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Islam Coomentary: What the Koran really says about Jews, Jewry and Israel. *First published in the NCYI magazine "Viewpoint" in the winter 1998.*

Editorial background for readers of The Rondel

Although the central traditions in Bible and Koran are translated to many languages, both lay and learned may have problems in the understanding of the texts. The following interpretation of the Koran and Muslim Oral Tradition by imam Palazzi shows that these messages can be read in order to promote peace and mutual understanding. BN

Islam/Commentary:

WHAT THE QUR'AN REALLY SAYS

by Shaykh Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi

The Koran says that Allah gave the Land of Israel to the Jews and will restore them to it at the end of days

The Koran says:

"To Moses We [Allah] gave nine clear signs. Ask the Israelites how he [Moses] first appeared amongst them. Pharaoh said to him: 'Moses, I can see that you are bewitched.' 'You know full well,' he [Moses] replied, 'that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has revealed these visible signs. Pharaoh, you are doomed.'"

"Pharaoh sought to scare them [the Israelites] out of the land [of Israel]: but We [Allah] drowned him [Pharaoh] together with all who were with him. Then We [Allah] said to the Israelites: 'Dwell in this land [the Land of Israel]. When the promise of the hereafter [End of Days] comes to be fulfilled, We [Allah] shall assemble you [the Israelites] all together [in the Land of Israel]."

"We [Allah] have revealed the Qur'an with the truth, and with the truth it has come down. We have sent you [Muhammed] forth only to proclaim good news and to give warning."

[Qur'an, "Night Journey," chapter 17:100-104]

Shaykh Prof. Palazzi comments:

God wanted to give Avraham a double blessing, through Ishmael and through Isaac, and ordered that Ishmael's descendants should live in the desert of Arabia and Isaac's in Canaan.

The Qur'an recognizes the Land of Israel as the heritage of the Jews and it explains that, before the Last Judgment, Jews will return to dwell there. This prophecy has already been fulfilled.

Muslims must recognize the state of Israel as a Jewish state

Is there any fundamental reason which prohibits Muslims from recognizing Israel as a friendly State? I realize that a negative answer to the above question is taken for granted by popular opinion. My approach, however, is not based on popular opinion or the current political situation, but on a theological analysis of authentic Islamic sources.

Viewing the Jewish return to Israel as a Western invasion and Zionists as recent colonizers is new. It has no basis in authentic Islamic faith. According to the Qur'an, no person, people or religious community can claim a permanent right of possession over any territory. The Earth belongs exclusively to God, and He is free to entrust sovereignty over land to whomever He likes for whatever time period that He chooses.

"Say: 'O God, King of the kingdom (1), Thou givest the kingdom to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off the kingdom from whom Thou pleasest; Thou endowest with honour whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: all the best is in Thy hand. Verily, Thou hast power over all things.'"(2)
[Qur'an 3:26]

From the above Qur'anic verse we deduce a basic principle of the Monotheistic philosophy of history: God chooses as He likes in the relationship between peoples and countries. Sometimes He gives a land to a people, and sometimes He takes His possession back and gives it to another people.

In general, we can say that He gives as a reward for faithfulness and takes back as a punishment for wickedness, but this rule does not permit us to say that God's ways are always plain and clear to our eyes, since His secrets are inaccessible to the human intellect.

Using Islam as a basis for preventing Arabs from recognizing any sovereign right of Jews over the Land of Israel is new. Such beliefs are not found in classical Islamic sources.

Concluding that anti-Zionism is the logical outgrowth of Islamic faith is wrong. This conclusion represents the false transformation of Islam from a religion into a secularized ideology.

Such a false transformation of Islam was in fact made by the late Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini. He is the one person most responsible, both morally and materially, for the repeated Arab defeats in their conflict with the Jews in Israel.

Husseini not only incited Arabs against Jews. He also encouraged the torture and murder of all Arabs who correctly understood that Arab cooperation with Jews was a precious opportunity for the development of the Land of Israel. Husseini ended his woeful life by putting his perverted religious teachings at the service of the evil and pagan Nazis.

After Husseini came Jamal al-Din 'Abd al-Nasser. Nasser based his policy on Pan-Arabism, hatred and contempt for Jews, and an alliance with the atheistic Soviet Union. Nasser's terrible choices were critical factors in maintaining Arab backwardness. Fortunately, most of Nasser's mistakes were afterward corrected by the martyr Anwar Sadat. (3)

After the defeat of Nasserianism, Islamic fundamentalist movements made anti-Zionism the primary feature of their propaganda. They presented the negation of any Jewish rights to the Land of Israel as rooted in authentic Islam and derived from authentic Islamic religious principles.

The Land of Israel in Koran exegesis

The fundamentalist Muslim program to use Islam as an instrument for political warfare against Jews finds a major obstacle in the Qur'an itself. Both the Bible and the Qur'an state quite clearly that the right of the Israelites to the Land of Israel does not depend on conquest and colonization. This right flows from the will of almighty God Himself.

Both the Jewish and Islamic Scriptures teach that God, through His chosen servant Moses, decided to free the offspring of Jacob from slavery in Egypt and to constitute them as heirs of the Promised Land. Whoever claims that Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel is something new and rooted in human politics denies divine revelation and divine prophecy as explicitly expressed in our Holy Books (the Bible and Koran).

The Qur'an relates the words by which Moses ordered the Israelites to conquer the Land:

"And [remember] when Moses said to his people: 'O my people, call in remembrance the favour of God unto you, when he produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave to you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin.'" [Qur'an 5:20-21]

Moreover - and those who try to use Islam as a weapon against Israel always conveniently ignore this point - the Holy Qur'an explicitly refers to the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel before the Last Judgment - where it says: "And thereafter We [Allah] said to the Children of Israel: 'Dwell securely in the Promised Land. And when the last warning will come to pass, we will gather you together in a mingled crowd.'" [Qur'an 17:104]

Therefore, from an Islamic point of view, there is NO fundamental reason which prohibits Muslims from recognizing Israel as a friendly State.

Islam and normalization of relationships between Islamic states and the Jewish state

PLO documents can in no way be regarded as Islamic. The PLO leaders are a gang of criminals and thieves, and Arabs will be the main victims of any supposed "Palestinian State" under their leadership.

I do not believe that Islam is the factor preventing normalization between Arabs and the State of Israel. The real problem is that members of the ruling classes in Arab countries believe their authority and power would be threatened by democracy, modernization, and education in the Arab world. They use a distorted interpretation of Islam as a political tool, and unfortunately the majority of uneducated Arabs believe their poisonous propaganda. I believe that we must return to the time when Islam was in the vanguard of scientific progress and interfaith dialogue. Instead of false "leaders" such as Qadhafi, Saddam Hussein, Arafat [el-Husseini] or Yasin, we Muslims again need true leaders such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun.

King Faysal of Iraq said: "The Arabs, and particularly the educated ones among them, must look at the Zionist movement with the deepest sympathy."

Tragically, true leaders such as Faysal were silenced, and fanatics such as Haj Amin al-Husseini prevailed. The evil consequences of the victory of fanaticism are clear for all to see: Jews expelled from Arab countries where they lived in peace for over one thousand years, "Palestinian" refugees, terrorism, etc. To avoid future mistakes, we must learn from our past ones.

Unfortunately, there are Arabs who believe that they must fight against Israel until they completely destroy it (a tragedy which I do not believe the God of Israel will ever permit to happen - Never again!).

Unfortunately, there are also naive and foolish Israelis who believe, incredibly to me, that they will achieve "peace" with their Arab neighbours by giving the murderer "Arafat" [el-Husseini] a State, an army, etc. This is insane. You Jews are supposedly famous for your intelligence. How can some of your "leaders" be so stupid? From the perspective of the natural world, I am not optimistic about what the future holds. However, from the supernatural perspective of faith, we who believe in God must face the future with a positive attitude.

We must have faith that we will see the day when real peace and prosperity - which can only be based on true faith in God and His Word (the Bible and Rabbinic Tradition for you; the Bible, Qur'an and Authentic Islamic Tradition for us) - will spread throughout the world. Meanwhile, we must work together to prepare for a better future.

Muslims must recognize Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem

From an Islamic point of view, is there any fundamental reason which prohibits Muslims from recognizing Jerusalem both as an Islamic Holy Place and as the capital of the State of Israel?

I realize that a negative answer to the above question is taken for granted by popular opinion. My approach, however, is not based on popular opinion or the current political situation, but on a theological analysis of authentic Islamic sources.

Jerusalem in the Koran

The most common argument against Muslim acknowledgment of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem is that, since al-Quds [Jerusalem] (4) is a Holy Place for Muslims, Muslims cannot accept that it is ruled by non-Muslims, because such acceptance amounts to a betrayal of Islam.

Before expressing our point of view on this question, we must reflect upon the reason for which Jerusalem and Masjid al-Aqsa [the Al Aksa mosque] hold such a sacred position in Islamic faith.

As is well known, the inclusion of Jerusalem among Islamic holy places derives from al-Mi'raj, the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammed to heaven. The Ascension began at the Rock, usually identified by Muslim scholars as the Foundation Stone of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem referred to in Jewish sources.

Recalling this link requires us to admit that there is no connection between al-Miraj [the Ascension] and Muslim sovereign rights over Jerusalem since, in the time that al-Miraj took place, the City was not under Islamic, but under Byzantine administration. Moreover, the Qur'an expressly recognizes that Jerusalem plays for Jews the same role that Mecca does for Muslims.

We read:

"...They would not follow thy direction of prayer (qiblah), nor art thou to follow their direction of prayer; nor indeed will they follow each other's direction of prayer..." (5)

All Qur'anic commentators explain that "thy qiblah" [direction of prayer for Muslims] is clearly the Ka'bah of Mecca, while "their qiblah" [direction of prayer for Jews] refers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. To quote only one of the most important Muslim commentators, we read in Qadn Baydawn's Commentary:

"Verily, in their prayers Jews orientate themselves toward the Rock (sakhrah), while Christians orientate themselves eastwards..." (6)

In complete opposition to what "Islamic" fundamentalists continuously claim, the Book of Islam [the Qur'an] - as we have just now seen - recognizes Jerusalem as the Jewish direction of prayer.

Some Muslim commentators also quote the Book of Daniel (7) as a proof for this.

After reviewing the relevant Qur'anic passages concerning this matter, I conclude that, as no one denies Muslims complete sovereignty over Mecca, from an Islamic point of view - despite opposing, groundless claims - there is no reason for Muslims to deny the State of Israel - which is a JEWISH state - complete sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Islamic holy places

Anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by Islamic leaders throughout the Middle East are, in fact, not religious in nature, but, rather, political. The best proof of this is in the fact that Islamic anti-Judaism is quite recent. Omar ended the Roman ban that prevented Jews to enter Jerusalem, the Ummayyad caliphs in Cordoba built a synagogue for Maimonides, and Salahu-d-Din, after defeating the Crusaders, wrote to the Jewish leaders, "Your exile is over. Whoever wants to come back is welcome."

The late King Faysal of Iraq openly expressed his sympathy for the Zionist movement, while King Abdullah of Jordan was compelled to wage war against Israel by the other Arab leaders.

Recently, the Resident Arab ["Palestinian"] Wakf has made pronouncements, such as that the Western Wall (Kotel) is not a Jewish shrine, but, rather, the wall to which the Prophet's [steed] was tethered, or, at best, the wall surrounding the Muslim Mosque. The Wakf has also stated that all of Hebron should be turned over to the Resident Arab ["Palestinian"] Authority, and that Jews would be forbidden to pray in the Cave of the Patriarchs. These kinds of declarations by the PLO gangsters are ridiculous and absurd.

The Kotel was effectively, according to the Islamic tradition, the place where al-Buraq [the Prophet's steed] was tethered, but it was already an existing part of the Herodian structure. Muslims have never prayed close to it, and it has never had a special relevance in Islam. On the contrary, everyone knows how important it is for Jewish worshippers.

Apart from Mecca, no Islamic holy place is off-limits for non-Muslims. Historical sources say that the Prophet Muhammad entertained a delegation of Christians from Najran in the Mosque of Medina, and permitted them to celebrate a mass inside the Mosque, notwithstanding the fact that Christian rites can include words that are against Islam [such as stating that Jesus is God].

There is nothing in Jewish worship that can be offensive for Muslims, and nothing in Islamic Law prevents Jews to pray on Haram al-Sharif/Har Habayit (the Temple Mount), in the Cave of Machpela or in any other place that is regarded as holy by Muslims.

Every time I meet those who say otherwise, I ask them to identify a single authoritative Islamic source as legal proof of their claim. None of them has ever answered such a request of mine.

Notes

1. The original Arabic word we translated as "kingdom" is mulk, from a Semitic root m-l-k, that is common to both Arabic and Hebrew. According to Islamic theological terminology, the three synonyms for "kingdom" are mulk, malakut and jabarut. They refer respectively to the physical, psychic and spiritual levels of existence. Of course, G-d can be called King of all of them; if here only mulk is quoted, it depends on the fact that this verse directly concerns the earthly domain. To denote a kingdom in the secular and political sense, Arabic commonly uses another derived form, that is mamlakah.

2. Koran 3:26. For typographical reasons, it is not possible to reproduce here the original Arabic text of the Koran, which must nevertheless be understood as quoted. As well here as in other Koranic quotations, the English translation of the meaning of Koranic words from Arabic is my own, but based on the most authoritative English commentaries, such as M. Marmaduke Pickthall's "The Meaning of The Glorious Koran" (Beirut 1973), 'A. Yusuf 'Ali, "The Holy Koran - Text, Translation and Commentary" (Maryland 1983) and A. 'A. Maududi "The Holy Koran - Text, Translation and Brief Notes" (Lahore 1986).

3. In using the term "martyr" I do not simply refer to one who lost his life for a good cause. I give a precise translation of the Arabic word "shahid," which identifies a "martyr" in the strictly religious sense; that is to say, someone who spent his life serving the cause of G-d. Since making peace with former enemies is an explicit

Koranic order (see Koran 8:61), and since, according to Islam, Peace is G-d Himself, any believer who is killed because of his search for Peace must be understood as a religious martyr. The same considerations clearly apply to Yitzhak Rabin. 4. Arabic name of Jerusalem, from the root q-d-s, meaning "holiness". It is an abridged form of Bayt al-maqdis, "the sanctified House" or "the House of the Sanctuary", an exact equivalent of the Hebrew Beth ha-mikdash. The name originally referred only to the Temple Mount, and was afterward extended to the City as a whole. This extension of meaning became common among Arabs from the tenth century C.E. onwards. Earlier Islamic sources use the name Iliyia, an adaptation to Arabic pronunciation of the Roman name Aelia. 5. Koran 2:145. 6. M. Shaykh Zadeh Hashiyaah 'ali Tafsir al-Qadn al-Baydawn (Istanbul 1979), Vol. 1, p. 456. 7. Daniel 6:10

Biography and sources

Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi has been a lecturer in the Department of the History of Religion at the University of Velletri (Rome, Italy).

In 1987, after completing his secular and religious education in Rome and Cairo, he was asked to serve as an Imam (spiritual leader) for the Italian Islamic Community. In addition to numerous Masters Degrees, Prof. Palazzi hold a Ph.D in Islamic Sciences by decree of the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In 1989 he was appointed a member of the Board of Directors of the Italian Muslim Association (AMI) and afterward elected its Secretary General.

In 1991 he was asked to act as Director of the Cultural Institute of the Italian Islamic Community (ICCII), with a program based on the development of Islamic education in Italy, refutation of fundamentalism and fanaticism, and deep involvement in inter-religious dialogue, especially with Jews and Christians.

In 1997, Prof. Palazzi's essay entitled "The Jewish-Moslem Dialogue and the Question of Jerusalem" was published by the Institute of the World Jewish Congress.

In 1997, Prof. Palazzi joined the International Council of the Root & Branch Association.

In 1998, Prof. Palazzi and Dr. Asher Eder (Jerusalem, Israel) co-founded the Islam-Israel Fellowship, which promotes a positive Muslim attitude towards Jews and Israel based on what Prof. Palazzi believes are the authentic teachings of Muhammed as expressed in the Koran and Hadith (Muslim Oral Tradition). Prof. Palazzi serves as Muslim Co-Chairman of the Fellowship. Dr. Eder serves as the Jewish Co-Chairman.

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