

## *Interview*

# End times Syncretism: The Abrahamic Faiths - Commonalities and Divergence - an Islamic Perspective

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“I will work with others to make Education a qualitative and affordable right, not a privilege, for all and keep promoting multi-regional centres of excellence...”

Will continue to advocate as others do for a genuine New World Order based on self-worth of each and every individual and on trans-cultural understanding leading to each person residing at the global centre. Will keep imploring that those who have bound themselves to the consciousness of the ‘masses’ stop looking for leaders and those who profess the mantle of leadership do away with their crude self-serving framework of global leadership; grow up and understand that every single cell is vitally important even

when the degree of its significance is yet to be fully understood or is not understood, at all.”

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Prof. Dr. Sahib Mustaqim Bleher, Islamic Scholar and Professor of Linguistics, Member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, UK, and Chartered Institute of Journalists, UK; Co-founder and General Secretary of the Islamic Party of Britain. He has written many books on and about Islam with a recent complete translation of the Our'an from Arabic to English amongst his other writings on the Media and Education. Professor Bleher is a linguist specialising in the translation of the English, Arabic, and German languages.

For more on Professor Bleher's biography, see:

<http://www.mustaqim.co.uk/profile.htm>

## INTRODUCTION

Much has been made about the Abrahamic Faiths monotheism, yet Christianity's concept of G-d is almost alien to that of Islam, and although Judaism shares the belief that God has no son as does Islam, nonetheless it has a unique perception about who the messiah is and what constitutes the messianic lineages and message quite differently from the dominant positions of orthodox Christianity or Islam.

To explore the eschatology of the Abrahamic faiths in respect of end times, these series of interviews will endeavour to establish core paradigms relating to the Divine and G-dhood, Mankind as created being, Heavens as After-life Worlds and Before-Earthly Life Worlds, Hell as a real domain or as a state of existence, Salvation and Redemption from what into what? Judgement, and the End-time.

**PAS:** To start off, I begin by asking what does it mean to be a believer in Islam and is it the same with Judaism and Christianity?

**SMB:** Let's start with what it means to be a believer: to hold a conviction about something which cannot be empirically proven. That does not mean blind faith - there may well be supporting evidence for one's beliefs, but they themselves remain unverifiable. Belief in Islam is made up of six so-called articles of faith: belief in Allah as the only deity to be worshipped, in the angels, in His scriptures, in His messengers or prophets, the day of judgment and resurrection after death.

The existence of God itself cannot be proven scientifically, although Immanuel Kant postulated and tried to prove that His existence is a necessity for human existence. The angels are not ordinary visible to human eyes and their existence is, therefore, also an item of belief rather than proof. The scriptures are available in their recorded forms, but that they are the actual word of God is an item of belief, as is the statement that a particular person

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was indeed sent by Him as a messenger. The day of judgment and resurrection after death, in other words the after-life, have not been witnessed by any living human and are likewise matters of belief.

That a belief is an unproven conviction also holds true for other monotheistic traditions like Judaism or Christianity as well as any other religion or belief system, whereas the content of those beliefs differ, although there are numerous parallels in monotheistic religions: All the above-mentioned articles of faith are also subscribed to by Judaism and Christianity.

However, the detailed content of those beliefs differs when, for example, in Christianity the trinity, made dogma in 325 BC (<https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Council-of-Nicaea-325>) replaced the belief in a single God, and the validity of subsequent scriptures (Gospel, Qur'an) is rejected by the preceding monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity) as are the messengers who followed their own.

**PAS:** It has always been alluded to that Christianity lacks authenticity because of the many revisions and versions of its holy book – The Bible. Islam on the other hand has the same undiluted and authentic Qur'an. However, just like Christianity with different denominations, Islam too is split between Sunni, Shia, and the Alevi and many more sects within these major divisions but more importantly is the issue of the interpretation of the Qur'an which is generally based on *Hadiths* and there are many versions of these. How does a believer know which *Hadith* to use and which Islamic sect or denomination is the right one for her or him?

*There are references to hundreds of teachers from whom al-Thauri, Ibn al-Mubarak, al-Zuhri, etc. had written ahadith. In the works of biographers we find a long list of teachers and students of eminent scholars. There are at least fifty students of al-Zuhri who made their written collections from him. If, on average, every one of them had written only five hundred traditions from him, then this number would have been 25,000. If we go a step further and assume for example that every student of al-Zuhri had only two or three students, then this numbers of traditions might have increased at the end of the second century to some 75,000, and in the time of Bukhari and his contemporaries they have been in hundreds of thousands.*

*Thus, the number of a few thousand ahadith reached about three quarters of a million in the mid third century.*

<https://www.letmeturnthetables.com/2012/01/huge-number-hadith-bukhari.html>

**SMB:** To begin with, there is nothing surprising about the large volume of material considering that it spans 23 years of the prophet of Islam's mission and his followers or companions were eager not to miss anything which might be of relevance. Imagine the wealth of information to sift through if one were to collect only one local newspaper over two decades. Multiply this by the number of newspapers in circulation in a given region and the "huge number of hadith" is in no way an indication of later additions.

In fact, such wealth of information is an asset, compared to other religions, given that the art of writing and recording these reports was by then well developed. The problem remains of how to sort the relevant from the irrelevant, the private from the public, the authentic from the questionable. Here, for the first time, Muslims developed a science of "literal criticism" by scrutinising the reported sayings of the prophet with regard to their chain of transmission as well as concordance with the scripture.

This was an immense task, yet as it was undertaken in still close proximity in time to the first generation of Muslims who witnessed the prophet's teachings firsthand, there is a very high degree of reliability. Even though the collections which emerged as authentic cannot be completely infallible, and Hadith take second place after the Qur'an, the text of which was already written down during the prophet's lifetime and witnessed by so many people that it is absolutely beyond doubt – even non-Muslim scholars (the serious ones, not the polemicists) agree on this (Theodor Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'an*, Leiden: Brill, 2013) and it has been more recently been evidenced by the discovery of the Birmingham manuscript (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/cadbury/birmingham-quran-mingana-collection/birmingham-quran/index.aspx>).

The two prime sources of Islam, Qur'an and Hadith, are then subjected to various rules of interpretation in order to obtain rulings valid for a given time, place or situation.

**PAS:** Is the interpretation of the Jewish Tora, The Qur'an, and the Bible static with no evolution because they are claimed to be inspired or directly given by the Creator?

**SMB:** Generally, the consensus is that the texts are immutable whereas interpretation is subject to judgment and therefore change. The advantage the Qur'an has over other texts is that it did not start out merely as an oral tradition, which was later agreed upon as a canon but, since the art of writing was well developed by then, was recorded orally and in writing from the outset. What is common to all three Abrahamic faiths is that their texts include both prescriptive and esoteric meanings. Much of the confusion arising from mis-reading scripture is the result of taking esoteric meanings literally when they are intended to be allegorical.

**PAS:** How do Abrahamic Faiths explain Earth, Heaven or Heavens, Judgement, the Last Days and the Messiah or Messiahs? The choice is yours to choose your preferred denomination from Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, because of the inherent pluralism organic to these monotheistic faiths, to illustrate your answers.

**SMB:** The “story of creation” does not end with creation; it is a continuing journey of human life on earth. Thus both the Biblical and Qur’anic narrative depict the development of humanity within the cosmic environment from its beginning to its end. Key markers on this journey are mapped out through the stories of the prophets, e.g. Adam and the fall from grace, Cain and Abel and the first homicide, Noah and the washing away of an entire corrupt generation, Abraham and the prohibition of human sacrifice, David and Solomon as the embodiment of just rule, Jesus as restorer of the spiritual essence of the law, and Muhammad as the final seal of prophethood.

At the end of human life on this earth there are the tribulations of the end times followed by the restoration of peace, justice and mercy during the Messianic age. The temporary worldly life itself is contrasted with the ever-lasting hereafter, a place of both reckoning and reward or punishment, eternal bliss or condemnation. Differences arise between the Abrahamic traditions as well as to some degree within them as to whether a given status in the hereafter is obtained through achievement or grace.

**PAS:** My last question to you Prof. Bleher is many-fold; firstly illustrate for me the battle of Armageddon and help draw out relationally the tangible meaning or meanings and interpretations ascribed to this end-time ‘battle’.

“Islam has a fairly detailed account as to how the final battle for Armageddon will be like. This battle will include such figures such as Jesus (as) and Imam al-Mahdi” (<https://muslimconverts.org/curriculum/special-topics/independent-topics/the-battle-of-armageddon-an-islamic-view>)

In your view, do you think that the Jews, Christians, and Moslems are worshippers of the same God, G-D?

Lastly, is the end already here? Or is there no ‘real end’ to speak of? You are a well-respected Islamic scholar so I ask you according to your own Islamic tradition, when is the end, if there’s one or what really happens when a human is deceased? Is there an after-life? What does it look like and how do we experience it?

**SMB:** Volumes have been written about these topics and it is near impossible to summarise them in a few lines. The battle between good and evil started with expulsion from paradise and human life on earth. The attainment of eternal bliss in the next life has always been related to the question of which side we are on in this life. Armageddon is seen as the culmination of the battle between these opposing tendencies in the souls of men. Each prophet of God who came to a particular nation called them to the undivided worship of the one God together with criticising a particular unsound practice prevalent amongst them, be it lawlessness, cheating in trade, immorality etc. After the final prophet passed away, exemplars of all those individual “sins” were present simultaneously and nations mingled with each other.

We have now reached the age of globalisation where whatever happens, happens universally. The anti-Christ or “Dajjal” in Islamic parlour will rule the entire world with oppression in a system opposed to all that is good and godly. He will fool most people but be nonetheless confronted by the Mahdi, a reluctant “opposition leader” or “revolutionary”, who will slowly gain the upper hand in spite of the odds against him.

In the final battle he will be assisted by Jesus who returns as the Messiah and kills the Dajjal. Just as the three faiths Judaism, Christianity and Islam are divided about the person and role of Jesus, they are divided about the person and nature of the Messiah and no agreement can be reached regarding those divides.

In principle, the God of Abraham, worshipped by Jews, Christians and Muslims is one and the same god. Their understanding of His attributes, as Muslims would say, his nature, and hence the proper way of interacting with him, on the other hand, differ greatly.

Thus, there is common ground, but the differences do matter as they influence the moral code of how we should live our time-limited lives on earth. If reward and punishment are meted out exclusively in this world rather than the next, or if we are given several attempts at getting it right through a cyclical process of reincarnation, or if transgressions are wiped out through a substitute sacrifice, then we view the consequences of our actions from a different perspective than the Muslim who knows that after death all deeds are done and can no longer be mended.

One does not need to turn to religion to realise that life on earth is nearing its end. It would be foolish to assign a specific timeline to this process, but the trend is unmistakable. For Muslims, the concept of an afterlife provides the reassurance that irrespective of whether one obtains justice on earth or achieves one’s worldly aims, none of the effort made with the right intention, namely, to please God by doing what is right and abstaining from what is wrong, shall ultimately be wasted.

**PAS:** I would like to express my profound gratitude to you for sharing your knowledge and thoughts with us. Thank you, Prof. Sahib Mustaqim Bleher.

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