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**Religious Responses to Confronting  
Epidemics and Diseases**

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# RELIGIONS

Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

**RELIGIONS/ADYAN** is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relation between Islam and the other faiths.

In a world of the religious misunderstandings, violence and hijacking of religious faith by political ideologies the **RELIGIONS/ADYAN** intends to provide a welcome space of encounters and reflections upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the Journal suggests religious diversity, while suggesting the need to explore this diversity to develop keys to both a deepening of one's faiths and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Quran suggests a commonality of faiths and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:

*“To reach among you, we have prescribed a law and an open way. If God had willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so, strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.»* (The Table Spread: 48, version of Yusuf Ali).

As a refereed international publication published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue, **RELIGIONS/ADYAN** finds its inspiration in the universal message of the monotheistic broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broad defined context.

**RELIGIONS/ADYAN** encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present, and potential future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, **RELIGIONS/ADYAN** wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationship between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also away to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

The essays published in **RELIGIONS/ADYAN** exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of the authors, and necessarily reflect the views of the **DICID**. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organizations.

COVID-19



# CONTENTS

<b>Editorial</b>	
<i>By Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi</i> .....	6
<b>Interview with Archbishop. Makarios,</b> Greek Orthodox Church Patriarchate of Jerusalem	
<i>By Nahla Fahmy</i> .....	8
<b>Pandemic and Caution in Islamic Thought:</b> <b>Reflections on the Work of al-Turyāqī al-Tamīmī</b>	
<i>By Prof. Aisha Yousef Al-Mannai</i> .....	24
<b>Calamity: A Message to Humanity</b>	
<i>By Mohammad Hosam Mohammad Bashir Al Nahas</i> .....	32
<b>Islamic Guidance on Infection Prevention and Control for COVID-19</b>	
<i>By Mohamed Magid</i> .....	46
<b>Religious communities in US and Canada and their responses to Covid-19</b>	
<i>By Alena Demirović</i> .....	56
<b>Religious Responsibilities in Times of Pandemics: Mutual Relationship between Spiritual and Physical Well-being</b>	
<i>By Senad Mrahorovic and Majdey Zawawi</i> .....	64
<b>Religions, Epidemics and the Common Good</b> <b>Building up a Common Good of Respectful Identities and Coexistence: A Contribution from the Main Religious Traditions</b>	
<i>By Samuele Sangalli</i> .....	74
<b>The Role of Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Fight against Covid – 19 Pandemic</b>	
<i>By Rijad Delić</i> .....	88
<b>M. Ali Lakhani (Ed.), Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity, Volume 45, Summer 2020,</b>	
<i>By Senad Mrahorović</i> .....	102
<i>Biographies</i> .....	108





# Editorial

In your hands, dear reader, is the fourteenth issue of the *Religions*, a scholarly journal published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, entitled “**Religious Responses to Confronting Epidemics and Diseases**”. This issue brings together a diverse range of research on the approach, thought and culture related to the subject of religions and pandemics, in both the Arabic and English languages by distinguished researchers in the field.

The connection between religion and disease is always present. The preservation of the self has long been placed as a priority amongst the very foundations of various religions, which outlines the care for human health, considering the protection of both, the physical and spiritual elements of the self as great priority, that is in line with the spiritual and ritual aspects of religion, as mentioned in religious texts. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings be upon him, said: “Treat (medically) the servants of God, for God did not create a disease but by placing a cure along

with it.” Likewise, in Christianity, churches, at the time of epidemics, have issued their religious advice to care for the sick and treat them in monasteries and hospitals, as it is mentioned in the Bible (James chapter 5: 14-15) that: **“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”**

If the disease described is a disorder that afflicts human beings, then there is no doubt that it does not affect the body alone, but goes beyond it to affect his soul as well, and all other aspects related to one’s life. As such, the treatment inevitably meets religion in one of these aspects.

Perhaps the pandemic crisis that the world is going through today with the emergence and spread of the Corona virus in many parts of the world possesses an important question about the position of religion, its institutions and scholarship, and its role in confronting pandemics





and diseases, especially when the human soul tends to believe that the evil which afflicts us is a type of divine punishment or one form of God's anger.

From this standpoint, the *Religions* for its 14<sup>th</sup> issue has chosen to present the topic concerning religions and pandemics. In fulfillment of the center's universal humanitarian vision, which holds that all human issues are governed by a close relationship with religion as an influential factor, and further proposes to deal with many of these aspects and find solutions to them.

In this issue of the *Religions*, the reader will explore multiple themes and perspectives on the position of religions and their role in

confronting epidemics and diseases elucidated in various research papers that we have chosen to touch upon this important subject, adding to previous scientific journals that have addressed the relationship of religions to diseases, in particular at times of epidemics as its main topic. We wish the dear reader finds in the research presented an enrichment of his/her understanding of cultures and expands his/her knowledge.

### **Prof. Ibrahim Al-Naimi**

Editor-in-Chief

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

## A Dialogue between “Religions” and



### Archbishop of Qatar, Makarios<sup>1</sup> (Greek Orthodox Church Patriarchate of Jerusalem)

Dialogue conducted by: Nahla Fahmy

**Religions:** The Bible (James chapter 5: 14-15) states: “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.” Can we understand from this text that only faith and prayer are what the church calls for in order to cure diseases?

**Makarios:** In the Bible we have other verses that refer to the physician and adjusting the role of the faith and the science accordingly, as it concerns the cure of diseases. For example, “Honor the physician with the honor due him, and also according to your need of him. For the Lord created him. Healing comes from the Most

High, and he will receive a gift from the king. The physician’s skill will lift up his head, and he shall be admired in the presence of the great. The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible man will not loathe them. Is not water made sweet by wood, that its strength might be known? And He gave skill to men that He might be glorified in His wonders. By them He heals and takes away pain. A druggist making a compound of them, God’s works are never finished. And from Him health is upon the face of the earth.” (Wisdom of Sirach: 38, 1- 8)

In order to be effective, our prayers have conditions, so as to be offered for good and profitable things for our souls and bodies, which then may be answered immediately or later on, according to the wisdom of the Divine. An important required condition is the faith from both sides that are



involved, then he who offers the prayers should be a righteous man, and the sick to repent for his sins to God. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16)

In the New Testament there are many cases of people being cured by the prayer of the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ or by the prayer of any of His Apostles. For example, the following verses are a testament to prayers of the righteous curing various sicknesses and disease: “Then He put out His hand and touched him saying, I am willing, be cleansed. Immediately the leprosy left him.” (Luke 5,13). Then there is the case where Jesus

Christ visited the house of the mother-in-law of the Apostle Peter: “He touched her hand and the fever left her and she arose and served them” (Matt.8: 15 and Luke 4, 38-39). The Evangelist Matthew gave the following witness: “...healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matt.4, 23). The other Evangelist Luke refers to his own witness with many details because he himself was a physician:” And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions and evil spirits and to many blind He gave sight.” (Luke 7,21) and “Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech....and

put His fingers in his ears and He spat and touched his tongue, then looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him “Ephphatha” that is be opened. Immediately his ears were opened and the impediment of his tongue was loosed and he spoke plainly” (Mark.7, 32-35), “Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed.... I say to you, arise, take up your bed and go to your house. Immediately he rose up before them...” (Luke 5, 18-25). The grace and the power to heal sickness and disease was given by our incarnate Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples: “And when He had called His twelve disciples, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kind of disease” (Matt.10:1). A characteristic witness from the Book of Acts of the Apostles proves it: “So that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also, a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits and they were all healed” (Acts 5, 15-16). During the two millennia of Christianity, we have many historical witnesses in which people were cured by the prayers of

the righteous, until today. Besides that, many people have been cured in Holy Places that are connected with Jesus Christ or Mother Mary the holy Theotokos, such as the Holy Shrines in Holy Land, Mount Athos, or other Monasteries and Churches in which are kept holy relics or miraculous icons. It is not these objects themselves which are worshipped or prayed to, but God himself, whose grace is emitted to us through certain blessed objects. To bring one of many an example of our days, since the 1960s, there have been miracle associated with the appearance St. Rafail and the others who were martyred with him. Their relics were found and until today, eight books have been published full of names and data of people who were cured from various diseases. We have similar cases with St. Nektarios, St. Luke of Sempheropol, St. Paisios and many others.

After all, neither the medicine nor the physicians can cure all the diseases or cure at all the diseases that humanity suffers. More specifically, many known physicians and representatives of science have many times declared: “We have done everything to our ability, now raise up my hands” or “The medicine done, now only God can help.” We know from our experience or have heard

from friends about cases in which the scientific professionals say after the unsuccessful efforts of medicine, the only hope is God.

**Religions: There are still many people who believe in the complete separation between religion and science (I mean medicine here). Can we truly rely only on religious advice and guidance in a crisis such as the outbreak of COVID-19?**

**Makarios:** Since the creation of the world, the relationship between religion and health is an interesting subject from both sides. Prayer helps the human being to find peace and to avoid various diseases, both physiological and psychological. For example, Dr Herbert Benson, cardio surgeon at the Medical School at Harvard, discovered what he calls “reply slackening” which happens during periods of prayer or meditation, during which metabolism of the body is slowed. The heart rhythm calms, arterial pressure reduces, and even breathing becomes calmer. Benson estimates that more than half of visits to doctors are from diseases connected to depression, high arterial pressure, ulcer, and migraine. Dr Andrew Newberg, director of the Spirituality Center

at the University of Pennsylvania, has done a research on the practices of Tibetan Buddhist and Franciscan monks. The study showed that prayer and meditation increase dopamine levels, which is related to good health and feelings of joy.

The pastoral work of the Church meets with the practice of medicine at the common point of scientific/medical progress and the relief of human pain. The doctor has to perform his duties according to the Hippocratic Oath and medical deontology in order to heal sickness.

The priest must fulfill his pastoral service when he is beside the sick person, tending to his mental and bodily comfort, and is concerned with the salvation of the soul. These duties are a testament to the common experience of doctors and priests, who day and night serve at hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

The Bible witnesses the allegory of the Good Samaritan, who represents Jesus Christ. His words, “I was sick, and you visited me,” (Matt. 25, 36) are fulfilled by Christians as a secret duty throughout the centuries, until our present day. Many miracles performed by Jesus Christ cured various spiritual and bodily sickness: “...they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick” (Luke 8, 16), “possessed

by bad spirits,” (Luke 7, 21), “For He said to him, come out of the man, unclean spirit” (Mark 5, 8), “So all the demons begged Him saying send us to the swine, that we may enter them” (Mark 5, 12), “A woman had a flow of blood for twelve years and had suffered many things from many physicians, she had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse...she touched His garment... immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction” (Mark 5, 25-29 and Luc 8, 43-44). Moreover, the Apostle Paul says: “Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12,15).

One of the evangelists, the Apostle Luke, was a physician, as it is written, “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you” (Col. 4,14). Many other saints of the Church were physicians from the first century until today. Besides this, the Church honors and celebrates many physician saints, who mainly belong to a special group of saints called *anargyri*, which means “without money,” referring to the fact that they cured sick people without any charge. Among them are Sts. Cosmas and Damnian, St. Panteleimon, St. Kyr and John, and many others. The most recent is St. Luke of Crimea, from

the second half of the twentieth century.

The Christian doctrine respects the body, honors the personality, shows respect and responsibility toward science, and offers service and *diaconia* to every sick person without differentiation of his faith, race, or nationality. Worldwide, there are Christian establishments which care for the human being in every aspect, from his conception to his death. There are many examples including, hospitals, clinics, prenatal care, single mother centers, orphanages, special needs centers, nursing homes for the elderly, all of which can be found in almost every country. Faith and the science of medicine together form a synergy of divine and human factors, as, discussed in this article. And it is demonstrated by texts of the Holy Bible and the practice of Christianity throughout all the centuries of the Church’s life.

There is no true scientific progress without ethical conditions. Without ethical considerations, scientific progress is not useful and in fact can bear results that are selfish and catastrophic, as history has shown. Therefore, it is prudent to remember the saying of the ancient philosopher Plato: “*Every science split from virtue is cunning and unwise.*” There are borders that have to be respected between

science and religion. Religion has to know its border and the religious leader to say: “This is a matter of medical science,” and the science must do the same, and a real physician to say: “This is a spiritual matter.” More specifically, known physicians and representatives of other science disciplines have many times declared: “We have done everything in our ability, now we raise up our hands,” or, “The medicine can do no more, now only God can help.” We know from our own experience or have heard from friends, cases where after the unsuccessful efforts of medicine, the only hope left is God. We have also heard positive outcomes in some of those cases, where recovery is unexplained by medicine.

Humanity has marveled at the words and witness of the well-known French physician, one of the most notable surgeons of the European Renaissance, regarded by some medical historians as the father of modern surgery, Ambroise Pare: “*I have bandaged, God has healed*” Additionally, we have the words of the French chemist and microbiologist, one of the most important founders of medical microbiology, Louis Pasteur: “*Little science takes you away from God, but more of it takes you to him.*”

As it is written, “Honor the

physician with the honor due him, and also according to your need of him. For the Lord created him. Healing comes from the Most High, and he will receive a gift from the king. The physician’s skill will lift up his head, and he shall be admired in the presence of the great. The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible man will not loathe them. Is not water made sweet by wood, that its strength might be known? And He gave skill to men that He might be glorified in His wonders.

By them He heals and takes away pain. A druggist makes a compound of them, but God’s works are never finished. And from Him health is upon the face of the earth. My son, do not be negligent when you are sick, but pray to the Lord and He will heal you. Depart from transgression and direct your hands aright, and cleanse your heart from every sin. Offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice and a memorial of the finest wheat flour and pour oil on your offering, as if you are soon to die. And keep in touch with your physician, for the Lord created him. And don’t let him leave you, for you need him. There is a time when success is also in their hands, for they will pray to the Lord to give them success in bringing relief and healing. For the sake of preserving your life, he who sins before the One who made

him, may he fall into the hands of a physician” (Wisdom of Sirach: 38, 15).

Plague, epidemic or pandemic is known to human history since the ancient times. History records a plague in Athens in 430 B.C., when two-thirds of the city within four years passed away. Europe witnessed such a catastrophe in the 14th century during what is known as “the black death,” when about 75 million people passed away. And in Spain, between 1918-1920 A.D., there were 50 million deaths in only the first six months of its epidemic. More epidemics are recorded locally in various places on the planet, for example, in Egypt in 542 A.D., in China in 610 A.D., in the city of London in 1665 A.D., in Europe and Middle East in 1347 A.D., in France in 1721 A.D., in China in 1855 A.D., in Sydney and San Francisco in 1900, and in Vietnam in 1960. In all the above cases, the biggest difference from today’s measures to prevent the pandemic spread is that places were established in order to isolate the effected population only until the emergence of a cure. Life in the communities wasn’t permanently altered, they didn’t change their daily rhythm of life, there were no lock downs – a word which some scholarship has pointed out has arisen from prison

vocabulary, places of worship were left open and their practices not interfered with. It is difficult to account for how these different and drastic practices of today could prevent the further spread of Covid-19 compared to previous cases throughout history, and in fact, according to the number of cases worldwide, today’s measures have not prevented the spread of the virus at all.

**Religions: It is clear that COVID-19 has affected the world in every aspect of life; socially, economically, and even education and religious practice. In your opinion, what are the lessons learned from such a pandemic, in terms of its impact on religious values, and the human need to associate with his Lord in good and difficult times?**

**Makarios:** The circumstances in which the world community finds itself today with the Covid-19 pandemic are teaching us many lessons and there is a wide discussion going on about the causes and the effects of this situation. As mentioned, historically, this isn’t the first time that humanity is confronted with a pandemic. There are local records of states, countries, or continents, which have been affected from epidemic





or pandemic. The message we have learned today is that technology isn't as powerful as the majority of people had imagined. The fact that a minimally lethal virus can paralyze the entire world is a big lesson for us in which we must rethink our way of life, and through repentance return all aspects of our life to its proper order; spiritually, financially, socially, and to think well about how we spent our time. From the religious aspect, we have sinned and have distanced ourselves from God's values. We have disrespected His laws and commandments, and have become materialists, proud, selfish. The

inclination toward this realization is universal, as we can see that within the first months of the pandemic, people sought activities to calm and heal their spirits and sought meaningful interpersonal connection by any means possible. We learned that nothing can be taken for granted. Now we seek to rebuild our relation with God, and by virtue of him, to approach the world, our fellow people and families with love and understanding. Whereas before we may have thought that we could live without Him, following a secular, materialistic approach to life which has inspired mankind's building of

a new Tower of Babel through the abuse of technology and deifying manmade creations, we have seen that without Him, we are actually lost. God created the world, and entrusted man to protect His creation we are not the masters and proprietors of nature but called by God to protect and cultivate it by respecting its laws and its integrity and honoring its Creator. In the Christian faith, there is a deep understanding of the relationship between God and the material world. In an ultimate act of love, God took on our human condition in order to save us. Therefore, we conduct our lives according to His example, by respecting His creation, but worshipping only Him. For as Saint John of Damascus said, *“I do not worship matter, but the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation...”*

Association with Lord has to be regular, consistent, and based on the values of our faith, not out of fear, of need, or in times of difficulty, but as a true relationship of love, with freedom from our passions, with peace, light, and justice. This is the salvation from every material that carries death, including illness. This relationship will have a continuation eternally, not in temporary happiness and

satisfaction. This is the meaning of paradise.

Another lesson has learned from the pandemic has to do with the limits of science. It is not only economics but also natural and medical sciences that are to a great extent responsible for the disturbance of humanity’s relationship with nature. I mean the biotechnological interventions into nature, verging on the boundaries of species and threatening their variety and their right to existence. Science is often giving the impression that it operates as if the rest of nature existed simply in order to serve the needs of humanity. The present pandemic teaches us that even a small and almost invisible natural element can challenge this assumption. The rights and power of science have their limits.

Probably the most difficult lesson from the pandemic is what is emerges. Scientists are heard to be saying today that the corona virus will certainly be defeated because science possesses the means to do that. The vaccine is presented as the solution to the problem. But what about after the vaccine? If we continue treating nature in the way we do, humanity will be called again to pay the same high toll of thousands of deaths and new economic crises. Science by itself cannot prevent this from

happening. It is only our healthy relationship with nature that may help us to avoid it.

As far as religion is concerned, the pandemic has brought to the surface a long-standing need for dialogue between religion and science, which would help each side to appreciate the other's role and significance. The current pandemic is teaching us that religion must respect scientific findings and advice based on the ethos and away of any kind of interests, and science must learn that truth and life cannot be imprisoned or exhausted in the scientific laboratory.

**Religions: After great suffering, many vaccines have appeared to prevent COVID-19, with varying degrees of effectiveness. We see that governments have given people a choice whether or not to take the vaccine. Does religion have a say in taking vaccinations? Considering that the decision may affect the lives of other human beings and other ill effects as well.**

**Makarios:** There is no doubt that humanity has suffered greatly this past year, and has been forced to live with situations that are the first of their kind, with significant effects in social, religious, financial, and many other parameters of life.

It is also possible that people have suffered more from the measures taken to prevent the pandemic from spreading. Unfortunately, there were controversial decisions made, maybe on the basis of a lack of data, experience, or under conditions in which people were forced to use un-tested methods from the beginning of this epidemic a year ago. Immense fear has spread, and as a consequence we have cases of widespread drug use, suicide, an increase in psychological illness, severe damage to social and familial life, as well as damage to many other aspects of life, including the religious aspect. In previous times in history, places of worship remained open, and people were used to praying and asking for God's merciful intervention and help, besides the medical. They found great comfort in prayer and in practicing their religious rituals. We have many examples of this in Christian history, as well examples of their benefits.

Concerning the appearance of new vaccines, the companies producing them are still not sure of the degree of their effectiveness or of the scope of their side effects. Additionally, the pressure to manufacture the vaccine has resulted in the bending of standard rules of research, such as bypassing certain timeframes for safety trials and further research,

and abdicating liability. As a result, the full responsibility falls on the person who will make the choice whether or not to be vaccinated. Many people are confused about their decision. Aside from the vaccine, there are medicines which have been proven to successfully treat this virus, which have not been promoted at all.

Although respective governments have thus far given people a choice whether or not to take the vaccine, unfortunately, indirectly there is not much of a choice. If somebody takes the second choice, not to be vaccinated, they may not be able to enter an airplane, according to recent announcements from particular airlines, or to be employed by certain companies which are changing their policies. And perhaps later on, more restrictions will be imposed for those who choose not to take the vaccine.

In our childhood we have taken vaccines to prevent various diseases. Those vaccines were manufactured after many years of extensive scientific research and after many clinical trials. The new vaccines of today, to prevent Covid-19, are not all manufactured on the same classic basis, but some on the basis of new genetic manipulation that so far has gotten much criticism from respected

scientists, epidemiologists, and microbiologists who do not agree that it is ready to be distributed to humans before further testing is conducted.

Furthermore, if somebody takes the vaccine, he will be protected himself but may still spread the virus. He who takes the decision not to be vaccinated is also essentially only affecting his own life, not the lives of other human beings, since the instructions after vaccination are to continue the prevention measures. In other words, the same instructions will still apply to both those who have taken the vaccine and those who haven't.

To maintain our health is an important duty towards our God. At the same time, we have to keep the other values of our faith, and not violate all the others in order to save one. Christianity holds dear the basic value of freedom that is given by the Creator of the world to mankind, who gave mankind the choice to stay in communion with God, who is the giver of life, by obeying to His commandments, or to die. (Gen. 3,1-2).

It is important to mention that some of the new vaccines are made with methods that affect the genetic code, and which may cause changes in the body that is created by God and so we have to keep it unaltered. The new technological experiment

is not yet properly tested, and there is no control group with which to compare its results. Until now we don't know the side effects of this new technology in the body. There are not yet comprehensive medical explanations regarding the conception of the new vaccine, nor are they transparent to the public only asking from every person to take his on responsibility. Some side effects, such as Bell's palsy on some patients, have not been fully explored or explained. A number of people don't see the need to take on such a risk when the percentage of the very severe or fatal cases of Covid-19 universally is between 1-2 %, or possibly less than 1%. At the same time, other diseases in certain countries have a fatality rate in much higher degrees, and people suffer for decades without solutions. Those diseases, not to mention preventable crises like famine and dysentery, are not being met with the same speed and panic within the scientific community as a new, unknown yet in all parameters, virus. The rush to produce vaccines and distribute them before adequate testing has deeply concerned many physicians who have recommended, in light of their concerns, that for the present time only the most urgent and at-risk cases consider vaccination.

**Religions: We know the measures taken by all countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the prohibition of prayers and meetings in churches. Do you support this from a Christian point of view?**

**Makarios:** As mentioned in previous answers, in which we have quotes from the Bible and examples from the Christian life throughout the centuries, there are plenty examples in which the prayer of righteous men heals various sickness and disease. Additionally, we have the witness of physicians who state that prayer helps the human being to find peace and to avoid various diseases, either physiological or psychological. The Christian belief is that we have a body and spirit, and as such we must maintain the needs of both and through it to glorify God who created it. "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Cor. 6, 19-20).

We support the measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 as any other disease, maintaining our bodily health and at the same time the spirit, since both belong to

God our creator. For this reason, we fulfill the safety hygienic measures enacted, and value the efforts of the Qatari Government in keeping the public health, in addition to maintaining our spiritual help through prayer. As such, we support not the complete closure of churches, but reasonable measures of safety and hygienic. We as humans need the nourishment of food and medicine in order to maintain our bodily needs, just as we believe that to the same extent, we need to nurture our spiritual needs.

**Religions:** At this point of time, having survived and adapted too much of the changes since the spread of COVID-19, how, through your experience, have the needs of the people changed during this time and how differently has the church responded?

**Makarios:** Humanity does not always learn from crises, and the tendency is usually to return to old habits as soon as a crisis is over. Man, over time, has accumulated a large quantity of power and is able to adapt even in the most difficult circumstances, always finding a way to provide for his needs. Life continues, and in any case, people find a way to survive.

Spiritually, the Church at this point, given our present circumstances, has made use of technology, and our clergy have performed live prayers and spread messages through social media. However, we must make clear that online prayers or education has presently had little success, and this has been the reaction of the participants from both sides of the cable. There is nothing that can replace personal communication, gathering, and sensory experience.

However, on the familial level, family members have had the opportunity to share more time and make things together. The current crisis has taught us about tempering our greed and the geocentricism that lie at the root of our problems.

**Religions:** There is a text I read in the Second Chronicles 7: 13-14 where God says to Solomon, “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Two questions regarding this:



Do we understand from this text that the emergence of pandemic diseases is specifically linked to God's judgment upon the sin of his people?

Does the devil play any role in pandemics and diseases from the church's point of view?

**Makarios:** During the time of the Old Testament, God used pedagogical ways to shape and form and test the character of the people, since although they were grown-up persons, they were still infants in their spirituality. We use similar reasoning to raise our children, using methods and ways

of communication that help them to understand. According to Scripture, "For everyone who partakes only milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age" (Heb. 5:13-14). God, out of care for His creation, maintains a relationship of a father toward His child, and as they gradually are introduced to the challenges of life, maintains this communion.

I think it is a good point about why we get sick – that it's not necessarily a punishment from God but a result of our human weakness. And yet, this is also why God is able to intervene on our behalf in the

material world and to cure illness. God's judgment is just and reflects His love and righteousness. He uses all ways to keep us in communion and eternally united with Him.

God is the absolute good by His nature, and He created everything that is good. God created only good, according to the Book of Genesis, so only good has existence as God's creation. Evil is the absence of good, in other words, it is that which cannot subsist with God. The devil is the fallen angel who by his choice, the God-given gift of free will, separated from the wellspring of life, good.

The devil is the opponent of both God and mankind, who doesn't like the good and prosperity of mankind and therefore actively works against mankind's salvation. However, as God's creation, who were made in His image and likeness, mankind's ultimate purpose and potential is to be unified with Him. As inheritors of the gift of free will, it is here in our earthly life where this struggle, a battle between good and evil, takes shape. It is for this reason that we may experience both good and bad in this world, and why prayer takes on such a powerful role. Maintaining our communion with God, especially in the face of adversity and evil, is the means by which we may attain grace, healing,

and ultimate unity with Him upon our passing from the earthly life into the heavenly life.

**Religions: To what extent - from your perspective - can religion help in overcoming crises, especially such as a global crisis, which does not differentiate between those who live on this earth?**

**Makarios:** According to my perspective, which is fortified by millennia of tradition of the Christian Church and its forefathers, our faith is equipped to deal with several aspects of global crisis and maintains the wisdom to understand and prevent many roots of their causes. First, as it is said, according to the Scriptures, "Then God saw everything He had made and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). The awe, the surprise, the filling with enthusiasm, and even ecstasy of scientists from all disciplines when they go deeper into their studies, only confirm this sentiment in the Scriptures. We see it when they spend lifetimes trying to preserve and understand the natural world. It is clear to us, that any violation of nature, which was created by God in His goodness and wisdom, may subsequently produce a reaction of equal



weight, such as ecological plight. Moreover, other types of calamity may arise from our abuse of God's creation, including the abuse of our fellow human being. It is within our modern era of technology, which has increasingly tested the limits of nature, that the most alarming crises have taken place, not only ecologically but socially, financially, and psychologically as well. By many accounts, there will be more severe situations to come if we do not respect God's creation and our place in it.

Unless we learn to cherish the values in our life, which the pandemic has taken away from us, such as personal contact and communication, religious prayers, gatherings, and loving relationships, which are more impactful and meaningful than material goods, we will suffer greatly in their absence. The teachings of the Church place much importance on these things, which strengthen and develop the human spirit. Furthermore, the Church teaches us through tradition, prayer, and scripture to respect and steward the natural environment so that we can share with others and bequeath to our children for the glory of God.

As it concerns understanding

the core of the crises that we collectively face, the help of religion is crucial in order to overcome our present situation, and to not repeat the failures of the humankind. Religion helps us to maintain God's great gift of repentance, which drives humankind and the world toward salvation. This is the mission of our Church through Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, Who cured sickness and disease and continues to cure throughout the Church's living history.

The major wound, and above all disease, for the human being is death, and only He cured us from death. Death is the unnatural state of our soul that is connected with sin. We are not created for death, but rather, to be united with our creator. This is the deeper understanding of the sin of mankind; abusing and violating the entire creation where we are not the masters and proprietors of nature, but are called by God to protect and nourish it by respecting its laws and its integrity and honoring its Creator.

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1-The answers in written form are provided based on the Christian Orthodox tradition.



## Reflections on the Work of al-Turyāqī al-Tamīmī

Prof. Aisha Yousef Al-Mannai

The importance of the Center for Muslims' Contributions to Civilization lies in its goals, vision and civilizational mission towards demonstrating the capabilities of Muslim scholars since ancient times in the various sciences of nature, matter, soul and spirit. This is represented in scientific fields such as astronomy, medicine, physics, chemistry, psychology, and the science of human body and its diseases and remedies. Translating and disseminating these sciences has been the main goal of the Center.

It is indeed a pleasant coincidence that just a few months ago we signed a contract with a scholar to translate the work of Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Tamīmī al-Maqdisī al-Turyāqī entitled *Māddat al-Baqā' fī Iṣlāḥ Fasād al-Hawā'*

*wa'l-Taḥarruz min Darar al-ʿAwbā'* into English language just before the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic which swept across the whole world since the beginning of this year.

It is yet another beautiful coincidence that the author of the book, who died in 370 AH, was a Palestinian, born in Jerusalem and thus called al-Maqdisī (referring to *al-Quds*). He was the son of today's wounded and occupied Palestine, usurped by the Children of Israel, with whom some Arab governments are rushing to normalize their relations. May the salutations be to Palestine and her children and scholars.

As our preoccupation with this book coincided with the rise of the current pandemic, I saw it

befitting to review the contents of this priceless work, which gives the reader the impression that its author was a scholar of epidemiology and environmental health; it is almost as if the author is relating to us diseases from which we are suffering today. The book, edited by Prof. Yahya al-Sha‘ār was awarded the Arab Prize for Editing of a work of Heritage from the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization in 1998. As a result, it turned into a seven hundred pages’ work. The Institute of Arabic Manuscripts in Egypt prefaced the book, indicating that the environmental pollution as a world predicament in our times was similarly envisaged in previous times as well. I was particularly struck by their statement that: “Merely addressing this issue at that time in the past when the ‘environment issue’ did not mean anything in comparison to what it means today, is indicative of the level of civilizational awareness (of that time) and deserves all respect, pride and appreciation.” The editor confirms that this is the oldest Arabic manuscript of its kind having reached us, as it discusses the problem of air pollution, its causes, diseases resulting from it, ways of treating it, and the medication appropriate for its cure.

The author adopts the ancient classification of the elements of life, namely, water, air, earth and fire. According to him, any corruption that affects the air, affects all creatures. He says, “We may term the air to be healthy as long as it is moderate in heat, gentleness and clarity, and is pleasant to breathe with a pleasant smell. If the other three elements participate with the air for the benefit of animals and plants and their well-being, then such an air is of the greatest benefit. This is so because in it, we breathe and from it, we accept by inhaling what nourishes our bodies and through it, we are strengthened by the will of God. As the air becomes corrupted, it leads to the corruption of things in it, such as the animals and plants.» (p. 111).

When al-Maqqdisī named his book *Māddat al-Baqā’* (substance for survival), by substance he the air and water that preserve human life and ensure its survival, but also the life of animals and plants. Then he mentions *wa’l-Taḥarruz min Darar al-Awbā’* (caution from the harm of epidemics), which means taking all the necessary precautions to avoid the dissemination of the epidemic and how it should be treated by creating remedies constituting of plants and fruits to

cure one particular ailment or more. In our country, the State of Qatar, the name ‘Ehteraz’ was given to an application specifically created to manage the pandemic, just as the wearing masks was made compulsory here or elsewhere in the world – to prevent the virus’ transmission through the nose or mouth.

It is worth noting that the book is divided into ten major sections some of which are further divided into several chapters. Al-Maqdisī began his work by acknowledging that he was influenced by his predecessors, quoting them at times or adding to what they have already mentioned. Among these scientists are Hippocrates, Galen, Aristotle, Ahern and others.

I also came across a review of the book by Professor Fadel al-Sadouni from Qatar University, published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of *Tahsīr* (the journal of Ibn Khaldun Center, Qatar University) and published by the Qatar University Press. Owing to the large size of the book, I thought that we should briefly touch upon what concerns us by selecting some chapters and addressing their contents as mentioned by al-Maqdisī al-Turyāqī.

In the beginning (p.91), al-Maqdisī

distinguishes between the common diseases arising from the corruption and pollution of the air and various other diseases that people living in cities are exposed to, throughout the year. He says, “The change of seasons of the year is what generates diseases, more particularly so, when there is greater change in the cold or in the heat, at one time” (p. 92). He then proceeds with classifying the diseases and its descriptions according to each season, and what happens during each disease to the human body from the top of the head to the bottom of the foot.

He then explains corruption of the air that causes plagues, measles, and commonly-spreading filthy diseases. As usual, he attributes severe diseases to the corruption of the air. He believes that man’s fear is often related to food and drink; but he also suggests that the contaminated air that a person breathes on daily bases, may have a great impact on everything, such as polluting water etc. “The food which might contain toxic elements such as poison and polluted water, when eaten or drunk causes harm to a person and hardly anyone escapes from it, except the one whose temperament is opposed to the elements of corruption; such a person’s body accepts it as a



patients' acceptance of medicine. Thus, air is a substance for the life of every breathing entity; it reaches the heart with the movement of the lung through the breathing process" (p. 112). Here, al-Maqdisī indicates that breathing the polluted air might be even more severe than eating spoiled food because it strengthens the hold of a disease acquired from food or drink.

Then he goes on to explain six states of human being that modern physicians today are

also recommending for the better health of body and soul; these six states need to be acquired and well balanced if one wishes to strengthen his/her immune system. These states are:

Condition of air surrounding the body; cold or warm, pleasant or toxic.

Food and drink

Emptying one's bowels in response to the call of nature, and refraining from all food that might negatively impact one's health.



Activity and relaxation. Sport in its entirety is movement and stillness. A nature therapist once told me that knowing how to relax one's body might be more important than any activity.

Sleeping hours and waking hours.

Psychological events, which effect

the health of the soul such as sadness, depression, fear, obsessive thoughts and hallucinations etc.

Corrupted air, whether it be in nature or from the human self, is the channel through which infections are transmitted. Indeed, this is what happened in the current pandemic

(Covid-19) that encompassed the whole world and we are still suffering from it. It gets transmitted from one person to another through the breathing process. Al-Maqdisī says, “Air is corrupted by the breath of the sick person and from him/her it is carried to the neighboring healthy person through the breathing of the sick person (p. 138). The evidence for that is, “We notice that in a house in which no one has had blisters or smallpox, if anyone in that house is afflicted by any of these two ailments, after only a short while the remaining members would also be afflicted by the same ailment” (p. 138).

Al-Maqdisī the pharmacist – I like to call him that because he invented medicinal mixtures and antidotes (to the degree that I got exhausted and could not keep track of them) – does not stop here. Rather he goes on to describe the curative properties of eating, drinking and smelling pleasant odors and refraining from consuming meat and sweets. He dedicated a whole chapter of his book for this purpose. In its introduction, he mentions remedies which if taken gradually during one’s healthy state, would dispel a harm caused by the pollution of air and rid it of epidemics” (p. 151). In another chapter, he mentions

perfumes and how their aroma restores corrupt air, strengthens those who are healthy and those with debilitating illnesses” (p. 209). The odor of pleasant scents such as rose water, camphor, musk, amber and others fumigating with a variety of substances, strengthens the self. These are the matters that Arabs have known about various kinds of incenses; they change a person’s temperament instilling in him a sense of psychological wellbeing which then results in a healthy body, more specifically in cases of what is today known as psychosomatic diseases.

He makes a mention of music and singing and how they cure human pain; in this matter his views are no different from the recommendations of modern medicine. Further, he is aware of the properties of rancid and polluted water and how it could be treated by boiling it at a certain temperature in order to remove its corruption and making it pleasant to use.

Al-Maqdisī also denounced the view of Indian scholars that there are drugs that prevent aging, restore youthfulness, perpetuate health, and eliminate sick people. He says, «We know that it is rationally impossible for youthfulness to be restored

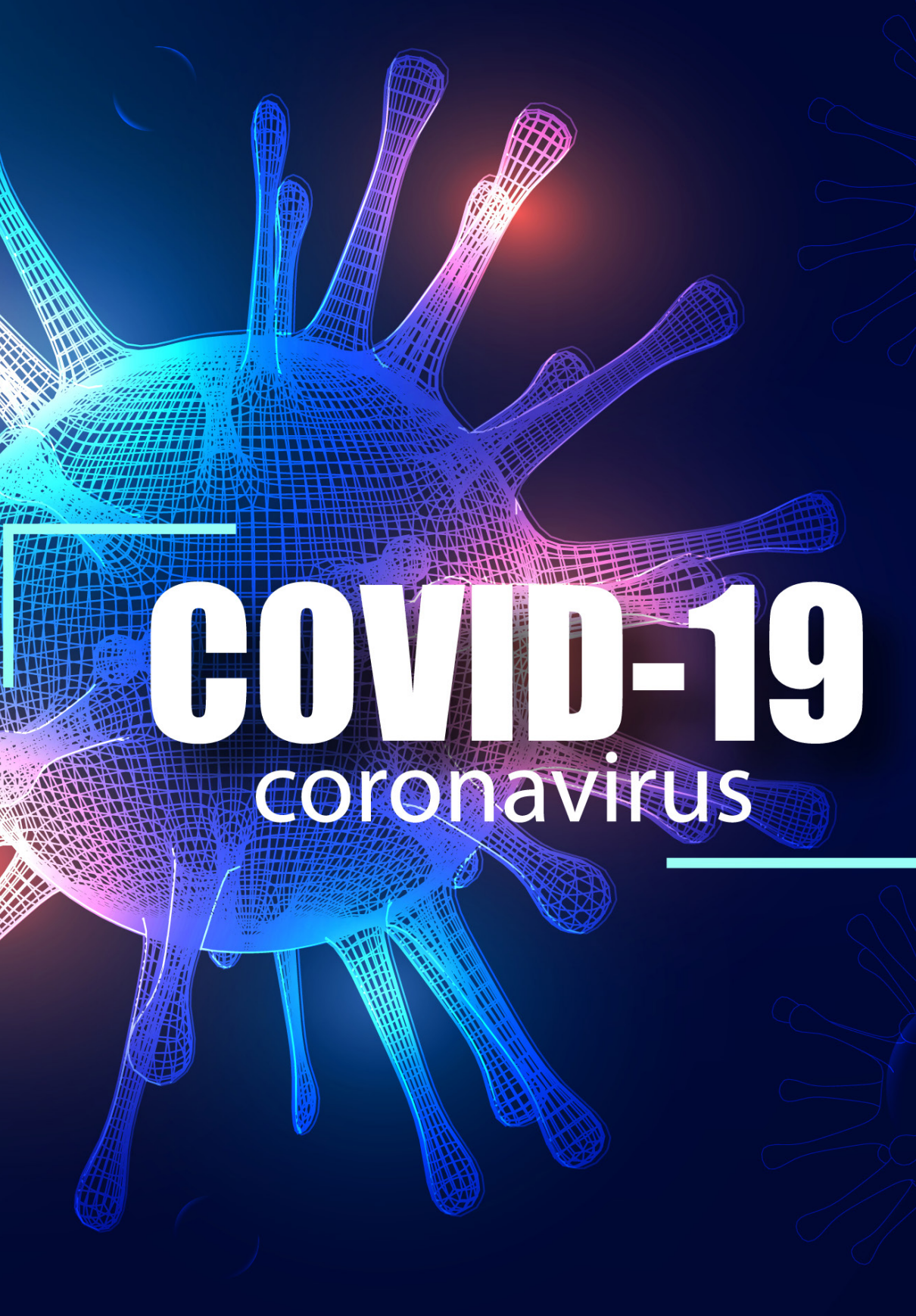
for people continuously marching towards old age and death through the use of any of the curative mixtures» (p. 200). From the legal Islamic perspective and despite the excellence of this book, al-Maqdisī needs to be held accountable for enumerating the virtues of alcohol and its curative abilities particularly for psychological disorders. The editor of the book indicates that this is contrary to the law of God Almighty who has forbidden alcohol. Al-Maqdisī however, writes, “...intoxicating drinks are brothers of the soul and spirit and one of the best things that benefit the body in digesting its food and adjusting its temperament” (p. 237). He goes on to suggest that intoxicants can cure mental disorders such as “Melancholia”. Some medical experts in our times might also advise the drinking of alcohol or even having relationships outside of marriage. As a Muslim scholar however, we strongly disapprove of this view. Al-Maqdisī says, “And since the necessary outcome of Melancholia is fear, dread and loneliness, and the effect of alcohol is earning for the soul swift delight - and that is its most powerful act because it causes loss of mind and accentuates courage and boldness – the drink must be a

potent medicine for the sorrowful and the fearful.” (p. 241). We used to hear of the term “Melancholia” from our Egyptian brothers and it occurred to us that this term is used for mental illnesses that include all that the author mentioned such as grief, despairing of life, fear and dread of everything.

I wish I could have mentioned for you some of al-Maqdisī’s medicinal mixtures, but the names of many of the ingredients that he used were difficult for me to depict as it would have been for any non-specialists in our times.

Be it as it may, this scholar had produced a book that well preceded his time and that of those who came after him; moreover, he was able to achieve that, before modern inventions such as microscopes and machines had been devised to measure the flow of blood or examine man’s internal organs and bones and before doctors, scientists and researchers introduced methods for extensive medical researches. It was for these reasons that this work needs to be considered significant and thus it was important for us to discover such Muslim scholars and their many contributions to Islamic and human civilization





# COVID-19

coronavirus



# Calamity: A Message to Humanity

*'It was not raining when Noah built the ark'*

Richard Cushing

Mohammad Hosam Mohammad Bashir Al Nahas

## Introduction

Disasters have become a relatively frequent occurrence in contemporary life. Wherever they hit, they result in big change in people's lives, and they alter the course of history when they affect large populations. However, the impact of disasters seems to transcend the disruption they cause to the physical environment, sparking off considerable debates about God's existence and wisdom. Some refer to disasters as 'acts of God' that happen for a purpose, mainly as a divine retribution for human sins, while others argue that if God truly existed and was merciful, He would put an end to human suffering. Indeed, disasters can be a faith-challenging experience that trigger theological

reflections and raise questions over why they happen in the first place, why God allows them to happen, and whether they are 'pure evil' or 'merciful torture'.

## What Is a 'Disaster'?

Etymologically, the word 'disaster' means, «an unfavorable aspect of a planet or star.» It comes from Middle French and the Old Italian word *disastro*, from the Latin prefix *dis-* and Latin *astro*, meaning «star.» So, the word comes from the belief that the positions of stars influence the fate of humans (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, n.d.). Cisin and Clark (1962, p.30) define the term, 'disaster' as any occurrence that "seriously disrupts normal activities", while Quarantelli (1985) remarks that "disasters are ad hoc, irregular occasions that

involve a crisis... where demands exceed capabilities”.

### **1.1 Connotations of the Word ‘Disaster’ in Arabic**

The word disaster translates as *museebah* in Arabic, derived from *sauba*, meaning “to correct a mistake, someone or something; to point an arrow towards a goal” (Alma’ani, 2020). This highlights the deliberate nature of the action. However, *museebah* not only refers to natural disasters, but also extends to any emotional or physical disaster that one might experience in life. For example, it can include the death of a family member, a bad accident, or a serious illness. According to the Virtual Mosque website ([www.virtualmosque.com](http://www.virtualmosque.com)), it is Allah who decrees that a *museebah* will come to pass. Therefore, instead of asking questions, we should remember a *museebah* (disaster) is merely ‘an arrow hitting its target’, based on its denotation above.

## **2. How Are Disasters Perceived and Interpreted in Different Religions?**

When a tsunami hit in the Indian Ocean in 2004, causing the deaths of thousands of people, it was widely posited by Buddhists,

Christians, Jews and Muslims that this disaster was the result of people’s unpardonable sins. However, interestingly, those who survived also appeared to perceive their survival as an ‘act of God’ or evidence of the ‘mercy of God’.

### **2.1 An ‘Act of God’**

In most religions, as touched upon earlier, disasters tend to be regarded by many as deliberate ‘acts of God’, intended to mete out punishment for the sins of mankind. They could therefore be described as manifestations of God’s wrath. According to the Cambridge Business English Dictionary (2011), an ‘act of God’ is “an event such as a very bad storm that cannot be prevented or controlled and usually cannot be insured against”. The assumption here is that while an individual might be innocent of any direct blame for these disasters, human beings are collectively responsible for provoking God’s wrath (and therefore, disaster) through their sins.

According to Hosea, a book in the Hebrew Bible, God calls punishment upon His people due to their sins: “An east wind from the LORD will come, blowing in from the desert; his spring will fail and his well dry up. His storehouse will

be plundered of all its treasures” (Hosea 13:15, NIV). However, we also observe that God chooses to save certain people during disasters, as in the case of His plan to destroy the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whereby the prophet Lot and his two daughters are spared: “...and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived” (Genesis 19:29, NIV).

There are similar illustrations of how disasters are ordered directly by God as punishment for the sins of the people. For example, God brought disaster down upon an Egyptian Pharaoh who refused to believe in Him. The Biblical book of Exodus describes the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, when a plague of locusts was sent by God to swarm over the land as a punishment for the sins of the Pharaoh and his people. However, in response to prayers of supplication from Moses, God revoked this disaster:

they [the locusts] invaded all Egypt...Nothing green remained on tree or plant...Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘...forgive my sin once more and pray to the LORD your God to take this deadly plague away from me’. Moses then left Pharaoh

and prayed to the LORD. And the LORD changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. (Exodus 10:14-19, NIV) The Quran narrates that Pharaoh and the people of Egypt were arrogant and refused to acknowledge God’s existence or His blessing on their land. At each disaster, they would plead with Moses to supplicate God for an end to the scourge. However, after Moses had done so, they merely regressed to their arrogance and continued to reject God. According to the Quran, “Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them, slaughtering their [newborn] sons and keeping their females alive. Indeed, he was of the corrupters” (28:4). Moreover, the people of ancient Egypt declared: “No matter what sign you bring us with which to bewitch us, we will not be believers in you” (*Quran*, 7:132). Consequently, God punished them: “So We sent upon them the flood... but they were arrogant and were a criminal people” (*Quran*, 7:133). However, is this true of all disasters? Are they all visited upon the human race as a form of punishment? In the story of Job’s suffering, it cannot be said that God was punishing him

for his sins, as it is emphasised in the ancient writings (the Bible) that he was a virtuous and upright man. Most of his oxen, donkeys and camels were stolen, and then seven thousand sheep were burned up by the ‘fire of God’. All but three of Job’s servants were killed and all ten of his children were crushed to death (Job 1:15, 19, NIV). The Prophet Mohammad stresses that disasters expiate our sins; “There is no calamity that befalls a believer except that it removes some of his sins, even if it is the pricking of a thorn” (*Al-Bukhaari*, 5640; *Muslim*, 6239).

Another message to the humankind is that there is still a long way to become in full control of the world. White (2014) writes, “Disasters pull us up sharp and make us face head-on the hard questions of life and death... they challenge humankind’s hubris that we can control our environment — or that our cleverness can keep us from suffering”. It could also be understood from the Bible that just as we escape a disaster leaving our possessions behind, we should also be prepared to leave this world one day, taking nothing with us: “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it” (1 Timothy 6:7, NIV). In this

way, disasters send an important message about the transience of this life as well.

## **2.2. Restoring Connection with God**

One more perspective worth exploring here is that disasters help forge a stronger connection with God. This can be seen in Surat Al Anaam: “And We have already sent [messengers] to nations before you, [O Muhammad]; then We seized them with poverty and hardship that perhaps they might humble themselves [to Us] (*Quran*, 6:42). The purpose is to urge us to believe with humility, which will strengthen our connection with God. In the same vein, Christ refers in the New Testament to a tragedy that killed 18 people: “Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:4-5, NIV). Therefore, Christ basically stresses that disasters should be a warning to us all; rather than pondering on who is responsible for them, we are therefore urged to repent before it is too late.

In her study of the relationship between levels of religiosity during and after natural disasters, Bentzen

(2019a) found that people all over the world become more religious when they are hit by earthquakes. However, she specifies that only sudden disasters (earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions) increase religiosity, whereas more commonplace disasters, such as storms or quakes in earthquake zones do not. Bentzen is referring to an increase in intrinsic religiosity, rather than conventional church or mosque attendance. In an article published last year, Bentzen (2019b) reported on new research findings to suggest a nine-fold increase in religiosity where earthquakes occur unexpectedly, compared to areas spared such disasters during the period 1991-2009. It is equally interesting to learn that Google searches for religious terms, such as ‘God’ or ‘Pray’ are most prevalent where there is high risk of disaster. It appears that disasters seem to offer us an opportunity to not only stop and reflect on our experience and appreciate the bounties and provisions we sometimes take for granted, but they could also function as a wake-up call for us to restore our connection with God and develop our relationship with Him.

### **3. Does God Want Us to Suffer?**

In Islam, God has created us to worship Him, work the land and achieve justice. In the Quran, Allah declares: “We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice” (57:25). Therefore, God did not create this universe to cause suffering to His creation. In another verse, it is stated: “What would Allah do with your punishment if you are grateful and believe? And ever is Allah Appreciative and Knowing” (*Quran*, 4:147). The verses indicate that we are commanded to achieve justice, believe in God and be thankful for God’s provision. It seems that the implication here is that disbelief, the absence of justice and lack of thankfulness for God’s bounties would probably have grave consequences.

However, the two elements of thankfulness and belief are explained in other verses. Allah declares: “Work, O family of David, in gratitude” (*Quran*, 34:13). Thus, it is with actions (good deeds), rather than words, that people demonstrate gratitude to Allah. Similarly, belief in God without doing good deeds towards others



is inadequate in Islam: “Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds - for them are the Gardens of Pleasure.” (*Quran*, 31:18). Attached to ‘those who believe’, the phrase ‘and do righteous deeds’, occurs more than 10 times in the *Quran*, reiterating the significance of translating beliefs into useful actions.

The Bible also assures us that God cares for us and that He feels for us when we suffer: “In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old” (*Isaiah 63:9, NIV*). Elsewhere in the Bible, we read: “The thief comes only to steal

and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (*John 10:10, NIV*).

It seems that disasters are not the rule, but the exception. Landslides do not occur with every rainfall. Although we might get sick from time to time, we spend most of our lives enjoying good health; similarly, life predominantly goes well, while times of disasters are temporary occurrences. Therefore, it does not seem viable to suggest that God wants people to suffer undeservedly.

#### **4. Man: Victim or Culprit?**

As far back as 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote: “All earthquakes and disasters

are warnings: there is too much corruption in the world.” However, he had not witnessed anything like the level of damage caused by Man to the natural environment in the last 100 years alone.

Ferris (2008) reports that before Hurricane Katrina, a natural phenomenon which displaced over a million people in 2005, the Louisiana wetlands had been destroyed by developers in past decades, which eliminated a natural barrier for the hurricane. Due to the destruction of the wetlands, the Hurricane moved in full force to populated areas, thus causing the disaster. In other words, the hurricane itself was not a disaster, but human actions caused one.

It cannot be denied that human beings are responsible for at least some disasters, due to sheer greed and selfishness. These vices have consequences for nature, such as building in earthquake zones or polluting the atmosphere. Air pollution has been linked to global warming, and in turn, disasters such as floods and tsunamis. The Bible admonishes: “The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, ...and for destroying those who destroy the

earth” (Revelation 11:18, NIV).

In the same vein, Berg (2017) writes: “With so much evidence of depleting natural resources, toxic waste, climate change, irreparable harm to our food chain and rapidly increasing instances of natural disasters, why do we keep perpetuating the problem? Why do we continue marching at the same alarming beat?” Meanwhile, in O’Mathúna, Dranseika and Gordigin’s (2018), *Disasters: Core Concepts and Ethical Theories*, it is posited that disasters occur as a reminder that the world is not as it should be:

God created the world with love and beauty, and humans introduced sin and ugliness. Injustice demands justice... discrimination and injustice are unethical... when Christians are hit by disasters, their belief that God can bring good from a bad situation should provide hope and resilience. Disasters should cause all of us to reflect deeply on what matters most in life. They remind us that we are not in control in this world, and will all ultimately face death...

It is therefore evident that humans are responsible in many ways. If Man is at least partially responsible for some disasters, how can we



then expect a perfect world without disasters when we know that humans are a major contributing factor? And my question is, with practices and behaviors like the ones mentioned above, do we deserve a perfect world in the first place?

## **5. Reactions to Disasters:**

### **5.1. Seeking Refuge in Faith**

Religion can be seen as a psychological coping mechanism. In fact, the religious coping hypothesis (Pargament, 1997) states that individuals draw upon religious belief and ritual to try and understand or manage difficult situations. Religious coping performs five major functions: to discover meaning, to garner control, to acquire comfort by virtue of closeness to God, to achieve closeness with others and to transform life (Pargament *et al.*, 2000).

Additionally, some scholars have argued that religion provides a survival strategy in the face of recurring hazards or disasters in Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities alike (Texier & Gaillard, 2010). Bentzen (2019b) stresses that empirical evidence suggests that people affected by disasters, such as

serious illness, the unexpected loss of close family members, divorce, etc. have a tendency to be more inclined towards religion.

### **5.2. Collaboration and Planning**

Acceptance, collaboration and contingency planning seem to be fundamental elements to mitigate the impact of disasters. According to Matsa (2019) in her article, ‘Jewish theology of disaster and recovery’, observant Jews recite a *bracha* (blessing) for every activity of the day. In times of crisis, they say, “*Baruch dayan ha emet* [God is the true judge]”, implying that life brings both good and bad fortune. This would appear to capture how disasters are perceived in Judaism. According to Matsa (2019), “Disasters are invitations for people to rise to their highest levels of compassion and concern. They provide an opportunity to reach out to each other to provide support, realizing that we cannot take away the devastation, but we can ameliorate it somewhat”. Additionally, planning ahead seems vital, too: “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty” (Proverbs 22:3, NIV). For example, in the Biblical book of Genesis (41:48-50), during years of abundance, Joseph stored grain



in anticipation of a future famine. Thus, the population was saved, which shows that in a disaster, preparation and collaboration are essential.

### **5.3. An Islamic Perspective to Human Response to Disasters**

Exercising patience plays a pivotal role to get through disasters in Islam. In many places in the Quran, Allah commands us to exercise patience, as it will be rewarded in the Hereafter: "...and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship ...those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous" (2:177).

Moreover, the *Quran* highlights that we should recite certain phrases besides exercising patience when

disasters occur: "And we shall surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return'", and the reward is, "Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided" (*Quran* 2:155-57).

We should accept disasters as 'acts of God', with a purpose that we might not see at the time, but which could eventually become clear. 'Good tidings' are promised to those who exercise patience when a disaster strikes, as in the verse cited

above. The word 'test' is significant here, as it indicates that a disaster is not necessarily a punishment for human sin, as mentioned in the story of Job in the Bible earlier. This adds another dimension to our understanding of the phenomenon of disaster. It is equally interesting that Allah states quite clearly that we, being human, must expect disasters in this life and not assume that our lives will be free of trouble. Instead, what is required is our patience, and also our gratitude to Allah for his bountiful provision. Furthermore, we are urged to seek Allah's forgiveness. In the *Quran*, Allah promises us that life will improve and our blessings will abound if we repent, seek His forgiveness and return to His path: Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver. He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in [continuing] showers. And give you increase in wealth and children and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers (71:10-12).

And [Allah revealed] that if they had remained straight on the way, We would have given them abundant provision. (72:16)

The Prophet Mohammad describes the believer as a fresh tender plant; from whatever

direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 5644)

Evidently, we are encouraged to bear our difficulties with resilience and be proactive rather than sinking into despair and losing hope. The Prophet Mohammad also emphasizes that not only should we exercise patience, we should also be thankful for everything that we have in life:

How wonderful is the situation of the believer; there is good for him in everything, and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity reaches him, he expresses gratitude to God, and that is good for him; yet if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is good for him. (*Muslim*, 7138)

Thus, we are urged to adopt an attitude where we internally accept the disaster. Asking for Allah's forgiveness and being proactive, trying to help others and learn something from the experience so that we come out stronger are equally important and rewarding. Al Nabulsi (2007) writes that for one who does not learn from a

disaster, the disaster in himself is bigger.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1. When Pain is Gain**

Although disasters are frightening, challenging occurrences that expose our weakness, one cannot learn or grow without them. Rabbi Yehuda Berg has stated: “Unfortunately, it is human nature for us to only learn and grow from a place of emptiness. It’s hard to learn when we are winning and on top of the world.” Meanwhile, philosopher Mustapha Mahmoud (1986) cites in *A Dialogue with My Atheist Friend* several examples that illustrate how a bad experience often bears good fruit. He reminds us that disease can enhance immunity, pain can build endurance, and vaccines are created from microbes. He also points out that earthquakes relieve pressure within the earth and protect the earth’s crust from exploding, while volcanoes form significant mineral and other deposits deep within them. Similarly, many important inventions and discoveries for peacetime have come out of war, such as the development of penicillin and atomic energy. This perspective seems to answer the long-standing question of why God allows disasters to happen.

Wars provided opportunities to explore ideas that have inadvertently transformed our lives. Alnahas (2020) expands on this theme of war and its consequences. He mentions, amongst other things, that the first ambulance services was established in the 1400s, when Queen Isabella of Spain ordered support for the wounded in battle. Computers were also developed during the First World War to help crack enemy codes. Moreover, although they are catastrophic in themselves, wars cause nations to interact and communicate, form alliances and promote collaboration across the globe. For example, the League of Nations was founded at the end of World War I, constituting the first intergovernmental organization in history. Similarly, the Security Council was created after World War II for the same purpose: to safeguard the rights of nations and improve cooperation. While it is true that the Security Council has not always achieved this purpose, it cannot be denied that it has been at least partially successful in bringing nations together to discuss matters of universal concern.

### **6.2. ‘Safety Brakes’**

‘Minor’ disasters can be seen as protective devices. Al Nabulsi

(2007) states that given the widespread corruption in this world, God sometimes wants to get our attention, so that He can steer us along the right path. In the Quran, it is written that “Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]” (30:41). Al Nabulsi emphasizes that although disasters are usually perceived negatively, there is some purpose to every disaster. As an example, he cites the analogy of a car and its brakes. Although cars were made to move forward, they also have brakes, which work against the very purpose of a vehicle, since they stop it from running. However, it is these brakes that prevent car accidents.

Nevertheless, how feasible is it to embrace this positive view and behave more proactively? Our perception of disaster could either encourage or restrain our behavior. In his article about tolerance and human nature, Alnahas (2019) claims that it is not easy for “conditioned minds [to] break away from their embedded thinking and gradually evolve a new mentality”.

It would seem that the concept of disaster as an opportunity or warning is alien to many of us and difficult to grasp.

### **6.3. The Silver Lining**

In a stark and very real illustration of the positive aspects of disasters, Alnahas (2020) outlines how the current coronavirus pandemic has benefited the world in some ways, despite its many challenging outcomes worldwide. For example, there have been dramatic positive changes to the natural environment due to the long lockdown. Additionally, there is now considerably more awareness of the significance of scientific research for the safety of future generations. This is evident from an increase in research funding in many countries. Especially crucial is the increased cooperation between nations, which is the long-term answer to foster growth, empathy, love and care for one another. Indeed, this reminds us of a verse in the Quran that indicates our limited knowledge:

... but it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But God knows, and you know not (*Quran*, 2:216).

In their different forms, disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes,

floods and pandemics do not necessarily mark the end of the world, as history has witnessed many other catastrophic phenomena, some of which exceed what we have experienced in recent years. Previous disasters have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, but the human race has survived and continued to learn, develop and even thrive.

The ideas and illustrations explored in this article point to a need for balance between what is lost and what is gained. Just as a surgeon makes an incision to perform surgery and save a life, disasters can be the start of a new and better life. Therefore, we must not lose heart or allow our hope to fade.

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## Islamic Guidance on Infection Prevention and Control for COVID-19

By Mohamed Magid

### Introduction

I have been asked to provide an Islamic guidance on visiting the sick, performing certain ritual acts of worship, and fulfilling burial rites while preventing and controlling for infection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before delving into specifics, I would like to comment on how Muslim scholars have historically responded with jurisprudential principles under special circumstances.

Muslim scholars have articulated general principles derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet, peace be upon him (PBUH). These principles, referred to as the higher purposes of Islamic law (*Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*), guide the

understanding and application of religious laws.

The higher purposes of Islamic law encompass the preservation of 5 things:

Life

Religion

Intellect

Progeny

Property

They are used to govern *ijtihād*, the systematic method of interpreting Islamic law based on a strong understanding of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* by jurists trained and well-versed in legal theory. From these higher purposes, scholars have derived legal maxims (*Qawā'id Fiqhiyyah*) that structure and regulate Islamic laws and rulings. Consider an example of the preservation of religion and life. Islam allows for the suspension



or easing of rules in conditions of difficulty or expected harm. The consumption of swine and carrion therefore becomes permissible in situations where people are faced with starvation. This suspension of rules is based on the legal maxim that “necessity makes the unlawful lawful” (*al-dharūrāt tubih al-mahzūrāt*).

Another legal maxim is that «harm shall be eliminated» (*al-dararu yuzāl*). Scholars have detailed guidance for the jurisprudence of “lifting of blame” (*raf’ul ḥaraj*), which seeks to remove hardship and eliminate harm. Based on these principles, Islamic law has made the unlawful into lawful as we have seen in the case of consumption of swine or carrion in the face of starvation. Commands such as fasting in the month of Ramadan may be similarly suspended for valid reasons like physical illness. In those circumstances, required fasting is replaced by feeding the hungry or is able to be made up when the person becomes well. In the jurisprudence of purification, the practice of dry ablution (*tayammum*) (i.e., wiping the face and hands with sand or earth) can replace conventional ablution (*wudū’*) in cases of sickness or lack of water.

In the jurisprudence of ritual prayer (*ṣalah*), one can combine daily prayers when inclement weather such as heavy rain or streets that become impassable with mud make it difficult to attend congregational prayers. There are also different formats allowed for prayer in response to community concerns about safety and security, such as in times of war. In some cases, this can include the suspension of Friday congregational prayers. Based on these higher principles of Islamic law, we shall address the important issue of modifying Islamic religious practices for infection prevention and control in response to the grave contemporary public health threat of COVID-19.

### **Protecting the Healthy**

The first higher purpose of Islamic law that will be addressed is the preservation of life, one of the most critical responsibilities of imams and community leaders in Islam. We learn about the jurisprudence of restoring and saving life (*fiqhul-Iḥyā’*) from the Qur’anic verse, “if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all humankind” (Qur’an 5:32). We also point out the Islamic legal maxim “[let there be] No harm and no counter harm.” Consequently,

the primary objective regarding contagious diseases like COVID-19 is to stop the spread of the contagion. Life can be preserved by preventing unsafe interactions between healthy and infected people and by ceasing all other practices that contribute to the spread of the contagion. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has taught us that:

“Let none of the sick be brought to where the healthy are” (Bukhāri and Muslim)

“If you learned that the plague has been found in a land, do not enter into it. And if you were in a land where the plague is present, do not depart from it” (Bukhāri)

“Flee the leper as you flee from a lion” (Bukhāri).

Muslim narrated the people of Thaḳīf had a leper among their delegation that came to the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) sent him a messenger that conveyed to him “we accept your oath of allegiance and you can go back.”

An important related issue regards who is charged with determining the nature of the disease and its gravity. In other words, who has the authority to declare an active contagion and determine the protective mechanisms that should be followed to protect

individuals and the community from harm? Islam regulates public responsibilities that affect the common good. Thus, only qualified doctors or public health authorities have the right to declare a contagion and the resulting health-related protocols that should be followed to minimize its spread. The Qur’an states, “O you who have attained to faith! Pay heed unto God, pay heed unto the Messenger, and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority” (Qur’an 4:59). The ones entrusted with authority (*‘ulil-amri minkum*) in matters relating to individual and community health are doctors and public health authorities. In the case of COVID-19, there is a significant and growing body of evidence on the nature of the disease and how both individuals and communities can protect against it.

Violating the directives of doctors and health authorities can lead to endangering lives and is clearly against the command of God. So, if the public health authorities declare any of the following, then all Muslims should respond and accept these conditions:

Healthy people should not visit the sick

Muslims should not share



containers for ablution (*wudū'*)  
Congregating in public places including mosques and marketplaces should be suspended  
Congregational prayers should be temporarily abated in areas where infections are rampant to avoid spreading disease and endangering people's lives

This is similar to a sick person following their doctor's medical orders to not fast in Ramadan, or to prioritize protecting the life of the mother over that of the fetus when pregnancy endangers the mother's life.

### **Visiting and Consoling the Sick**

There are numerous hadiths calling for visiting and consoling the

sick, but they are on the condition that such visits do not lead to transmitting disease. The Prophet (PBUH) asked, "if you learned that the plague has been found in a land, do not enter into it. And if you were in a land where the plague is present, do not depart from it" (Bukhāri). This clearly indicates his utmost goal (PBUH) was to protect the lives of the healthy. Otherwise, the plague would spread wherever people traveled and would devastate large numbers of people. Alternatives to physically visiting the sick are to see and gesture to them from behind a glass wall or safety barrier, or to call and record messages for them through mobile phones. In other words, we should

follow best practices communicated by public health authorities as a safe way to perform our Islamic duty of visiting or consoling the sick.

### **Funeral Rites and Burial Practices**

Some of the sick in our community may pass away despite the best efforts and care. How should we handle the bodies of the deceased who cannot be washed because of the conditions of their death, e.g. those who drown, are burnt, or who died from an infectious disease such as the plague or COVID-19? Islamic scholars have handled this issue in detail. The Malikis, the school of jurisprudence most commonly followed in West Africa, say that if the body cannot be washed because the corpse should not be touched, then water should be poured on it. This also applies for bodies that are bloated (*maraqī al-falāh*). The Maliki tradition also upholds that dry ablution (*tayammum*) can be performed. If difficulty in washing the body arises from body wounds, burns, and smallpox such that washing can cause the skin to crack or spoil, then only enough water is poured on the corpse as to avoid worsening the wounds or body's condition. If pouring water on the body is not feasible, then dry

ablution should be performed. Some interpretations from the Hanbali school of jurisprudence state that the deceased can be shrouded and buried without washing or performing dry ablution since the purpose of washing the body is to cleanse it. Shaikh Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Mukhtār al-Shinqīī opines, in *Sharḥ Al-Zād*, that “if it is expected that harm to the washer may result from the act of washing as we see with contagious diseases, and if the deceased cannot be washed in a manner that ensures the washer is safe from contracting the disease, under these circumstances scholars have stated they should not be washed, only dry ablution [should be used].”

These opinions that call for substituting washing with dry ablution do not, however, resolve the problem of spreading infection through touch. Thus, pouring water from a distance or burying without washing becomes the required action and is contingent on the best practice recommended by authorized public health authorities. This course of action is validated by the previously stated legal maxims, “necessity makes the unlawful lawful”, “[let there be] No harm and no counter harm.” The Qur’an

also states, “So keep your duty to God as best you can” (Qur’an 64:16). Finally, we must remember that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “If I command you to do something, do it as much as possible (narrated by Bukhāri, Muslim, Tirmidhī).

Scholars have also said that for those who are sick and unable to physically move to perform purification by water or earth, the purification requirement is suspended for them. They should pray in their current condition based on the verse, “God does not want to impose any hardship on you” (Qur’an 5:6). If the sick can pray in whatever condition they are in without conducting wudu, then in a similar vein, the deceased can also be buried “as they are” because of the evident difficulty to perform the required purification posed by the potential harm that can result to individuals and communities.

The Prophet (PBUH) considered those who die from the plague as having the same status as martyrs (as reported by Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Daoud). These hadiths and others should comfort the family of the deceased that their loved one can be considered to have status equal to those of martyrs *inshā’ Allah* (if

God wills). It is also important to note that not washing the corpse does not take away from the dignity of the deceased, as we have learned from the Prophet (PBUH) through his tradition of burying the martyrs without washing their bodies.

Burying the dead is obligatory (*wājib*). As we have cited above, the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Let none of the sick be brought to where the healthy are” (Bukhāri and Muslim). He also said, “Flee the leper as you flee from a lion” (Bukhāri). It is clear that the Prophet (PBUH) sought to avoid the spread of contagious diseases that might harm the community. In the case of COVID-19, which is spread through direct contact as well as proximity to the infected, it is important to take extreme care when touching the deceased as advised by public health authorities to protect the family and community members of the deceased. Moreover, if public health authorities advise that burial in the immediate ground can pose risk of disease, then burial practices should be adjusted to minimize harm to the living in accordance with the guidelines from health authorities. The Prophet (PBUH) said, “[let there be] No harm and no counter harm.” Legal maxims



also state that “Repelling evil/harm is of higher priority than securing benefits” and “Necessity is measured in accordance with its true proportions”.

Regarding funeral prayer in absentia for the deceased whose family members are in quarantine and their bodies were buried by the health authorities before their families could pray on them (to protect against infection), it is permissible to perform funeral prayer in

absentia (*salātul-ghā'ib*) for them. This is analogous to when funeral prayers in absentia are performed on those who have drowned, were burnt, or missing and their death has been ascertained. Such prayers are also performed for those who died while on travel away from their family and community members. The Prophet (PBUH) performed funeral prayers in absentia on the Negus (*al-Najāshī*) who passed away in Ethiopia. The Prophet (PBUH) also performed funeral

prayers for the servant who used to clean the mosque at her grave site when he learned of her passing. Thus, Muslims can perform funeral prayers in absentia for those who have died and were buried by the health authorities before their families could pray on them.

### **Conclusion**

I have reviewed the health guidelines that were issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). I have also consulted with many trusted experts who are all in agreement that it is critical for Muslims and others to follow these guidelines so that we can protect our communities from COVID-19 and help eradicate this pandemic. The consensus is that unless we follow these rules and guidelines, we will cause great harm and even death as the disease spreads throughout the region and globe.

It is the responsibility of scholars, imams, and community leaders to disseminate accurate and useful public health information to the community. Leaders must communicate directly with and follow the directions of authorized health officials in order to protect

community members. In addition, they must steer people away from listening to rumors and inaccurate information. By doing so, Imams can show leadership in serving and protecting the community. Imams should remind people to be patient, compassionate, to continue praying for one another, and of the verse “and who enjoin upon one another patience (in adversity) and enjoin upon one another compassion” (Qur’an 90:17).

Imams should also convey that the whole world is concerned with what is happening in their communities. People are praying and making *du’ā* (supplication), and are donating their time, money and until the last patient is healed and COVID-19 is defeated, *inshā’Allah* (God willing). We must express our gratitude to all those dedicated public health providers who are sacrificing their time and effort under very difficult circumstances. We also thank the burial teams for their personal sacrifices to protect the community. Some health workers have even died as they worked to protect and serve the community. May God accept them among the righteous. May God reward and protect the living among them with His Bounty and Grace.



## Summary

1. Preservation of Life is one of the Higher Purposes of Islamic Law.
2. In matters of health, the ‘ones entrusted with authority’ (‘ulil-amr minkum) are doctors and health authorities.
3. It is not permissible to touch a person infected with COVID-19 as

one can contract the virus through any of the bodily fluids. Muslims must follow health authorities’ directions in how to visit the sick.

4. If the body of a Muslim cannot be washed because of health concerns from COVID-19 infection, then dry ablution (tayammum) may be performed. If neither is possible, then coffin and burial is sufficient.

5. In areas where infections are





rampant, Friday (Jumu'ah) and other congregational prayers or religious gatherings can be suspended until health authorities declare that it is safe for people to congregate again.

6. It is permissible to perform funeral prayer in absentia (ṣalātul-ghā'ib) if the family of the deceased could not perform the prayer at the time of burial due to

health concerns.

7. Imams should coordinate with health authorities and receive validated health information directly from them. Imams must perform the critical role of spreading awareness, consoling and comforting the community, and assisting health authorities so as to protect life.



# Religious communities in US and Canada and their responses to Covid-19

Alena Demirović

## Abstract

This article attempts to inform a reader of the outbreak of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) in the US and Canada, and its impact on religions, religious practices and their respective communities throughout these countries. The Covid-19 virus has thus far killed over 201,000 people in the USA and over 9,200 in Canada. Even though the Covid-19 has lower severity and mortality rate than the previous SARS virus, it is much more transmissible, which makes it even more difficult for the communities to uphold the spread. Although many questions still require answers, my hope is that the article will contribute to the understanding of struggles which North American religious

communities and its leaders had to go through by battling the virus and its spread.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has become a definite turning point in world history, with a profound impact on society and practice of religion. When the Covid-19 pandemic started back in March of this year, followers of various religions found themselves in a previously unknown situation. This was especially true with monotheistic religions who, with their affiliated communities, could not perform regular communal activities, and could not even normally celebrate important holidays such as Ramadan, Jewish Passover, Catholic and Orthodox

Easter.

Many religious people saw this pandemic as a test from God and they could absolutely be right, as everything points that the coronavirus pandemic is indeed a big test of resilience and patience for all religions. However, it is not a test only for a faith and its believers, but rather this is also a test for human reasoning - whether we as human beings will be disciplined enough and act properly to help save people, or ignore the danger and put lives in a serious danger. To say the least, at the heart of the Covid-19 pandemic we are being tested on the conflict between rational health needs and traditional religion needs. Many of us have probably asked ourselves have we as a community neglected health preventative measures issued by our governments in regards to the current Covid-19 pandemic and in return have, played a role in spreading the virus? Did our religious behavior, such as live religious services, religious schools, our pilgrimages to holly places and our interactions during Ramadan observation, Easter and Eid celebrations contributed to such?

Fortunate to say rational health-

conscious behavior has played a major role in subduing the pandemic and biggest praise goes to our religious leaders who have taken serious necessary measures and have changed regular religious practices, adapting them to the preventive measures issued by their local authorities thus saving their congregants from the disaster that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought. It was not difficult to find the right solutions on how to set and follow the procedures, as many religious leaders and communities have followed the ones recommended by the respective governments of the USA and Canada issued at the start of the pandemic back in March of 2020.

### **Muslim Experience**

As for adapting a change to in person services, the religious leaders began using technology to keep the community connected virtually by holding religious services online, convening groups, and providing support to people who are struggling. Such services have been offered in Chicago's Bosnian Sabah community center since the beginning of the pandemic and even though the preventive measures have eased somewhat, their online

service «learning with imam” is continuing. Dr. Senad Agić, imam at the Sabah community center responded to my question on what strategies and religious practices in his community were used to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and how effective they have been, by saying:

“First of all, it was a very different Ramadan, like never before. Even the oldest members don’t remember this kind of situation happening in their lifetime. The month of Ramadan is a very social month, and it is meant to be opposite from isolation from the community. Social distance or physical distance is such a strange concept to any religion whose primary purpose is socializing people into communities. But now, instead of coming together we are staying at home in isolation. The good thing in all of this is that we have been given an opportunity for all of us to be alone and come to know ourselves better; through self-reflection, through contemplation, through self-purification, through wondering about why we have to go through all of this. Is this a warning from God, His test or even punishment, remained as a tough question and a puzzle for us all to solve?

Despite the fact that last Ramadan was a unique and revealing of what every Muslim really loves about the month: the self-improvement, God-consciousness, and self-control, we missed our community iftars and congregational *tarawih* prayers. Due to the Covid-19 we were forced to limit ourselves to a noon prayer at 1:00 P.M. followed by recitation of the holy Quran for about one hour. We could not allow more than up to 10 worshipers to attend following the state guidelines. Unfortunately, we had to completely cancel our evening dinners and prayers service. We requested our members to stay home and break the fast with their families. There was no other option left. Ramadan 2020 was challenging in many ways, but we did not surrender to be defeated by the Covid-19!”

Smail Serdanović, a director at the Plav-Gusinje Islamic community center in New York City, commented on how his members of community are coping with the Covid-19 and its implications: “The month-long celebration of Ramadan was different for our community this year. It is usually a time for the community to come together, but the Covid-19 has changed that. We were not able to

celebrate Ramadan, the end of the fasting month Eid was performed under strict rules. We were not able to come to the mosque and had to opt out for an outside prayer instead, however we had to be cautious to follow the rules and not perform a sermon, where everybody hugs each other, shakes hands and embraces each other. Our funerary rituals had to change, we could not wash nor shroud someone who died from the Covid-19 and only few people could perform communal prayer on behalf of the wider community. As it stands right now, we can only have up to 50 members inside of our center even though we have larger holding capacity however I am confident that our members are happy to be able to come as well.”

### **Christian Experience**

The faith leaders still provide connection, support, and ways to continue worship, as well as other services for their communities as they have done it before. As history has shown when disasters happen the religion and awareness of God becomes an important way of dealing with it. As a result, people become more religious and they pray more. However, the socializing part that a religion provides had

to be changed or completely stop, because of the pandemic preventive measures. Many communities throughout Canada and the USA had to close their places of worship for the time being and most of them shifted to online services through live streaming, radio and television. Communion had to adapt to the new rules of physical distancing that had to be implemented to any place of mass gathering due to the requirements of state and provincial laws. Dr. Milan Radulović, an Orthodox priest and a professor at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, commented on how his parishioners are coping with the Covid-19 and its implications:

“In Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, we have a holy communion. In Orthodox churches we have one spoon for holy communion and in Catholic churches we give wafers usually directly into the mouths of believers. Now, that changed and we only place it into the hands of the believers. As for Orthodox churches, many spoons are now being used which are being disinfected after every holy communion. In mosques and synagogues there are no such things as communions and physical distancing is easier to keep. Some people are complaining about those

changes, but we definitely want to obey the government rules and most people are obeying safety measures without question.

Of course, it is effective, because we as social beings, we have a need for human company and to be integrated into the society. So, if a social distance is in the order for all of the religious organizations, it is not ours to question if corona is true or a lie, we are actually not in a position to judge, we obey the government until new rules come in order. In Bible God says: “Give what is to God to God, and what is to Cesear to Cesear to Government. (Mark 12:17)”

### **A way forward**

Whether one is a believer or not, everyone can nowadays see how much pride, greed, violence, bullying, malice, tyranny, immorality and deception of all kind are present in the world, which surely is not pleasing to God nor to any of His creatures, be they humans or others. This is because it is all directed precisely against life and survival on this planet. In this regard, commenting of the current state of humanity a well-respected scholar of Islamic and religious studies in America, Seyyed Hossein

Nasr has stated: “It is important we remember that all of us on the globe share in destroying our natural environment, although the reason for this are different in different parts of the globe. In this modern world the environment is destroyed by following the dominating philosophy, while in what remains of the traditional world it is done in spite of the prevailing world view and most often as a result of external coercion as well as temptation, whether it be direct or indirect. I have repeated this truth in many places and have caused some people to become angry. But the fact is that the only action in which nearly everybody participates at the present moment of human history, from communist and socialist to capitalist, from Hindu and Muslim to atheist, from Christian to Shinto, is in living and acting in such a way as to cause the destruction of the natural environment. This fact must seep fully into our consciousness while at the same time we remember the differences in motive and perspective among religious and secularized sectors of humanity. Obviously, for those for whom religion is still a reality, it is much easier to appeal to religion and the religious view of nature to discover the means through which



a solution would be found for the crisis from which we all suffer.” (Chittick, 2007)

As followers of monotheistic religions, we all believe that the pandemic might be a punishment for all these excesses, and because we have neglected to be honest and sincere human beings, we created these challenges for our communities. A number of verses in the Qur’an for many Muslim believers supports this view. For example, the following verse may illustrate this point: “Do men think

that they will be left alone because they say: ‘We believe,’ and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and God will certainly know those who are true from those who are false. Do those who practice evil think that they will get better of Us? Evil is their judgement! For those whose hopes are in the meeting with God (in the Hereafter, let them strive); for the Term (appointed) by God is surely coming and He hears and knows (all things).” (Al-’Ankabut 29:2-5) Be it as it may, many people also believe that this pandemic and mass



deaths it caused, together with our religious or meditating practices have helped us intensify our awareness of God, and helped us to cope with the current challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge is that so much things about the Covid-19 disease are still unknown, and in the face of so much of the uncertainty, belief in God and that He is in control provides us with calm and comfort.

We have asked religious leaders, imams, priests and rabbis, how they adjusted their religious practices

and conversations within their communities to help their members cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and how their congregants responded. They all agreed that this situation presented challenges to adjust to the new situation with rules and regulations set by governments that very much intrude into daily religious practices. Furthermore, they also had to adjust to unusual communications through online consulting, preaching and connecting with their congregants. All of them pointed that the challenge had to be met and



practices had to continue now even more than before. Everyone is now facing the same challenges within our communities and we all hope that with the mercy of God we will soon overcome these challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought. Although it is difficult, it also gave as a reason to reflect on life and on things that we for so long took for granted here in North America or elsewhere. All religious leaders are clear with their messages to everyone is to continue to stay strong and continue to abide by all the sets of measures indicated by the governments to prevent the further spread of the disease. This certainly will help us all to go back to our normal ways of observing our religious traditions, live and celebrate God together as we have done for so many years.

An interesting quote by M. Fitzgerald attributed to F. Schuon with regards to misfortunes and disasters that befall on humanity such as the current crisis of Covid-19 is suitable to end this paper: “Whatever maybe the phenomena and whatever they causes, there is always That which is; and That which is is beyond the world of tumult, contradictions and disappointments. That which

is can be troubled and diminished by nothing; it is Truth, Peace and Beauty. Nothing can tarnish it, and no one can take it away from us.” (Fitzgerald, 2020).

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# Religious Responsibilities in Times of Pandemics: Mutual Relationship between Spiritual and Physical Well-being



By Senad Mrahorović and Majdey Zawawi

*“Let us hope that the present global crisis will teach us how to overcome that hubris, how to live with greater humility and compassion, not only towards other human beings but also towards all beings, all creatures great and small. The present crisis can be an occasion for spiritual awakening and be seen as a gift from God to open our eyes again to the spiritual realities that so many had forgotten.”*

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

## Abstract

The purpose of human existence according to the Islamic perspective is to know and serve. Being a divine vicegerent (*khalifatullah*) on earth, every human being has its cause to fulfill in his or her lifetime. Such a

duty which relates not only to the fulfilment of rights towards oneself, but also rights towards others, will be accomplished based on his knowledge and understanding of himself and the world surrounding him. The more self-awareness one acquires the more understanding of human diversity, including their ethnical, religious, and cultural characteristics, one will gain. This principle equally applies regardless of time and space, prosperity or calamity, peace, or conflict. In times of crisis such as wars or natural disasters, wherein human unity and solidarity is exceptionally needed to preserve that precious divine gift of life, the importance of knowledge and understanding comes to the fore even more. In this article therefore, we will discuss what are religious responsibilities in times

of pandemics, and how spiritual states and awareness of reality are important to protect oneself as well as others from a disease, regardless of its nature.

## **Introduction**

The present pandemic identified as coronavirus Covid-19 which started late in 2019 has affected the world in almost every aspect of human life. It has become one of the deadliest diseases in recent times, infecting over 22 million people and claiming more than 8 hundred thousand lives worldwide. Apart from that, it caused enormous losses in world economy, effecting gradually all sorts of businesses from small and private firms to giant and global companies all over the world. In addition to that, Covid-19 has also changed the system of education as well as numerous working standards globally within the educational and working environments.

Since the beginning of Covid-19, countless studies have been conducted on the operational readiness of not only the labor industries, but also the communities in several places around the world in order to track down responses to the pandemic according to the

guideline set out by the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>1</sup> Among the criteria used in these studies to measure the societal responsiveness towards the pandemic was to look at three aspects, namely, knowledge, attitude and practices of certain frontline workers in several countries, including China, UK, Iran and Jordan.<sup>2</sup> For this article however, the authors will only look into one of the abovementioned aspects, that is knowledge and its significance, as far as it is considered as a religious duty, in protecting the well-being of an individual or community at times of pandemics such as Covid19. To this end, the spiritual and the physical well-being of man, according to Islam, will certainly alleviate much of the responsibilities which an individual or society holds during the times of plague or other similar calamities. As S.H. Nasr stated, the current ongoing pandemic allows for “an opportunity to turn more inward, to turn to introspection, to become more familiar with our inner self, to view nature as our spiritual friend and a realm of reality governed not by blind forces and laws but by the Divine Will.”<sup>3</sup> To that extent, the article will explore how knowledge in Islam is connected to the preservation and promotion of

well-being, an important element that has caught the attention of the world recently.

### **Knowledge as a religious duty in Islam**

Knowledge, or the enrichment of the intellect, is one of the cornerstones of the Islamic worldview. One of the persistent themes within the Qur'ān concerns the subject of Knowledge. The attestation of faith, or *shahadah*, essentially involves having knowledge of the oneness of Allah (*tawhīd*) and attesting to the Prophet Muhammad being the last messenger of Allah. The tawhidic foundation of knowledge in Islam became a major motivational factor in the attainment of knowledge, especially during the golden age of Islamic Civilization. The advancement of sciences, particularly in the field of mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, metallurgy, architecture, textiles, and agriculture. The tawhidic epistemology during that time played a central role in providing the society with beneficial knowledge eventually leading to the establishment of justice and the promotion of goodness and peace in society.

Islam encourages its followers to

seek knowledge that is attained for the benefit and goodness of man. Islam acknowledges the different forms of knowledge that exists in the world. Although most of the knowledge can be beneficial to mankind, there are also types of knowledge that could bring harm or lead to destruction. Islam endorses the intellectual pursuit that is both good and beneficial for this world and the hereafter. Knowledge allow Muslims to “understand the purpose of humankind’s creation and existence through an ethical analysis of nature and how nature behaves”. One of the elements connected to the concept of *khalifatullah fil’ard* (Allah’s vicegerent on the Earth) is to attain knowledge in order to gain wisdom. The tawhidic approach to knowledge espouses the permanence of knowledge sources, in line with the ultimate and permanent faith and beliefs. The integration between tawhid and knowledge guarantees that individuals can be guided to be the khalifatullah.<sup>4</sup> Which is why the first verse of the Qur’ān demands people to read in the name of Allah the most merciful. Through divine mercy and guidance, Muslims will be able to attain knowledge on what Allah requires from Muslims to be successful in *dunya* and

*akhirah*. In other words, by the virtue of knowledge a Muslim will be able to fulfill its twofold functions on earth, vicegerency, and obedience to the Divine Will. Now the question how do we know what is it that God wants from us, or what is it that He wills for us, is answered in a number of Qur'anic verses such as: "I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me" (Qur'an, 51:56), or "Verily I, I am God. There is no God save Me. So worship Me and establish prayers for My remembrance" (Qur'an, 20:14).<sup>5</sup>

Prophetic hadith also teaches Muslim to seek refuge from knowledge that is of no benefit. In a hadith narrated by Anas bin Malik, the Prophet once supplicated (*du'a*):

"O Allah, I seek refuge with You from knowledge that is of no benefit, a heart that is not humble, a supplication that is not heard and a soul that is not satisfied".<sup>6</sup>

It is with this prayer that Muslims are encouraged to seek knowledge that is beneficial, bringing goodness in times of dire need. In these pandemic times, one of the most important area of knowledge is the knowledge of well-being, pertinent to the human condition, since maintaining well-being is part

of the Islamic principles, one of the objectives, or *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*. For this, we need to understand what is meant by well-being and whether Islam demonstrates the preservation of both the spiritual as well as the physical well-being.

### **Mutual Relationship between Spiritual and Physical Well-being in Islam**

As knowledge signifies a religious duty in Islam for in order to accept the first tenet of Islamic faith, namely, the belief in the unity of God, one has to have the knowledge according to his or her spiritual and mental capacity to distinguish between the Absolute and relative, the Infinite and limited, the Creator and creation, the awareness of reality therefore will depend on the given degree of knowledge. Viewed from the Islamic philosophical perspective, a human being represents a microcosm in relation to the macrocosm or the cosmos as such, containing within his or her self all the realities reflected in the created realm of the universe. "This doctrine of the correspondence between the human microcosm and the cosmic macrocosm" as Nasr writes, "is found in all authentic expressions



of the perennial philosophy, as one sees, for example, in Greek and Christian Hermeticism and Jewish and Christian Kabbalah. In the Islamic tradition it is found implicitly in certain verses of the Qur'an, such as the one in chapter 2 that states that God taught Adam the names of all things, for to know a name, as traditionally understood, means also to have an ontological correspondence to the being that is named.<sup>77</sup> That is why the Prophet of Islam has famously said that "whoever knows one's self, knows God." Commenting on this hadith, Nasr states that "[I]t provides, within the spiritual universe of the Islamic tradition, the light necessary to illuminate the dark corners of our soul and the keys to open the doors to the hidden recesses of our being

so that we can journey within and know ourselves, this knowledge leading ultimately to the knowledge of God..."<sup>78</sup>

In the traditional Islamic perspective, our spiritual states which are based on certain degrees of knowledge are clearly reflected through our behavior and outward deeds. On the other hand, however, our actions in turn affect our inner being or our soul. This reciprocal stimulus is being portrayed in the Qur'an as well. For example, the first instance of our spiritual state being reflected outwardly has been described in the following verse: "...You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and contentment; their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration..." (Qur'an, 48:29).

Commenting on this verse, a number of traditional exegetes suggested that the ‘mark’ in question refers to the visible light on believers’ faces resulting from their humility either in this world or the next or in both of them.<sup>9</sup>

The second case of outward actions affecting our inner or spiritual states is seen in this verse: “And whenever a surah is sent down, some among them say: ‘Which of you has this increased in faith?’ As for those who believe, it increases them in faith, and they rejoice” (Qur’an, 9:124). The verse clearly indicates the listening to the Qur’an, its reading, words and meaning as a believer’s noble deed or even a religious duty which in turn manifests its positive impact on a believer’s soul. “Within the Islamic spiritual tradition there is a commonly accepted idea that one understands and benefits from the Qur’an to the degree that one’s heart is pure, and one is humble before the Word of God. At the same time, the recitation of the Word of God and sincere meditation upon it have the effect of removing the hardened crust surrounding one’s heart.”<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, the same reciprocal impact of one’s actions and spiritual states in negative connotation as well. This opinion has been masterly

explained by Gai Eaton in the following passage: “The argument one hears only too frequently is that ‘outward things’ do not matter; all that matters is ‘what you have in your heart’. This argument is, to say the least, naïve. What we have in our hearts is constantly influenced – and eventually changed – by our immediate environment, and the environment closest to us is our robe, suit or dress we wear; after that comes the home, and after the home, the city. Just as the way in which people dress, indicates the idea of themselves, so the way in which they build indicates their idea of society and of the purpose of life. Occidental architecture in this century is an open book in which the ideologies of our time may be studied. Traditional Islamic architecture, despite a tremendous variety of styles, bears unmistakable stamp of Islam; the traditional home and the traditional city were precisely matched to the lives of people who, in all their activities, followed the *sunnah* of the Prophet...”<sup>11</sup>

### **A Muslim’s responsibility in time of pandemics**

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have highlighted the role of knowledge

within the Islamic tradition as well as the interrelatedness between spiritual and physical well-being based on that knowledge. Here our focus will shift to yet another important factor concerning knowledge, that is the question of one's obligation or responsibility during the crisis of pandemics and similar calamities endangering humanity. Covid-19 is the latest form of such pandemics that, since it was first recorded towards the end of last year, has left an enormous impact on nearly every aspect of human life. Numerous studies and analysis have already been devoted to this type of Coronavirus and its threat for humanity. In line with that, most countries have imposed specific measures to be followed by all citizens, individually or communally in order to minimize the impact of the virus and stay protected as much as possible. The measures in question are generally related to hygiene, quarantine, and physical distancing.<sup>12</sup>

From the Islamic perspective, all of the given aspects for one's protection during the time of current pandemic are well known and need not to be emphasized here. In fact, in Islam, these aspects are the main component of Islamic religious economy and as such are

recommended or strictly prescribed in all times. If for example, the whole earth Islamically speaking, is considered a place for the prostration or simply a *masjid*,<sup>13</sup> it therefore implies that a believer who wishes to be at this sacred place is also clean and prepared not only physically but spiritually as well.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, the abovementioned dual aspects of human being as '*abdullah* on the one hand, and *khalifatullah* on the other hand, are being fully realized. It is for this very reason that Islam strongly emphasized the sacredness of nature and all its inhabitants, be they, human or animal, herbal or mineral, visible, or invisible. Being created so to speak in the spiritual environment, specially designed for the realization of the Truth or Reality, human being is thus obliged to fulfill three sorts of tasks or responsibilities in this life. The first task is towards God via total submission to Him; the second task is towards himself via caring for his well-being, physically and spiritually; and the third one is towards Divine creation, including other human beings, animals and natural surroundings via social and economic norms prescribed in detail by the Islamic law or *Sharī'ah*. These spiritual obligations in principle are timeless as long as one considers himself or



herself to be a Muslim, for as the Prophet has said, when asked by the Archangel Gabriel to describe the notion of ‘*ihsān*’ (doing good or what is beautiful): Ihsan means “to worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.”<sup>15</sup>

In the Islamic context what a believer ought to do is not to look for the solution elsewhere when a calamity strikes, but rather to prepare him or herself within for readiness in dealing with any crisis at any time by simply fulfilling the tasks mentioned above. In other words, instead of improving the taste of fruits, one must improve the quality of roots. For a Muslim, this life consists of both, triumphs and trials, and regardless of which of the two prevails at a certain time, he or she should be ready to accept it as a divine test and to deal with it in the light of the Islamic teaching. Human life on the earth, as Nasr states, “is transient and cannot but be combined with dangers, disasters and tragedies great or small. The sacred scriptures of various traditions are there to remind us of this truth and to guide us to draw the right lessons from these occurrences.”<sup>16</sup>

One of the numerous reminders of such trials and turbulations is the qur’anic verse which may serve as the way of conclusion: “Do you

think you will enter the paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, “When (will come) the Help of Allah?” Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near! (Qur’an 2:214).

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## Endnotes

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2- Ibid.

3- S.H. Nasr, “A Brief Spiritual Reflection on the Current Pandemic”, *Sacred Web*, 45, 2020, pp. 14-15.

4- “By virtue of being created as this central being in the terrestrial realm”, write Nasr, “the human being was chosen by God as His vicegerent (*khalifat Allah*) as well as His servant (*‘abd Allah*). As servants, human beings must remain in total obedience to God and in perfect receptivity before what their Creator will for them. As vicegerents they must be active in the world to do God’s Will here on earth”. (S.H. Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* [New York: Harper One, 2002], pp. 276).

5- Most of the commentators of these verses agree that the worship of God or submission to His will is the main cause for the creation of human being. This submission however is not to be understood as something forceful or naturally embedded in every human being, but rather out of free will or choice. Thus al-Zamakhshari statement: “Had God wanted their worship by way of coercion (*qasr*) and compulsion (*ilja’*), it would be found among all human beings.” The worship in question according to other Qur’anic exegetes is being associated or complemented by knowledge. For this reason, Ibn ‘Abbas claimed that ‘to worship Me’ in the above verses means ‘to know Me’. For more on this see S.H. Nasr, C.K. Dagli, M.M. Dakake, J.E.B. Lumbard (Eds.), *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Harper One, 2015), pp. 1280-1281.

6- Sunan al-Nasa’i: 5470 / In-book reference: Book 50, Hadith 43 / English Translation: Vol. 6, Book 50, Hadith 5472.

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8- S.H. Nasr, *Ibid*, pp. 5. The verse in question states: “And He taught Adam the names, all of them, Then He laid them before angels and said: ‘Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful’” (Qur’an, 2:31). Muslim commentators of the notion of the names mentioned in the verse held different views. Some like Ibn ‘Abbas, believe that it refers to the names of common things such as ‘man’, ‘sea’, ‘mountain’ etc. Others such as Mujahid, think that the names include everything, or al-Razi who thinks that the names donate to all the languages of the world. Ibn ‘Arabi and other scholars however maintain that to be taught the names

of things means to be given knowledge of all things. For detailed analysis of this problem see S.H. Nasr, C.K. Dagli, M.M. Dakake, J.E.B. Lumbard (Eds.), *Ibid*, pp. 22.

9- S.H. Nasr, C.K. Dagli, M.M. Dakake, J.E.B. Lumbard (Eds.), *Ibid*, pp. 1256.

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11- Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (New York: SUNY with the Islamic Texts Society, 1985), pp. 209-210.

12- At the website of the World Health Organization the following measures are being listed as the way to protect one self and others from Covid-19 disease: Clean your hands often; Cough or sneeze in your bent elbow - not your hands!; Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth; Limit social gatherings and time spent in crowded places; Avoid close contact with someone who is sick; Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. For more details visit <https://www.who.int/>.

13- It is reported that the Prophet of Islam has said: “All of the earth is a Masjid (a place of prayer), except for graveyards and washrooms.” (Jami’ al-Tirmidhi, 317 / In-book reference: Book 2; Hadith 169 / English translation: Vol. 1, Book 2, Hadith 317 at <https://sunnah.com>).

14- “O you who believe! When you rise to perform the prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of major ritual impurity then purify yourself...” (Qur’an, 5:6); “...Truly a mosque founded upon reverence from the first day is worthier of thy standing therein. Therein are men who love to purify themselves, and God loves those who purify themselves.” (Qur’an, 9:108). In the first verse the purification refers to the ritual ablution or ‘*wudu*’ followed by the other form of cleansing or ‘*ghusl*’, while in the second verse, the purity is understood in its spiritual context as al-Razi among other qur’anic exegetes believes, saying that ‘*Men who love to purify themselves*’ means that their souls do not remain soiled by sin and rebellion. S.H. Nasr, C.K. Dagli, M.M. Dakake, J.E.B. Lumbard (Eds.), *Ibid*, pp. 535.

15- Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005), pp. xxv.

16- S.H. Nasr, “A Brief Spiritual Reflection on the Current Pandemic”, *Sacred Web*, 45, 2020, pp. 14.



### Building up a Common Good of Respectful Identities and Coexistence: A Contribution from the Main Religious Traditions

By Samuele Sangalli

#### Introduction

**The role of religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH) is significant and has sometimes been overemphasized in certain social processes. This overemphasis stems from the recent war past. However, the Islamic Community in BiH has a cohesive role in the society and state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is the initiator of many projects and activities through which dialogue and mutual understanding are promoted.**

In order to better shed light on the situation in BiH, in the context of religious communities and their members, we have to say that members of other religious communities (Orthodox and Catholic) have been finding their

ideals and goals in other neighboring countries, Serbia and Croatia, which they consider their homelands. The Muslims in BiH, apart from BiH, have no other, supplemental state, so their role in preserving the state is far more important and significant. The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a legal entity that gathers a large number of Muslim members through its bodies, develops awareness of the importance of the state and the obligation to comply with state regulations. Regardless of the fact that BiH is a secular state, i.e. the care and protection of citizens is the exclusive competence of the state, the Islamic Community has made an immeasurable contribution to the fight against the «Covid 19» pandemic. During the pandemic, a large number of imams and religious officials took an active part in relief

actions for people with coronavirus and the elderly, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

Since its foundation, the Islamic Community in BiH, as an organization has always been an active participant in certain social processes in BiH and the wider region. It has always been on the side of positive and universal values. It is known that Bosnian muftis in recent history issued proclamations in the process of protecting the other and the different. Today, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a very high place in Bosnian society among socially responsible organizations. The foundations on which Islam is based and its religious law, which make Islam modern and appropriate at all times, are: small number of obligations, removal of difficulties, consideration of human needs, and the establishment of social justice. It was long time ago when Islamic jurists derived six universal (protected) Islamic values, which are accepted by the modern world, and they are: faith, life, reason, honor, property and posterity.<sup>1</sup>

### **Position of Religious Communities in BiH**

The position of religious communities

in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to the provisions of the Constitution of BiH, is regulated by the *lex specialis Law* on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities<sup>2</sup> (Official Gazette of BiH, 5/04), which regulates the following issues: ***relationship between the state and religious communities; discrimination based on religion or belief; the work of religious officials; social rights of religious officials; property of churches and religious communities; the way of financing churches and religious communities; the legal status of churches and religious communities*** and other issues. In addition to these two basic legal acts, the position of religious communities in BiH is additionally regulated by agreements between the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and religious communities, including also legal norms of lower legal force, such as instructions, rule-books and other acts regulating this area. So far, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina has signed agreements with the Catholic<sup>3</sup> and Orthodox Churches, while no agreement has been signed with the Islamic Community, as a community of the majority of the population, due to political reasons. Historically, the area of Bosnia and

Herzegovina is heterogeneous in terms of religious affiliation, with three dominant religious communities (Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic) and a Jewish community with a very small number of members.

During the Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1463-1878.), there was a very close connection between the state and Islam as a source of state ideology. During the Austro-Hungarian rule (1878-1918.) and during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941.), the model of recognized religious communities was valid / effective. After the end of the Second World War in 1946 and the creation of a new, socialist Yugoslavia within which BiH was one of the federal units, there were radical changes in the position of religion in society. The new government opted for the secular structure of society, which meant the separation of state and religion, the complete secularization of the legal system, and the proclamation of religion as a private matter of each individual. Given the acceptance of Marxism as the official ideology of the one-party communist system of the former Yugoslavia, in the period until the 1990s there was a social marginalization of religion and believers and a weakening of the economic base of religious

communities through confiscation of their property by various measures of agrarian reform, nationalization and expropriation.<sup>4</sup>

The process of transition from a socialist to a liberal society began in the autumn of 1990. with the first multi-party election in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only to be interrupted by the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995. In the period following the achievement of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (Dayton Agreement), BiH opted to regulate the relationship between the state and religion in accordance with the principles of the secular liberal tradition. This meant maintaining the institutional and functional separation of the spheres of state and religious authority, but at the same time recognizing the important social role of religious communities through various forms of state cooperation with these communities.

### **History of Islamic Community in BiH**

The topic of this paper focuses on the field of activity of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its historical course through which it grew as an organization.

In formal and material terms, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed when Sheikh al-Islam in Istanbul, as the supreme religious authority in the Ottoman Empire, in 1882 appointed the Sarajevo Mufti Hilmi Omerović as the Bosnian Mufti and at the same time authorized him to appoint lower religious officials and sharia judges. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian state, by virtue of the Imperial Decree of 17 October 1882, appointed Hilmi Omerović Bosnian mufti and proclaimed him the first reis-ulema in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this year is considered the year of the foundation of an independent Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>5</sup>

In the past, the Islamic Community as a subject of law went through several phases and legal and political systems in which it adapted itself and sought its place. It happened for the first time in 1878, after the Berlin Congress and the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And then, after the collapse of Austro-Hungary and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Immediately after the introduction of the royal dictatorship, on 6 January 1929, the Islamic Community came under attack from the January Sixth Regime that sought to bring

its organization into line with the absolute unitarization of all political and public life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With the disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, the Islamic Community found itself in new political circumstances and state and legal environments for the fourth time. In 1946, for the fifth time, the Islamic Community found itself in completely new political and state-legal circumstances to which it had to subordinate its internal structure and organization. Throughout this time, from the first years of the Austro-Hungarian occupation until today, there have been twelve reis-ulemas (Grand muftis) at the head of the Islamic Community. On two occasions, naibu-reis (deputy mufti) was elected as a transitional solution.<sup>6</sup> From its existence until today, the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH have been regulated by constitutions as the highest legal acts. Each of these constitutions had its own characteristics according to the state-legal system in which the Community operated. Today's Constitution of the Islamic Community in BiH regulates the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH, determines its bodies and their competencies, rights and obligations of members of the



Islamic Community as well as other issues.<sup>7</sup>

Pursuant to the Constitutional provisions, the Islamic Community in BiH operates today as one and the only community of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandzak, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia, as a community of Bosniak Muslims outside their homeland and other Muslims who accept it as their own. The Reisu-l-ulema legally represents the Islamic community, and it is an inseparable part of the Ummah.<sup>8</sup>

The main goal of the Islamic Community is for all its members to live in accordance with Islamic norms, which is achieved by promoting good and deterring evil. The Islamic community preserves the credibility of Islamic norms and ensures their interpretation and application. In the interpretation of the faith and the performance of *ibadah* Islamic duties in the Islamic community, the *Maturidi aqidah* and the *Hanafi madhhab* are applied.<sup>9</sup>



## Organization of Islamic Community in BiH

Article 33 of the 2014 Constitution defines the structure of the Islamic Community in BiH, which consists of following bodies: *Jamaat*, *Majlis*, *Muftiate*, *Meshihat*, *Parliament*, *Reisu-l-ulema*, *Council of Mufti*, *Riyaset* and *Constitutional Court*. The basic unit in the Islamic Community is the *Jamaat*, which consists of at least 200 households according to the Constitution. More *jamaat* make up one *majlis*, more *majlis* make up the *muftiluk*, which in administrative, religious, educational, economic and other terms is covered by the *muftiate* headed by the *mufti*. The Mufti is the main religious authority in the area of *muftiate*. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are nine muftiates overring the entire territory of the state, regardless of the Entities, cantons and municipalities. The Council of Muftis is the body of the Islamic Community in charge of matters of religion, which consists of all the muftis in the Islamic community. The Mufti becomes a member of the Council by appointment as Mufti and ceases to be a member of the Council upon the termination of the term of office of the Mufti. The Council of Muftis is headed by the Reis-l-ulema, who

manages the work of the Council. The highest executive body of the Islamic Community is the *Riyaset*, headed by the reis-l-ulema. The *Riyaset* consists of special administrations for various areas such as: religious affairs, educational affairs, economic affairs, legal affairs, and foreign affairs administrations. The Parliament of the Islamic Community is the highest representative and legislative body of the Islamic Community in BiH, consisting of 87 parliamentarians elected in elections that are held in constituencies.<sup>10</sup> There are up to 1/3 of the employees in the bodies of the Islamic Community, and the remaining 2/3 are «civilians» who are not holders of any religious titles, and the Islamic Community in BiH and its diaspora is unique in this respect. Of course, the Islamic Community in BiH has its own congregations, *majlis* and *muftiates* wherever there are Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks). It is important to mention large communities, *muftiates*, in the United States, Australia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany (mufti for Europe). From the above it can be concluded that the Islamic Community is organized on the principle of organizing «state» levels of government, which is divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches. The Judiciary

in the Islamic Community consists of the Constitutional Court of the Islamic Community, the primary task of which is to preserve and apply constitutional principles.

In these few sentences, in outline, without concretization, we have presented the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This presentation is important for a better understanding of the text that follows and concerns the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH during the pandemic.

### **Activities of Islamic Community of BiH during Pandemic**

The outbreak of coronavirus (Covid 19) in China in December 2019 opened many controversies and debates, through which the views and aspects of various social disciplines were presented, where the medical aspect for man is emphasized as the most important. Human health and the right to treatment (health and social protection) is one of the basic human rights in all modern state systems, and we have already said in the introduction that this is one of the basic protected values in Islam. Since the onset of the pandemic, views on Covid 19 have gradually emerged, opinions have been highlighted in terms of legal norms, economic

trends and markets, IT and other segments. A particularly important aspect, which we emphasize in this paper, is the *religious* attitude or the attitude of *believers*, understanding and behavior in relation to *Covid 19*. It is well known that «Covid 19» is a global challenge that has caused many problems to the human population. Most of these challenges were felt in the small and very complex state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina are a country with a thousand-year historical and royal tradition, but in modern times it has gone through difficult phases, and one of these difficult phases continues today. Bosniaks as the majority population in this country have survived the Aggression and serious Genocide, which have been adjudicated before international courts. The aggression against BiH was stopped in Dayton, but some forms of aggression in the form of political blockades, violations of human rights and freedoms guaranteed by international conventions are still taking place in BiH today, especially in the Republika Srpska Entity. The state consists of two Entities, the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska, and the condominium of the Brčko District of BiH. According to the last census from 2013, there are about 3,531,159 inhabitants in BiH,

of which 1,790,454 are Muslims.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning, we pointed out that BiH is a secular state in which religion is separated from the state, but it is important to note that religious communities at the time of the pandemic, without legal obligation, implemented state measures in the context of protecting citizens from Coronavirus. In this paper, we especially deal with the role of the Islamic Community in BiH, which members make up the majority of the population of BiH, and therefore its role is more significant.

Taking into account the fact that the coronavirus in BiH has spread gradually, the decisions of the Islamic Community in BiH related to this topic have also been made gradually. The subject of analysis in this short paper are fatwas, decisions, instructions, and conclusions of the Council of Muftis of the Islamic Community in BiH and the Riyaset of the Islamic Community in BiH headed by Reis-l-ulema Hussein Kavazović. We have to mention that the Islamic Community in BiH fully implemented the instructions of the competent crisis headquarters, but in addition to the same it passed acts through which it provided its members with guidelines.

On 6 March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Reisu-l-ulema

issued an Instruction that the elderly and people of poorer health may, in accordance with Islamic regulations, perform noon prayers at their homes instead of coming to the Jumu'ah prayer.<sup>12</sup>

On 17 March 2020, the Council of Mufti as main religious body, at a session held in Sarajevo, passed the *Fatwa on deceased's bathing, preparing and Janazah prayers for a person who died of a contagious disease*, the text of which indicated the obligation to protect the lives of persons performing the deceased's bathing, burial of deceased, and Janazah prayer. The text of the Fatwa highlighted several actions, which, first of all, imposed an obligation upon religious officials to consult with the competent health institution on the degree of danger of spreading the infection. As for the method of bathing the deceased (ghusl) and preparing the *mayyit* (deceased) in the case of severe infectious diseases, the regulation on *tayammum* applies, thus replacing the act of bathing the body of the deceased in such a situation, and the person bathing the body of the deceased (*ghasal*) is obliged to use personal protective equipment (PPE), provided by the instructions of the competent state authority. Having completed the preparation of the deceased, it is obligatory to perform



cleaning and decontamination of the morgue (gasulhana), according to applicable standards. Whence the deceased is transported to the morgue in a sanitary bag or box, with a ban on opening and removing the corpse due to the danger of spreading the infection, the regulation on *tayammum* shall apply. A white sheet will be used only to cover the sanitary bag containing the deceased. In this case, it is also necessary that the person bathing the body of the deceased uses adequate protective equipment during the *tayammum* and the application of the white sheet. The *Janazah* and burial are done in the usual way. In case of declaring an epidemic or pandemic, as is the case with the coronavirus at this time,

regarding the attendance of *Janazah* prayers and burial of meyyit, it is necessary to observe the instructions of the competent state authorities related to public gatherings, therefore this prayer is performed by only one imam and family members. For persons who died under the self-isolation / quarantine regime, precautionary measures of protection and safety are applied as in the case of the infected person, which are mentioned in this fatwa. All other regulations and customs, which are regularly performed after *Janazah* prayers and burials, either in the home of the grieving family or in the mosque, are postponed until the danger of an epidemic / pandemic is eliminated.<sup>13</sup>

By virtue of this fatwa and other acts, the Islamic Community in BiH has shown maturity in the process of protecting the lives of religious officials and suppressing the possible spread of the pandemic. It is clear that the obligation to fight the pandemic is with the competent state bodies, institutions and centers. Religious communities are, above all, the Islamic Community as a collective body in this position at the disposal of the state in the promotion of measures adopted by the state. This fatwa is very important because it solves a set of issues related to the mayyit, the person performing the act of bathing the body of the deceased and the Janazah.

The next very important decision of the Council of Muftis is the decision to suspend the common prayers, but ordered the imams to recite the *adhan* in their mosques on a daily basis. The same decision also determined that the institute of Jumuaḥ prayers will not be interrupted, the Jumuaḥ will be performed by the imam, muezzin and members of the Jamaat committee, which is a total of 6 to 10 people.<sup>14</sup> According to this decision, the Islamic Community is unique, and we have not learnt yet if the issue of Jumuaḥ was regulated in a similar way elsewhere. In addition, the Instruction number 02-03-2-1719 /

20 of 17 April 2020 ordered distance in lineups (*as-sufuf*), wearing masks during prayers in the mosque, disinfection of shoes, temperature measurement, and a ban on going to mosque for people over the age of 65, and people in poor health.<sup>15</sup>

On 26 March 2020, the Directorate of Religious Affairs issued the Instruction No. 03-03-1-1550 / 20, which regulates the organization, conduct of rituals and other religious activities in the mosque, the work of imams, muallims, khatībs and others in mosques, masjids and other premises / facilities of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>16</sup> This Instruction introduced the obligation for all imams to recite *salawat* to the Prophet, p.b.u.h. through public address systems installed on the mosque minarets. *Salawat* were recited after the *Fajr* prayer and after the '*Isha*' prayer every day. In addition, the same document additionally regulates the issue of the organization of Jumuaḥ prayers, which resulted in providing the Jamaat committees, executive committees and other bodies with the guidelines related to the implementation of measures imposed by the competent state bodies. The question of contact between muallims and students of *masjid* (*mekteb in Bosnian*) took an important place

in this document, which resulted in the fact that the virtual system was completely introduced, while all the planned public activities and events were postponed.

The Islamic community has taken all steps to protect its officials and members. However, some activities within the work of the Islamic Community holds a special place here; first and foremost, the activities of the month of Ramadan. For the first time, Muslims in this area are facing the challenge of organizing tarawih prayers, *muqabalah* (recitation of the Qur'an), 'iftār, *sahūr* and other Ramadan 'ibādah activities in times of a pandemic. It is worth noting that the listed activities were not interrupted in BiH even during the Aggression on BiH. In addition, the Directorate of Religious Affairs additionally regulated this issue with the Instruction No. 02-03-02-17 18/20 of 17 April 2020.

Ramadan activities were carried out, though in a much-reduced form. Tarawih prayers were performed by imams along with their congregational committees. The performance of tarawih prayers was further complicated by the curfew, due to which all imams, muezzins and members of congregational committees were granted movement permits. Competent state bodies,

inspections and crisis headquarters had regard for the members of the Islamic Community in BiH. Please note that the acts related to the pandemic were adopted gradually, so their abolition was gradual too.

The Islamic Community has always followed the instructions and recommendations of the competent crisis headquarters and made its decisions based on them. Today, provisions prescribing distance and protective masks apply in the facilities of the Community.

In addition to the above, primarily normative activities, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina made a great contribution to the fight against coronavirus throughout BiH during the pandemic through the activities of its officials, imams, muallims, religious teachers, coordinators for youth, work and social care. The imams had constant contact with their congregation, they took care of their most basic needs. Proof that the Islamic Community in BiH acted well during the coronavirus pandemic is that neither its official nor a single imam was Covid positive. The Islamic community adapted all its regular activities to the new situation. As an example, I would like to single out the work of imams with children in the process of teaching religious



principles, which was very successful through online platforms and other IT tools.<sup>17</sup>

We have already said that young activists of the Islamic Community gathered around the «Youth Network», helped the elderly and infirm on the ground, who were banned from moving due to the pandemic. This help was especially needed by people over the age of 65, who were helped by young people in performing basic living needs in the form of buying and picking up medicines from pharmacies, buying food, paying utility bills, etc.

## Conclusion

The activities of the Islamic Community in BiH during the pandemic in the organizational, normative and every other sense have been aimed at protecting and promoting the general well-being of people, which is reflected in the preservation of their faith, life, posterity, reason, property and honor.

In accordance with its capabilities, the Islamic Community in BiH as a community of Muslims has taken concrete steps to help the state to implement measures in the fight against Covid 19. During the pandemic, more than a thousand

religious officials carried out the measures of the competent authorities in the mosques in a very rational and consistent manner, without a single case of Covid 19 recorded among religious officials or members of mosque committees. In addition, no mosque has been marked as the hotspot of the «Covid 19» cluster. Religious activities have not been interrupted, but the number of believers present in mosques has been reduced. Also, the Islamic Community with its officials has proven to be socially responsible, taking on the role of the state in certain segments. This was especially true in relation to the elderly, the sick and the infirm. Using its own resources and with the help of its friends from Muslim countries, the Community often organized humanitarian aid to the poor.

The activists of the «Youth Network», as volunteers of the Islamic Community, have also taken part in these activities.

The institute of Jumu'ah in BiH has not been interrupted, but the number of people present at the Jumu'ah prayer has been reduced to a minimum, and the message from the reis-ul-ulema's sermon was broadcast live on several television stations, through which the Islamic Community made efforts to ensure connection with its members and Muslims in the area.



## Endnotes

- 1- See more: Jusuf Džafić, *Contemporary Fiqh Themes / Savremene fiqh'ske teme*, Planjx komerc, Tešanj, 2019
- 2- *Law on freedom of religion and legal position of churches and religious communities*, Official Gazette of BiH, 5/04
- 3- *Basic Agreement between the Holy See and Bosnia and Herzegovina / Temeljni ugovor između Svete Stolice i Bosne i Hercegovine*, see: [https://www.bkbih.ba/info.php?id=217#\\_ftn1](https://www.bkbih.ba/info.php?id=217#_ftn1)
- 4- Fikret Karčić, *Religion and Law: A Brief Introduction / Religija i pravo: Kratak uvod*, Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo, 2011, p. 51
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- 6- *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 7- *Constitution of Islamic Community in BiH*, [https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/Ustavi/Ustav\\_IZ-e\\_precisceni\\_tekst\\_2014.pdf](https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/Ustavi/Ustav_IZ-e_precisceni_tekst_2014.pdf)
- 8- *Ibid*, Article 1 and 2.
- 9- *Ibid*, Article 7.
- 10- See more: *Constitution of Islamic Community in BiH*, [https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/Ustavi/Ustav\\_IZ-e\\_precisceni\\_tekst\\_2014.pdf](https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/Ustavi/Ustav_IZ-e_precisceni_tekst_2014.pdf)
- 11- <http://www.statistika.ba/?show=8#link3>
- 12- <https://www.preporod.com/index.php/sve-vijesti/islamska-zajednica/vijesti-izbih/item/11260-ne-odgada-se-dzuma-namaz-zbog-koronavirusa>
- 13- Council of Mufti of IC of BiH, Fatwa No. 03-2-26 / 20, Sarajevo, 17 March 2020.
- 14- <https://www.preporod.info/bs/article/15149/vijece-muftija-obustavlja-se-obavljanje-dnevni-namaza-u-dzematu-uce-se-samo-ezani>
- 15- RIC of BiH, Instruction number 02-03-2-1719 / 20 of 17 April 2020.
- 16- Directorate of Religious Affairs, Instruction No. 03-03-1-1550 / 2 of 17 April 2020.
- 17- <https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/28821-online-mektab-oficijelna-edukativna-platforma-islamske-zajednice>



## The Role of Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Fight against Covid – 19 Pandemic

By Rijad Delić

### Introduction

**The role of religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH) is significant and has sometimes been overemphasized in certain social processes. This overemphasis stems from the recent war past. However, the Islamic Community in BiH has a cohesive role in the society and state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is the initiator of many projects and activities through which dialogue and mutual understanding are promoted.**

In order to better shed light on the situation in BiH, in the context of religious communities and their members, we have to say that members of other religious

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contribution to the fight against the «Covid 19» pandemic. During the pandemic, a large number of imams and religious officials took an active part in relief actions for people with coronavirus and the elderly, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

Since its foundation, the Islamic Community in BiH, as an organization has always been an active participant in certain social processes in BiH and the wider region. It has always been on the side of positive and universal values. It is known that Bosnian muftis in recent history issued proclamations in the process of protecting the other and the different. Today, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a very high place in Bosnian society among socially responsible organizations. The foundations on which Islam is based and its religious law, which make Islam modern and appropriate at all times, are: small number of obligations, removal of difficulties, consideration of human needs, and the establishment of social justice. It was long time ago when Islamic jurists derived six universal (protected) Islamic values, which are accepted by the modern world, and they are: faith, life, reason, honor, property and posterity.<sup>1</sup>

## **Position of Religious Communities in BiH**

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Catholic<sup>3</sup> and Orthodox Churches, while no agreement has been signed with the Islamic Community, as a community of the majority of the population, due to political reasons. Historically, the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is heterogeneous in terms of religious affiliation, with three dominant religious communities (Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic) and a Jewish community with a very small number of members.

During the Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1463-1878.), there was a very close connection between the state and Islam as a source of state ideology. During the Austro-Hungarian rule (1878-1918.) and during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941.), the model of recognized religious communities was valid / effective. After the end of the Second World War in 1946 and the creation of a new, socialist Yugoslavia within which BiH was one of the federal units, there were radical changes in the position of religion in society. The new government opted for the secular structure of society, which meant the separation of state and religion, the complete secularization of the legal system, and the proclamation of religion as a private matter of each individual.

Given the acceptance of Marxism as the official ideology of the one-party communist system of the former Yugoslavia, in the period until the 1990s there was a social marginalization of religion and believers and a weakening of the economic base of religious communities through confiscation of their property by various measures of agrarian reform, nationalization and expropriation.<sup>4</sup> The process of transition from a socialist to a liberal society began in the autumn of 1990. with the first multi-party election in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only to be interrupted by the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995. In the period following the achievement of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (Dayton Agreement), BiH opted to regulate the relationship between the state and religion in accordance with the principles of the secular liberal tradition. This meant maintaining the institutional and functional separation of the spheres of state and religious authority, but at the same time recognizing the important social role of religious communities through various forms of state cooperation with these communities.

## History of Islamic Community in BiH

The topic of this paper focuses on the field of activity of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its historical course through which it grew as an organization.

In formal and material terms, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed when Sheikh al-Islam in Istanbul, as the supreme religious authority in the Ottoman Empire, in 1882 appointed the Sarajevo Mufti Hilmi Omerović as the Bosnian Mufti and at the same time authorized him to appoint lower religious officials and sharia judges. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian state, by virtue of the Imperial Decree of 17 October 1882, appointed Hilmi Omerović Bosnian mufti and proclaimed him the first reis-ulema in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this year is considered the year of the foundation of an independent Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>5</sup>

In the past, the Islamic Community as a subject of law went through several phases and legal and political systems in which it adapted itself and sought its place. It happened for the first time in

1878, after the Berlin Congress and the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And then, after the collapse of Austro-Hungary and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Immediately after the introduction of the royal dictatorship, on 6 January 1929, the Islamic Community came under attack from the January Sixth Regime that sought to bring its organization into line with the absolute unitarization of all political and public life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With the disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, the Islamic Community found itself in new political circumstances and state and legal environments for the fourth time. In 1946, for the fifth time, the Islamic Community found itself in completely new political and state-legal circumstances to which it had to subordinate its internal structure and organization. Throughout this time, from the first years of the Austro-Hungarian occupation until today, there have been twelve reis-ulemas (Grand muftis) at the head of the Islamic Community. On two occasions, naibu-reis (deputy mufti) was elected as a transitional solution.<sup>6</sup>



From its existence until today, the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH have been regulated by constitutions as the highest legal acts. Each of these constitutions had its own characteristics according to the state-legal system in which the Community operated. Today's Constitution of the Islamic Community in BiH regulates the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH, determines its bodies and their competencies, rights and obligations of members of the Islamic Community as well as other issues.<sup>7</sup>

Pursuant to the Constitutional provisions, the Islamic Community

in BiH operates today as one and the only community of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandzak, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia, as a community of Bosniak Muslims outside their homeland and other Muslims who accept it as their own. The Reisu-l-ulema legally represents the Islamic community, and it is an inseparable part of the Ummah.<sup>8</sup>

The main goal of the Islamic Community is for all its members to live in accordance with Islamic norms, which is achieved by promoting good and deterring evil. The Islamic community preserves the credibility of Islamic norms

and ensures their interpretation and application. In the interpretation of the faith and the performance of *ibadah* Islamic duties in the Islamic community, the *Maturidi aqidah* and the *Hanafi madhhab* are applied.<sup>9</sup>

### **Organization of Islamic Community in BiH**

Article 33 of the 2014 Constitution defines the structure of the Islamic Community in BiH, which consists of following bodies: *Jamaat, Majlis, Muftiate, Meshihat, Parliament, Reisu-l-ulema, Council of Mufti, Riyaset and Constitutional Court.*

The basic unit in the Islamic Community is the *Jamaat*, which consists of at least 200 households according to the Constitution. More *jamaat* make up one *majlis*, more *majlis* make up the *muftiluk*, which in administrative, religious, educational, economic and other terms is covered by the *muftiate* headed by the *mufti*. The Mufti is the main religious authority in the area of *muftiate*. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are nine muftiates overring the entire territory of the state, regardless of the Entities, cantons and municipalities.

The Council of Muftis is the

body of the Islamic Community in charge of matters of religion, which consists of all the muftis in the Islamic community. The Mufti becomes a member of the Council by appointment as Mufti and ceases to be a member of the Council upon the termination of the term of office of the Mufti. The Council of Muftis is headed by the Reisu-l-ulema, who manages the work of the Council. The highest executive body of the Islamic Community is the *Riyaset*, headed by the reisu-l-ulema. The *Riyaset* consists of special administrations for various areas such as: religious affairs, educational affairs, economic affairs, legal affairs, and foreign affairs administrations.

The Parliament of the Islamic Community is the highest representative and legislative body of the Islamic Community in BiH, consisting of 87 parliamentarians elected in elections that are held in constituencies.<sup>10</sup> There are up to 1/3 of the employees in the bodies of the Islamic Community, and the remaining 2/3 are «civilians» who are not holders of any religious titles, and the Islamic Community in BiH and its diaspora is unique in this respect.

Of course, the Islamic Community in BiH has its own congregations,

*majlis* and *muftiates* wherever there are Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks). It is important to mention large communities, *muftiates*, in the United States, Australia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany (mufti for Europe). From the above it can be concluded that the Islamic Community is organized on the principle of organizing «state» levels of government, which is divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches. The Judiciary in the Islamic Community consists of the Constitutional Court of the Islamic Community, the primary task of which is to preserve and apply constitutional principles. In these few sentences, in outline, without concretization, we have presented the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This presentation is important for a better understanding of the text that follows and concerns the activities of the Islamic Community in BiH during the pandemic.

### **Activities of Islamic Community of BiH during Pandemic**

The outbreak of coronavirus (Covid 19) in China in December 2019 opened many controversies and debates, through which the views and aspects of various

social disciplines were presented, where the medical aspect for man is emphasized as the most important. Human health and the right to treatment (health and social protection) is one of the basic human rights in all modern state systems, and we have already said in the introduction that this is one of the basic protected values in Islam. Since the onset of the pandemic, views on Covid 19 have gradually emerged, opinions have been highlighted in terms of legal norms, economic trends and markets, IT and other segments. A particularly important aspect, which we emphasize in this paper, is the *religious* attitude or the attitude of *believers*, understanding and behavior in relation to *Covid 19*.

It is well known that «Covid 19» is a global challenge that has caused many problems to the human population. Most of these challenges were felt in the small and very complex state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina are a country with a thousand-year historical and royal tradition, but in modern times it has gone through difficult phases, and one of these difficult phases continues today. Bosniaks as the majority population in this country





have survived the Aggression and serious Genocide, which have been adjudicated before international courts. The aggression against BiH was stopped in Dayton, but some forms of aggression in the form of political blockades, violations of human rights and freedoms guaranteed by international conventions are still taking place in BiH today, especially in the Republika Srpska Entity. The state consists of two Entities, the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska, and the condominium of the Brčko District of BiH. According to the last census from 2013, there are about 3,531,159 inhabitants in BiH, of which 1,790,454 are

Muslims.<sup>11</sup>At the beginning, we pointed out that BiH is a secular state in which religion is separated from the state, but it is important to note that religious communities at the time of the pandemic, without legal obligation, implemented state measures in the context of protecting citizens from Coronavirus. In this paper, we especially deal with the role of the Islamic Community in BiH, which members make up the majority of the population of BiH, and therefore its role is more significant.

Taking into account the fact that the coronavirus in BiH has spread gradually, the decisions of the Islamic Community in BiH

related to this topic have also been made gradually. The subject of analysis in this short paper are fatwas, decisions, instructions, and conclusions of the Council of Muftis of the Islamic Community in BiH and the Riyaset of the Islamic Community in BiH headed by Reis-l-ulema Hussein Kavazović. We have to mention that the Islamic Community in BiH fully implemented the instructions of the competent crisis headquarters, but in addition to the same it passed acts through which it provided its members with guidelines.

On 6 March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Reisu-l-ulema issued an Instruction that the elderly and people of poorer health may, in accordance with Islamic regulations, perform noon prayers at their homes instead of coming to the Jumuaḥ prayer.<sup>12</sup>

On 17 March 2020, the Council of Mufti as main religious body, at a session held in Sarajevo, passed the *Fatwa on deceased's bathing, preparing and Janazah prayers for a person who died of a contagious disease*, the text of which indicated the obligation to protect the lives of persons performing the deceased's bathing, burial of deceased, and Janazah prayer. The text of the Fatwa highlighted several actions,

which, first of all, imposed an obligation upon religious officials to consult with the competent health institution on the degree of danger of spreading the infection. As for the method of bathing the deceased (ghusl) and preparing the *mayyit* (deceased) in the case of severe infectious diseases, the regulation on *tayammum* applies, thus replacing the act of bathing the body of the deceased in such a situation, and the person bathing the body of the deceased (*ghasal*) is obliged to use personal protective equipment (PPE), provided by the instructions of the competent state authority. Having completed the preparation of the deceased, it is obligatory to perform cleaning and decontamination of the morgue (*gasulhana*), according to applicable standards. Whence the deceased is transported to the morgue in a sanitary bag or box, with a ban on opening and removing the corpse due to the danger of spreading the infection, the regulation on *tayammum* shall apply. A white sheet will be used only to cover the sanitary bag containing the deceased. In this case, it is also necessary that the person bathing the body of the deceased uses adequate protective equipment during the *tayammum*

and the application of the white sheet. The Janazah and burial are done in the usual way. In case of declaring an epidemic or pandemic, as is the case with the coronavirus at this time, regarding the attendance of *Janazah* prayers and burial of meyyit, it is necessary to observe the instructions of the competent state authorities related to public gatherings, therefore this prayer is performed by only one imam and family members. For persons who died under the self-isolation / quarantine regime, precautionary measures of protection and safety are applied as in the case of the infected person, which are mentioned in this fatwa. All other regulations and customs, which are regularly performed after *Janazah* prayers and burials, either in the home of the grieving family or in the mosque, are postponed until the danger of an epidemic / pandemic is eliminated.<sup>13</sup>

By virtue of this fatwa and other acts, the Islamic Community in BiH has shown maturity in the process of protecting the lives of religious officials and suppressing the possible spread of the pandemic. It is clear that the obligation to fight the pandemic is with the competent state bodies, institutions and centers. Religious communities are,

above all, the Islamic Community as a collective body in this position at the disposal of the state in the promotion of measures adopted by the state. This fatwa is very important because it solves a set of issues related to the mayyit, the person performing the act of bathing the body of the deceased and the Janazah.

The next very important decision of the Council of Muftis is the decision to suspend the common prayers, but ordered the imams to recite the *adhan* in their mosques on a daily basis. The same decision also determined that the institute of Jumu'ah prayers will not be interrupted, the Jumu'ah will be performed by the imam, muezzin and members of the Jamaat committee, which is a total of 6 to 10 people.<sup>14</sup> According to this decision, the Islamic Community is unique, and we have not learnt yet if the issue of Jumu'ah was regulated in a similar way elsewhere. In addition, the Instruction number 02-03-2-1719 / 20 of 17 April 2020 ordered distance in lineups (*as-sufuf*), wearing masks during prayers in the mosque, disinfection of shoes, temperature measurement, and a ban on going to mosque for people over the age of 65, and people in poor health.<sup>15</sup>

On 26 March 2020, the Directorate of Religious Affairs issued the Instruction No. 03-03-1-1550 / 20, which regulates the organization, conduct of rituals and other religious activities in the mosque, the work of imams, muallims, khaṭībs and others in mosques, masjids and other premises / facilities of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>16</sup>This Instruction introduced the obligation for all imams to recite *salawat* to the Prophet, p.b.u.h. through public address systems installed on the mosque minarets. Salawat were recited after the *Fajr* prayer and after the '*Isha*' prayer every day. In addition, the same document additionally regulates the issue of the organization of Jum'ah prayers, which resulted in providing the Jamaat committees, executive committees and other bodies with the guidelines related to the implementation of measures imposed by the competent state bodies. The question of contact between muallims and students of *masjid (mekteb in Bosnian)* took an important place in this document, which resulted in the fact that the virtual system was completely introduced, while all the planned public activities and events were postponed.

The Islamic community has taken all steps to protect its officials and members. However, some activities within the work of the Islamic Community holds a special place here; first and foremost, the activities of the month of Ramadan. For the first time, Muslims in this area are facing the challenge of organizing tarawih prayers, *muqabalah* (recitation of the Qur'an), 'iḫār, *saḫūr* and other Ramadan 'ibādah activities in times of a pandemic. It is worth noting that the listed activities were not interrupted in BiH even during the Aggression on BiH. In addition, the Directorate of Religious Affairs additionally regulated this issue with the Instruction No. 02-03-02-17 18/20 of 17 April 2020.

Ramadan activities were carried out, though in a much-reduced form. Tarawih prayers were performed by imams along with their congregational committees. The performance of tarawih prayers was further complicated by the curfew, due to which all imams, muezzins and members of congregational committees were granted movement permits. Competent state bodies, inspections and crisis headquarters had regard for the members of the Islamic Community in BiH. Please note



that the acts related to the pandemic were adopted gradually, so their abolition was gradual too.

The Islamic Community has always followed the instructions and recommendations of the competent crisis headquarters and made its decisions based on them. Today, provisions prescribing distance and protective masks apply in the facilities of the Community.

In addition to the above, primarily normative activities, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina made a great contribution to the fight against coronavirus throughout BiH during the pandemic through the activities of its officials, imams, muallims,

religious teachers, coordinators for youth, work and social care. The imams had constant contact with their congregation, they took care of their most basic needs. Proof that the Islamic Community in BiH acted well during the coronavirus pandemic is that neither its official nor a single imam was Covid positive. The Islamic community adapted all its regular activities to the new situation. As an example, I would like to single out the work of imams with children in the process of teaching religious principles, which was very successful through online platforms and other IT tools.<sup>17</sup>

We have already said that young

activists of the Islamic Community gathered around the «Youth Network», helped the elderly and infirm on the ground, who were banned from moving due to the pandemic. This help was especially needed by people over the age of 65, who were helped by young people in performing basic living needs in the form of buying and picking up medicines from pharmacies, buying food, paying utility bills, etc.

## Conclusion

The activities of the Islamic Community in BiH during the pandemic in the organizational, normative and every other sense have been aimed at protecting and promoting the general well-being of people, which is reflected in the preservation of their faith, life, posterity, reason, property and honor.

In accordance with its capabilities, the Islamic Community in BiH as a community of Muslims has taken concrete steps to help the state to implement measures in the fight against Covid 19. During the pandemic, more than a thousand religious officials carried out the measures of the competent authorities in the mosques in a very rational and consistent manner, without a single case of Covid 19

recorded among religious officials or members of mosque committees. In addition, no mosque has been marked as the hotspot of the «Covid 19» cluster.

Religious activities have not been interrupted, but the number of believers present in mosques has been reduced. Also, the Islamic Community with its officials has proven to be socially responsible, taking on the role of the state in certain segments. This was especially true in relation to the elderly, the sick and the infirm. Using its own resources and with the help of its friends from Muslim countries, the Community often organized humanitarian aid to the poor.

The activists of the «Youth Network», as volunteers of the Islamic Community, have also taken part in these activities.

The institute of Jumu'ah in BiH has not been interrupted, but the number of people present at the Jumu'ah prayer has been reduced to a minimum, and the message from the reis-l-ulema's sermon was broadcast live on several television stations, through which the Islamic Community made efforts to ensure connection with its members and Muslims in the area.

## Endnotes

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**“Special Section of Reflections on  
the Coronavirus Pandemic”  
(Vancouver: Sacred Web Publishing),  
14-43 pp. (A Journal review)**

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**By Senad Mrahorović**  
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The latest issue of Sacred Web, A Journal of Tradition and Modernity, has dedicated a special section to the ongoing pandemic known as Covid-19. Being devoted to all important issues related to Tradition and modernity from its inception in 1998, the journal has once again shown its deep concern about the traditional doctrines and ‘their application to the contingent circumstances of modernity’, which in fact, represents the essential aim of the Sacred Web. Apart from the Editorial entitled ‘The Garment of Light and the Garment of Fire’ written by M. Ali Lakhani, the Journal’s Editor, in which the author expressed certain ideas concerning symbolism of the concepts of light and fire from the traditional perspective, or rather based on the Qur’anic and Biblical

narratives, the Journal is divided into five main sections, namely, Special Section of Reflections on the Coronavirus Pandemic; Special Section on Wolfgang Smith; Articles; In Memoriam; Book Reviews and Poetry.

Our concern in this review is to highlight the importance of the first section of the Journal as it focuses solely on the current pandemic to which the present issue of Religions has paid its attention, mainly from religious perspectives as well. A number of traditionalist scholars has expressed their views regarding the new corona virus or Covid-19 that has been affecting the whole globe since it started at the end of last year. As the world is relentlessly trying to find the proper medical treatment for this type of virus, religious and other spiritual



leaders all over the world are also active for their part in battling this opaque disease. Among these religious authorities whose voices are touching the core issues relating, not only to the present crisis but rather on more profound level, to all negative impacts brought about by modernism understood in the traditionalist perspective.

In the first of eight articles provided in the journal's special sections on Coronavirus, Seyyed Hossein Nasr offered his, although short but insightful thoughts under the title "A Brief Spiritual Reflection on the Current Pandemic". Nasr reflected on human life on earth as a transient phase of human being that is naturally permeated with turmoil, torment and tragedies, to which best remedy is to be found in turning oneself to spiritual path or more inward, to contemplation of ourselves and natural phenomena, all of which eventually leads oneself to God. He said: "When the earth suddenly opens up under our feet, we have but two choices: Either to sink into the abyss below or to grow wings and fly into the illimitable sky. Let us grow wings and fly, remembering the Qur'anic verse, *Kullu man 'alayha fān wa yabqā wajhu rabbika dhu'l-jalāli*

*wa'l-ikrām*, which can be rendered as, "All other than Him perish, and there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generosity. The Face is also in a sense the face that we turn to God. May the present tragedy aid us to turn not our back but our face to Him".

The following article entitled "In Quarantine" by Lakhani, deals with the concept of quarantine as one of numerous measures undertaken by the majority of governments to help reduce and prevent the spread of Covid-19. The author's analysis reveals that the seclusion is not only a centuries-old practice used for similar causes but also very important for spiritual purposes in religious traditions. He highlighted the spiritual significance of quarantine in all three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, concluding that "the period of quarantine is a time to turn away from the adornments of this world and to reflect on one's spiritual condition", for the isolation in this sense may serve the same purpose as the *khalwa* in Sufism or spiritual retreat in other traditions. Lakhani also pointed out a number of positive outcomes of the current pandemic, being reflected in natural world

and its rejuvenation on the one hand, and on the other, the golden opportunity for human beings, while in quarantine, to reflect of their choices between transcendent, spiritual and higher order of reality impregnated within the nature itself and transient, terrestrial and lower level of this earthy space where is contemporary being situated.

“Trials Must Be: Thoughts on a Pandemic” is a reflection on Covid-19 by Michael Fitzgerald. Here the author has expressed three important questions to be contemplated upon, while facing the challenge of current pandemic. The questions are: “Is the virus a sign of the end of days? What are the proper attitudes in the face of such a trial? Will this world-wide shock turn humanity to prayer?” The answers were provided to each question based on the teaching of Frithjof Schuon, one of the founding figures of the Traditionalist school of philosophy in the West.

Another interesting perspective on the conditions of this world, envisaged as a “concatenation of mutable causes and conditions”, was provided by Rev. John Paraskevopoulos under the title “Buddhism and the Coronavirus”.

Like the previous authors, Paraskevopoulos, after expounding the Buddhist teaching concerning the nature of this world, seen as a reflection or manifestation of the “abundantly overflowing spiritual energy of the Dharma-Body”, which in Buddhism is considered as a spiritual Absolute or ultimate Reality that, with its eternal Essence, underlines the whole existence in our world, argues that coronavirus or Covid-19 as yet another life-form that struggles for its own survival like any other forms of life, may teaches us to “re-evaluate our priorities, and engage with the true font of our well-being by seeking permanent liberation from suffering.”

Harry Oldmeadow in his “Reflection Provoked by Current Pandemic” has to a certain extent, cast more light on the secularized cosmos of the West and elsewhere, briefly mentioned by Nasr in his article, pointing out all those consequences that have risen out of European renaissance and the so-called enlightenment which eventually in forms of rational ideologies wedded with material and economic progress became dominant in our world today and as such causing an unprecedented ecological crisis



# CORONAVIRUS

## PRAY FOR THE WORLD

during the twentieth century. Needless to say, this crisis is just a reflection of the corrupted nature of modern man who has turned his back to all the traditional principles of life that were revealed through different channels within diverse religious and spiritual traditions of the past. Therefore, “To imagine that the pandemic is unrelated to our willful turning away from these perennial truths is, to say the least, foolish and presumptuous.”

Unlike modern perspective on the meaning of life, traditional perspective insists that “world and

humankind have a divine origin and purpose.” This viewpoint brings us to “The Present Moment and Our Existential Situation” written by Peter Samsel who, masterly exposed the question of how fragile our existence in this world is, while at the same time, being enriched with grace. However, there is a deeper metaphysical truth which, as the author asserts “yet more decisive to both our nature and our fate, in respect of which fragility and grace are only muted echoes and shadowed reflections.”

The concentration on either side

will cast the shadow on the other, or reduce it in the meaning and significance. This is shown by a Sufi maxim mentioned by Charles Upton in his text entitled “A Sufi Response to the Coronavirus.” It is reported that a great Sufi master named Abu Yazid al-Bistami once said: “When the Heart contracts, the nafs (the ego) expands; when the nafs contracts, the Heart expands.” In relation to the coronavirus, the author suggests that from a Sufi perspective, we should use the pandemic crisis to contract our ego, which by its nature is always “grasping, fleeing and making demands... tries to hide from fear either by sinking into oblivion or else by asserting itself and starting conflicts.” So, by contracting the ego, we will enable the Heart to expand and by its expansion we will acquire a powerful sense of Divine Presence and Mercy that will eventually lead us with God’s Grace, to the total submission to the Divine Will.

Finally, “On Listening: Hearing God’s Voice in the Face of Suffering”, Mohammad Rustum has explored a few concepts within the traditional Islamic perspective, namely, the question of Divine

silence, the nature of evil and human silence, all in relation to the ongoing pandemic, or human suffering in general. The author has expressed Islamic viewpoint on each of the given questions, concluding that “Divine is never silent and that evils are a real and necessary feature of the cosmic order”. As for human silence, it is the key feature in order for one to hear the God’s responses to prayers offered to Him, especially in difficult times such as the current pandemic. “By bringing the soul to rest”, writes Rustum, “and eliminating what the Islamic psychologist call “internal chatter” (hadith al-nafs), our souls become more prone to attentively hearing God’s voice within us. In our world, filled as it is with all kinds of cacophonous sounds and alarming images, cultivating this kind of inwardness is difficult indeed. But the more engrossed we remain in these sounds and images, the less will we be able to hear God’s voice and see His signs.” Thus, by achieving this kind of spiritual silence, “the very sound of divine voice, amidst all of the pain in the world can serve as soothing balm for the soul, healing even the deepest of wounds.”



# BIOGRAPHIES

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## Archbishop. Makarios

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Archbishop Makarios/Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Qatar. He was born in Crete, Greece, in 1968, he emigrates in 1980, to Jerusalem. He studied at Seminary and graduated in 1986. He studied English, Arabic, Hebrew, Serbian and Russian language. He completes university studies in Belgrade 1990/95. He lectured from 1995- 2002 at Seminary on Mount Zion and he was the Rector for 6 years at the same Seminary. He appointed director of the Patriarchal Archive in Jerusalem from 1995- 2001. He served in Gaza and Jordan, during year 2002-2003 he attended an Arabic language course, University of Jordan. In July 2011, received his Masters degree, since 2004 serve in Doha, on 2013, Archbishop Makarios was elected as first with this title residing in Qatar. He is member of CCSC, member of GCF. He has written numerous articles and participated in various conferences.

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## Alena Demirović

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Alena Lena Demirović is a General Secretary at the Institute for the Research of Genocide, Canada as well as a member of Sandžak Council of America and a Project Manager for North America region of the Bosniak Cultural Community Preporod, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alena has extensive experience in advocacy and training on the protection of civil liberties and political rights, the promotion of economic and social justice, and international human rights law. She is in a process of receiving her AMP degree in Public Administration.



## Mohamed Magid

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Imam Mohamed Magid is the Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, Virginia. He is the Chairman of International Interfaith Peace Corps (IIPC) and the former President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). He is also the Chairman of Muflehun, which focuses on prevention of violence and hate. He serves on the advisory board of the Peaceful Families Project and as Co-President of Religions for Peace. He is also the Co-Founder of the Multifaith Neighborhood Network which focuses on building bridges between Muslim, Evangelical Christian, and Jewish communities.

Imam Magid has co-authored two books: *Before You Tie the Knot: A Guide for Couples and Reflections on the Qur'an*. His areas of interest and focus are religious freedom, violence against women, and preventing violence and hate in our societies. He has written for the Washington Post, Huffington Post, and has been featured in Time Magazine and the Wall Street Journal. Imam Magid has received several awards including the El-Hibri Foundation's Peace Education Prize in 2017.

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## Samuele Sangalli

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Rev. Mons. Prof. Samuele Sangalli is a Roman Catholic priest and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Science, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He holds the Chair for the Course "Global Governance through Interreligious Dialogue" at the LUISS University in Rome. This course offers a unique experience of Interreligious Dialogue led by a qualified team of scholars from the main Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Many students from Universities all over the world enroll in the lectures.





## Majdey Zawawi

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Majdey Zawawi holds a PhD in Islamic Governance from the Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and is one of the first in the world to have graduated with said degree and specialisation. His doctoral research titled “Power Dynamics between Religious and State Authorities: The Case of the Four Mujtahid Imams” employs the Islamic Governance Conceptual Matrix (IGC Matrix) as a conceptual tool for understanding the complex relational dynamics of power and authority between the four great mujtahids of Islam and their respective state authorities. diverse academic background (having been trained in three different fields) allow him to make use of a broad range of approaches in his thinking on Islamic Governance, Civilisation and Muslim politics. Although his research interests mainly revolve around Islamic Governance, Dr Majdey is keen on interdisciplinary research that traverses many disciplines.



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## Senad Mrahorović

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Senad Mrahorović is a lecturer and tutor at Sultan Omar ‘Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He also works as a researcher and editor for Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue DICID. Mrahorović received a PhD in Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues from International Center of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia. His research interests include Religious Studies, Sufism, Orientalism, Philosophy and Religious Art. He has edited four volumes of Conference Proceedings for DICID and published several academic articles in various publications.



## Rijad Delić

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Rijad Delić was born in 1984 in Zvornik. After his study at Behram-Begova Medresa, Delić completed his undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo. Having defended his Master's thesis titled "Ensuring Rule of Law through Full Jurisdiction Dispute" at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Sarajevo he successfully completed his postgraduate studies. He is currently a third-cycle PhD candidate at the Faculty of Administration and in the process of preparing a doctoral thesis. Delić is employed by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the head of the Legal and Administrative Affairs Service at the Sarajevo Muftiate. He has published several papers in journals of the Islamic Community and the journal titled «Administration» of the Faculty of Administration.

