazarat, Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı 2*,

⁷ *Die Bedeutung des Korans*, Band 1, Sure Al-Ma'ida 44, SKD Bavaria Verlag, München.

4. The Exclusion of Others?

"Those Who Believe in God Will Not Be Sad..."

The adherents of every religion have the right to see themselves as the only ones in the true faith. When, however, they deny others their faith, discredit them as unbelievers, as candidates for hell and as worthless, or see them as adversaries, then this is unacceptable for an open society.

The dealing with the classification "unbelieving" is an essential question which more than ever today needs an open clarifying and a vehement correction.

The stance adopted by quite a lot of Muslims – i.e., looking down upon dissenters or people of other faiths and categorizing them as unbelievers – is one of the causes of negative stereotypes, susceptibility to violence, and the potential for confrontation and conflict. Such behavior cannot, however, be justified with the Koran. Indeed, twice in the Koran it is stated (Sura 2:62 and Sura 5:69):

Those who believe, those who belong to Judaism, the Christians and the Sabians – any who believe in God and the Last Day and do what is right, shall have their reward with their Lord; and they will have nothing to fear and they will not be sad. (Koran 2:62)

All those who believe, and the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians, indeed all those who believe in God and the Last Day, and perform good deeds, will have nothing to fear and will not be sad. (Koran 5:69)

Of those who are believers and who belong to one of the faiths, the Koran states:

... those who hold fast to God and are sincere to God in their religion. They shall count among the believers. And God will grant the believers a mighty reward. Why should God chastise you if you are grateful and believe? Nay, it is God that recogniseth (all good), and knoweth all things. (Koran 4, 146-147)

These verses are clear and unequivocal. Taken together with other verses about Christians, Jews, and others who believe, a differentiated, harmonious, and acknowledging picture emerges that cannot be brushed aside.

Despite such evidence, ignorant individuals may tersely claim that such Koranic statements concern believers before Mohammed; the false conclusion that such an argument would inhere – i.e. that the Koran was revealed on behalf of the past and not as a guide for the future – apparently doesn't cross their mind.

4.1. Friendship Between Believers of Different Views

Another example of a Koran verse which discloses itself only in context, and which was (and is) often stated by Islam critics is verse 51 of the sura 5 "Do not take the Christians and Jews for friends... "

Its right understanding is extremely relevant for the construction, the forming and linking of trusting relations. The verse clears itself in the whole consideration of other criteria and statements in Islam, because:

"A decree must be flawlessly substantiated and its argumentation must not only be definitive, it must also be possible to clearly discern what its evidence points to." As this is not the case with verse 51 of the Sura Al Maide, it is necessary to employ informed interpretation in order to understand it. This prohibition in the Koran applies not in general, it is limited. If something is limited, then one can determine, according to necessity, its borders. And in this case, time solves this task in the best way. When time presents its evidence, it is impossible to contradict. For every century there is a different angle on a given verse.

If a judgment is based on a derivation, the cause of the judgment shows the spring of the derivation.

This particular ban refers to certain Jewish and Christian rites and consumptive practices⁸ which do not correspond with Islam.

Moreover, a person is loved not because of his religious affiliation, but because of his or her love, his or her (co-)humanity, his or her characteristics, abilities and talents.

The characteristics of a Muslim must not always be Muslim and also the characteristics and talents of a person of a different religion not always need

⁸ E.g. the consumption of alcohol.

be bad. Consequently, why should it not be good to praise and copy good characteristics and talents.

Furthermore, surely everyone loves and honors his or her husband or wife, even if she or he has another religious affiliation. Besides, such a permitted relationship is more than friendship.⁹

The historical backgrounds at the time of the revelation of the verse must be taken into consideration. The contacts and friendship in our time do not lie in the area of this verse, however, it would, however, by all means be possible.

In that age of the prophet a huge change took place. The whole attention, thinking, feelings, and life in the everyday life concentrated on religion. All sympathetic consideration and aversion went out from the religion. Hence, the affection for non-Muslims was referred to a possible betrayal.

In today's world the changes and transformations are remarkably civilisation-conditioned and worldly.

The feelings and thoughts of people and their intellect are dominated by the viewpoint of technology, the economy and science formed lifestyles and their advancement. Indeed, the people have an opener connection and attitude towards their religion.

Consequently, we make friends with them to follow suit in their progress and to preserve the peace and the security which are indispensable for the well-being of the world. A friendship of this kind falls in no way under the Koranic prohibition."¹⁰

Today the question of whether to be a friend or not does not apply any more. The necessity to come together and to co-operate is evident, in particular in our pluralistic societies of today. In order to reach common goals, stand up for peace and justice, and coexist in harmony, it is crucial that we establish connections and build friendships independent of our religious affiliation or respective worldview.

⁹ Cf. Beyza Bilgin in her expert's assessment to Christian-Muslim partnerships, 31.07.1995, Prof. Dr., theological faculty of Ankara.

¹⁰ Said Nursi, in 1911, *Risale-i Nur Külliyati*, vol. 2, *Münazarat*, p. 1944.

4.2. What Is the Meaning of Islam? What Does It Mean to Be a Muslim?

Islam refers, on the one hand, to the religion based on the revelation of the Koran. And on the other hand there is the Koranic definition of Islam, which is universal in nature and encompasses everything that went before it. In the Koran everybody, who believes in God is in Islam and is called Muslim. A few examples beside the already mentioned Koran verses at the beginning are:

... who completely dedicates himself God and, besides, is upright, has his reward with his Lord. These have to fear nothing, and they will not be sad. (Koran 2:112)

And who has a more beautiful religion than one who dedicates himself God completely and is upright, besides, and follows the faith of Abraham, as a follower of the pure faith? And God has taken Abraham as confidant from himself. (Koran 4:125)

... Whosoever believes in God and does good deeds, He will admit for eternity into paradise. (Koran 65:11)

And strive for God as you ought to strive. He elected you, and did not impose on you any hardship in religion – the faith of your father Abraham. He named you Muslims earlier and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people. (Koran 22:78)

Thus the verse "See, the religion with God is Islam (the surrender in God)." (3:19) also stands in another light, as if this statement is quoted and used in isolation and detachment by all. The position in the Koran is rather unequivocal that other believers cannot be excluded of the faith with the Koran verse 3:19.

The already mentioned is likewise valid for verse 85 of sura Al Imran (3): "Whoever seeks a religion other than the surrender to God (Islam), it will never be accepted by him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers." In the previous Koran verses the extent of being (in) Islam is recognisable. If one leaves Islam, he limits himself, excludes one or another, i.e. he does a backward step.

For the decision to believe is left open to everyone according to 18:29 “So believe if you like, or do not believe if you will.” and everybody is only responsible for themselves, all further ones are incumbent only upon the One. Till then He lets us know:

To each of you (Jew, Christians, Muslims...) We have determined a norm and an open way. And if God had willed He would have made you one single community. But He wanted to test you by what He has given you. So vie one with another in good works! Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye dispute. (Koran 5:48)

With the differentiated picture of the Koran about believing and the members of other religions no enemy's pictures can be founded und justified, but on the contrary a universal tolerance.

5. Legal Order and the Term "Sharia"

Religion encompasses the areas of faith, prayer, and ethics (iman, ibadet, ahlak). Faith is the essence, core and starting point from which, and on account of that, the prayer takes place. And ethics gain efficacy.

The legal system also belongs to the classical area of Islam and although, it is a small part in comparison to these areas which form the basis, it, nevertheless, has taken over all other things in the consciousness of many people. An overdue word on the clarification:

O you who believe! Stand up for God, testify the justice ...because that is nearer to piety and the awe of God. (Koran 5:8)

O mankind, We have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honorable of you with God is the one among you most just (pious). (Koran 49:13)

In comparison to animals, human being has multilayered needs and is inclined to desire goodness and beauty. As he cannot attain such things solely on his own, human being forge bonds with one another and build communities. And because his aggression, instincts, intelligence - his

propulsions (motivations) - are not limited, in order to prevent violations in community, he needs justice.¹¹

The criterion for justice was always disclosed by God of mankind and was announced to them through God's envoys.

All revelations contained, besides the principles of belief and prayer in their ethical principles the guidelines for the order of the communal life, which took up the rights and duties of the people in the society and concerned the religious-ritual like social life.

Herein, the efforts of religious people undoubtedly play a role to focus their inner attitude as well as their outer doings on God.

Before we move on to address the conception of the Sharia, it is crucial that we make the following fact clear so as to recognise and to name wrong interpretations and abuses:

Religion delivers the foundations and guidelines by demanding justice, security, freedom and their guarantee. All further details are left to the human intellect.¹²

The Laws of Nature Are Sharia.

All natural mechanisms are Sharia – "laws of God" – rules set down by God. Nature is the art of God and *şeriatî-fitrîye*, the Sharia of the creation.

The Islamic Sharia is based on logic and wisdom. It contains all areas of the sciences -from the spiritual disciplines up to the disciplines of social life.

Since the Sharia is rooted in the laws of nature – that is, in the corresponding mechanisms and scientific knowledge – individuals in society must necessarily act according to the Sharia.

If one attempts to go against nature and natural law – if one ignores physical, psychological and social mechanisms – one is destined to fail.

In our time and region in which totalitarianism no longer determines mankind to such an extent, the human intelligence of the individual up to the community acts for the dignity of the creation.

As it can be derived from all, Sharia is the harmony of the creation. It is based on justice which, on the other hand, implies freedom and well-being. The Sharia has prospered the most in sophisticated, liberal societies.

¹¹ Nursi, K, *İşârâtü'l-İcâz*, 1215.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1228.

From the experience of humanity and the synthesis of the commandments, the progress of mankind succeeded.

The best developed, most advanced country is one in which the ideals of mankind like security, justice, freedom, prosperity are recognised in general; here Sharia rules. i.e. western states with their liberal-democratic state systems are nearest to Sharia.

Sharia literally means big, wide street. It is the path of religion; the path that leads to God; the golden guidance; a guiding principle (ideal) for the individual, for mind and conscience.

"Sharia, the way of the religion, is made up to 99% of ethics, prayer, the hereafter and virtuousness. Only 1% is the legal system and this is incumbent upon the state."¹³ -- This is a summary which shows the relation of single areas of the religious way to one other and therefore their weighting in the religion. It states, wherein the individual is addressed in the religion and that the aim of religion and the Koran is not the constitution of a political system. This 1% which concerns the state is the part the Sharia was commonly understood as, e.g. the equality of human beings, prohibition of family liability, women's right to inheritance about the at least compulsory portion, legal equality, judgment based on evidence, the right to security and freedom, etc. – things which are regulated in a modern state to bring the activities and the interactions of people in an order according to righteousness and justice. Smail Balic explains: "The penal regulations of the Islamic law do not belong to the area of devoutness. They have a completely different value to the moral instructions. The observance of the latter is essential, one wants to become a perfect believer. However, the penal system is merely the answer to the bitter necessity of a human situation. This always has its peculiarity."¹⁴

Compiling with and conforming to Sharia, is called nothing else than legal statehood. It is the granting and guarantee of freedom and security of the individual in the society.

¹³ Nursi, K., *Divan Harb-i Örfi*, 1922; cf. also Nursi's comparison as a thousandth for the share of the legal system: *Münazarat*, 53, K., Yeni Asya N.

¹⁴ Smail Balic, *Dimensionen der Religiosität, Islam und Christentum aus der Sicht des Islam*, 1981.

"We haven't grasped the sense and the purpose of the Sharia."¹⁵ was already stated a hundred years ago as one of the causes for backwardness in science, for underdevelopment and the decline of Muslim regions.

Because of the ignorance and confusion around these things which we experience among Muslims, drifting in the matters of minor importance of the religion, in their rudimentary religious knowledge in which the unity and attachment of reason, science and religion has got lost, fanaticism and extremism has spread in the religion. Here, the Koran is unequivocal. E.g., Sura 2, 44-46 saying:

Will you enjoin men the devoutness (righteousness) and forget (to practise it) yourselves while you recite (read) the Book; have you then no sense?

And seek help in patience and prayer; and truly it is hard except for the humble ones, who calculate on the fact that they meet their Lord and that they will return to Him.

In local German scientific literature the following evaluation is found on this subject:

"In the recent intense discussion taking place again around their application it is to be furthermore noted that beside shari'a -- e.g., in the area of business and trade - a customary law always existed. Additionally there is the law which the rulers have themselves spoken since time immemorial – for example with all affairs of the state security. Apart from this they often understand by a re-islamization of the jurisprudence in extreme shortening only the superficial, albeit a more rigorous adaptation in symbol-laden and wide appealing individual aspects such as whipping or veil-wearing, because they are not at all familiar with the extraordinary complicatedness and complexity of the shari'a overall and its high juridical quality."¹⁶

5.1. Secularism

The concept of the secularism, the separation of state and religion, should in this context also be clarified. The concepts of secularisation and secularism have arisen from the history of the church and the associated (European)

¹⁵ Cf. Nursi, K., *Münazarat*, 1946; or *Divan Harb-i Örfi*, 1920.

¹⁶ Weiss, Walter M., *Schnellkurs Islam*, DuMont Buchverlag 1999, S.42/43.

social development, which describe the emancipation from church and religion and the abolition of paternalism by church and clergy.

Now then, in Islam there is no and there was not such a hierarchical organisation which is represented in the Christian sphere with its immense worldly power which the church exercised. Although the initial position in Islam and its historical development are completely different, one imposes these concepts on Islam and Muslims. And for a long time Muslims have also started to use these concepts in exorbitant way. "Secular" has become the synonym and the universal all-purpose word for worldliness and anti-religion. One ignores and overlooks:

The nature of Islam is secular.¹⁷ Only in secularism can faith be freely confessed and realised. Every Muslim who professes his religion, who knows about his religion cannot be against secularism. He must avow their support of secularism and must work on its behalf.

An elementary mistake, frequently made, is this: People equate fundamentalism, Islamism, and the politicization of religion with Islam. And vice versa, Muslims frequently misunderstand calls for secularization, falsely perceiving them as general attacks on religion, demands to set aside their faith, alienation from God and belief, even atheism.

Secularization has neither to do with suppression of religion nor with placing restrictions on religious freedom; instead, secularization guarantees the freedom and security of believers and non-believers alike. Many are not at all aware that there is no basis for these discussions. It is a controversy on a pseudo base.

It is a serious large mistake not to know or to ignore the context of history and its developments and to transfer ones own supposition onto others than a fact.

In order to illustrate: If in view of Islamism the following considerations are

¹⁷ In the non-ecclesiastical, real sense of the word; as a synonym for non-negation of pluralism; for freedom of confession as a basis; for differentiation between generally valid statements (of faith) and conditional statements,,cf. Imam A'zam Ebu Hanife: The statements which Mohammed executed as God's envoy and statements as a statesman, in the consequence the differentiation between religion and policy; the emphasis of personal (own) responsibility of every individual (the human as caliph) without paternalism by a human authority instance, etc.

made: “What are we to do if a religious community does not agree with certain principles of the state legal system, and if they even look at them as corruptive under circumstances?” and in answering, the toleration of this kind of intolerance, justified by freedom of religion.¹⁸ Isn't it - therewith does one equate Islam with Islamism and deny Islam of freedom and justice ideals, which by oneself has just found now?

Islam must be distinguished from these manifestations of Islamism, the politicisation of the religion, its misuse as a theocratic state doctrine or a religious totalitarianism. Identifying the causes of extremism is the first step. In doing so, the alienation from the own religion is repeatedly suggested as one of the main causes, as well as the encrustations and arbitrary governments which have emerged over the centuries, the colonisation by the Europeans and with all the accompanying social misery and the loss of freedom and self-determination of the people. The people search remedy in religion, as an apparently alternative system, as an illusory escape site, because religion is a hoard of justice and humanity.

The type of war and state theology that arose during the pressurized colonial and cold war periods – profoundly limited in its perspectives and commonly identified with “reform theologians” such as Sayyid Qutb, Sayyid and Abu'Ala Maududi – must not be permitted to grow into a generalized theology of Islam. The original and real must assume its rightful place.

6. The Place of Religion

The throne and the seat of religion is the conscience. Religion is God's advice to the thinking human being. Religion is the ideal. God is the counselor.¹⁹ Hence, commandments cannot be law. One can take the advice of God only for himself as a fixed law.

¹⁸ Cf., e.g. Mensnik D., Religion und Politik, in: Themenheft 2005 S. 17, Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit Deutscher Koordinationsrat e.V.; Böckenförde, E.-W., Religion in säkularen Staat, a.a.O, 432.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., Koran 80, 11-12; 38, 29; 76, 29; 73, 19.

Since the commandments serve as a guideline for the individual conscience, it is a misuse to declare them as law which threatens like a sword over the heads of the people. With it one defies the commandments of freedom and voluntariness.

If religion is converted from faith into politics, one deposes it from a noble entity to a banal one. Religion is associated with all inadequacy of people and is consequently discredited.

The usage of religion for any purposes of power is a striking offence against the basic commandments of the religion. And does this not mean "the signs of God sells for a low price" (e.g., Koran 3:187. 199 and cf. Sura 57:20)

Religion is a sanctum belonging to everybody, which professes; It is a resource that is accessible to everyone. And just as no one may claim to be in sole possession of the truth, so it is with religion that no one individual may claim it for his or her own.

However to justify political concepts or external aims through religion means that one inevitably calls into question the religiosity of others on account of one's personal political opinion. One's own party members are viewed as "better" believers.

Such an arrogant attitude and handling of religion causes a provocation of others and leads consequently to an opposition towards religion and an anti-religious attitude and in this manner to the disparagement of the religion.

Commandments are aids to sharpen the sense of justice and to increase the feeling of mercy. The highest respect and validity is attached to commandments if religious people themselves take them to heart and internalize them and do not force any power disposed some other way onto these commandments.

On the other hand, there are those who politicize their atheism. Their atheism is means to an end of accusing others with backwardness and politicisation of the religion.

The original consideration behind the secularization (of the church) and the depoliticization of religion (with respect to Islamism) was, and is, to prevent the abuse of the religion. It is in force so that religion and the religious may not be discredited or be discriminated against, as is manifested in the declaration of human rights and in most country's constitutions.

6.1 The Relationship Between Religion and Modern Society

In this society the thesis or notion “there is no single Islam,” has spread. With it, one wanted to work in a well-intentioned way towards a differentiated perception of Islam and Muslims. From the Islamic self-image, however, it is to be said: There is only one Islam. But Islam has not come to uniform people. Rather, Islam has come to lead them to the faith and knowledge of one God, to bring them love, respect, and a sense of mercy and justice for the people.

What the individual people and communities have taken in from this, which traditions and customs have developed more or less on account of religion, is as varied as the people and human beings there are in the world.

That is dependent upon many factors, from living conditions, ecological and economic circumstances, political relations, educational level, in each case of religiousness and many other things. Outwardly, these differences present themselves to us, e.g., in the architecture, the mentality, the respective culture etc.

Religion and tradition are two different things. There are customs, traditions, habits which people justify with religion. At the same time, there may also be something which is carried out in contradiction to the religion. Customs, traditions, role models, the division of task, are changing. This again depends upon the living conditions and many circumstances and not least from the need in the society.

Religion, of course, delivers a frame, an ethical benchmark. It demonstrates humans an ideal, which they can only fill with life.

Society is continuously in change towards modern society. With need and purpose formulations to further development, the best way is developing in a dynamic synthesis. In the process, as far as religion is concerned, it along with modern society and the need of a modern society do not contradict.

For a humane, civilised, just, and social society, ethical values and religion, which motivate to apply these values, are indispensable. At the same time, it can never be, that true religion propagates the suppression or discrimination of anyone on account of their gender or origin etc.

Answering the questions of time is one of the demands placed upon religion with which religion contributes to the development and understanding culture. The enormous increase of knowledge continues in all areas. The

linguistic ability of the religion must keep pace, so that people find nourishment for their spirituality.

7. Love and Wisdom

If one observes people's reactions, one ascertains: "The exaggeration in religious things brings forth weariness with one person and fanaticism with the other."²⁰

It allows the conclusion that religious things require, very much, a middle (moderate) way. Balance is the product of the holism of the individual. Balance cannot be achieved without the six basic elements of the self: courage, wisdom, love, reason, our sense of right, and awareness of the transcendental.

Such maturity and self-knowledge leads to knowledge of God; this is the most difficult path.

Many-sided education and training of the spirit are challenges for all of us. In this, the Hadith "The sleep of the wise is more worth than the prayer of the ignorant people."²¹ can be an impulse to us.

The job of the religion is that we find God, the promotion of humanity, wisdom and love.

The first message of religion is the prayer and peace for the people. Sincere prayer and the remembrance of God helps us in our efforts for good and preserves us from wickedness. That is why true religion only causes good. The knowledge about one's own religion and the knowledge about the religion of others prevents abuse and promotes the solidarity for the well-being of all.

Hadith:

"A Muslim is somebody of whose tongue and hand, others have nothing to fear (and/or are sure)."²²

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Said Nursi's analyses referring to this.

²¹ Keşful-Hafâ 2:286.

²² Ebu Davud 4681, Tirmizi 2629.

“The one, whose neighbour is not sure of him, will not come into paradise.”²³

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(Handreichung für die Lehrer, Bildungsplankommission Islamischer Religionsunterricht, Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe)]

²³ Kütübü sitte 3391.