

Who are the Quranists?

Exploring Islam's Second Reformation

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Key Questions



Introduction

I'm writing this book in order to bring great unity to the Muslim Ummah. This book is not meant to flatter any sense of sectarianism among Quran Only or Quran-centric Muslims, nor is it meant to flatter the sense of rightness among their critics, rather, it is both, and insha'Allah, it transcends such dialectics, such struggle between co-religionists, and points the way to the guidance from Allah subhana wa talaha that was sent down on Layl Qadr 1401 solar years ago.

Muhammad Bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, has in recent years revised his usuli principles, or methodology of reasoning about religious law, to restrain the use of hadd

punishments, such as execution, to rulings that come only from mutawatir hadiths. Hadith science is based on different rules for sorting hadiths as being likely to be true or not, based on chains of transmission, who narrated it, and how many threads can be traced back, mutawatir means, there are very many chains of narrators, similar to how we agree something is fact when many news organizations report it, along with many witnesses. If we're going to execute a human being, we better make sure it's something that God wants us to do.

As a consequence, Hassan Farhan bin Maliki, a prominent scholar who has been criticized as being a "Quranist" or "Hadith Rejector", has not been prosecuted and sentenced to death for the crime of promoting the Qur'an and critiquing the traditions of interpreting it in light of hadith. When questioned if Saudi Arabia still follows the teachings of Ibn Wahhab, the Crown Prince [said](#) "following a certain school or scholar means we are deifying human beings", this reminds us of Surah Tawbah, 9:31, which condemns Jews and Christians for having followed the religious interpretations of a privileged class of priests and rabbis. The Crown Prince went on to cite the importance of ijtiḥad for every Muslim, to reason for themselves about what God wants from us. This is of historic significance.

The way the Qur'an is translated, the way it is interpreted, and even the way its rulings are nullified by other verses or by hadiths, has been codified in the early centuries where the founding scholars of the popular madhabs, or schools of jurisprudence, defined terms. After a few centuries, it was deemed that the doors of ijtiḥad had been closed, and it was no longer acceptable for scholars to try to reinterpret those codes of understanding the Qur'an. Two popular scholars of the following centuries, Ibn Tammiyah and Al-Ghazali, went ahead and did ijtiḥad again, one taking the Hanbali school that embraces many hadiths and extrapolating further, the other trying to synthesize Sufi spirituality, the benefits and pitfalls of philosophy, and a respect for differences between madhabs within Sunni Islam. There was an epoch where Sunnis of different schools deemed other Sunnis with suspicion, Imam Ghazali deserves credit for reasoning through the variety within the scholarship of the ummah and forging some sense of intellectual tolerance for minor differences. Ibn Tammiyah on the other hand, sowed the seeds for what would become known as the Salafist movement, which tried to transcend madhabs, or forge a new one, based on the proliferation of hadith literature with the advent of the lithographic printing press making Sahih Bukhari and other hadith volumes accessible to more people.

The Quranist movement, one might argue, is an inextricable part of Islam, there will always be people who just want to follow the Qur'an as long as there are Muslims, just like there will always be people who want to follow all hadiths irrespective of the contextualizing of them by prior scholars. These are both hyper-textual movements, they can be analogized to the *sola scriptura* tendency in protestant Christianity where people rebuked the interpretations imposed by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, and went to their printed bibles, to decide what Jesus alaihi salaam really said, or at least, is alleged to have said in possibly authentic, possibly just hasan hadiths. This problem and this struggle to approach God is a universal field, we are all facing a choice between the Haqq - the absolute truth - and the corruption of taghut - the things we are told are true based on the desires of those in power and the temptations of Shaytan. We are all children of a history where printed information about God transformed the course of

history. And so, on the internet, in the 21st century, after the fall of the last living Muslim Caliphates and then of European colonialism, we can read the Qur'an, choose between translations, study all the tafsirs (interpretations), study the bible, study all the critiques of the bible, study all the hadiths, study all the historical contextualization of hadiths, and there is more scholarship being produced about all these texts.

It is in this environment that we have, quite possibly an Islamic Reformation occurring. The immediate reaction to such an idea, is to assume that it is corrupted western Muslims trying to distort the truth and water down the religion, to try and adapt the unchanging words of Allah subhana wa talaha to the comforts and fashions of modern times. Or, maybe it's about trying to get back to the original roots of what is really true, based on fresh readings, you get to decide.

We can analyze that there have already occurred multiple reformations in Islam. Arguably the codification of the major 6 Madhabs (Sunni: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, Hanbali - Shia's Jafari, and the Ibadi) is the formation of the codified religion. Then a partial reformation occurred with Ibn Tammiyah and Ghazali's scholarship, which was arguably not a radical reconstruction of interpreting Islam, but a renewal of the gears of interpretation without landing in a very different destination. The post-printing press Salafi movement does seem to be a reformation, and the rise of the House of Saud and subsequent globalized invitation to Islam in the Salafi school funded by oil money, is a consequence of that reformation. The Quranist movement is attempting to then be the 2nd major reformation in the history of the Ummah.

I am a revert to Islam. Coming into the Din, I got a dizzying survey of almost everything the Ummah has to offer. American neo-Sufis like the Inayattiya. Canadian Barvevi Naqshbandi Sufis who believe that the Prophet Muhammad (alaihi salaam) is a Logos-like entity that was the first being to be created. Traditionalist Sunni Dawah YouTubers. Madhab-specific Sunnis. Madhab-non-specific Sunnis. Many articles of Twelver Shia and Zaidi Shia, as well as scholarship by representatives of the Ibadi school, have also crossed my desk. And then there are the Quranists. The Quranists have dizzying variety for such a low-population category. There is no one party line among the so-called "Quraniyoon". Their emphasis on reading the Qur'an and making up your own mind, has lead to a lot of interpretations.

Let's categorize them and learn something.

In this book we will cover the history of the Quranist movement, from early Islam through the late colonial period, to the career of notable scholars from the 2000s and early 2010s, to the recent years activity on social media. We will cover the different sub-schools of thought that people have gotten reading the Qur'an from first principles, differences in prayer frequency, prayer format, tolerance or intolerance of hadith, and major dividing questions such as the reliability of the bible as a reference, the createdness or lack thereof of the Qur'an, theories of shirk, the code 19, theories of what "kufir" means, and also what is generally held in common. We'll review the work of major scholars in the field, such as Omar Ramahi and Mufti Abu Layth. We'll explore some of the more fun conspiracy theories about the Ummah's early history and

look at supporting evidence for what, if any, are true. We will look at verses exploring the pro-Hadith and pro-Qur'an arguments as well as intermediate perspectives.

Most of all, we're going to contemplate the Qur'an. Irrespective of what other Muslims believe, all Muslims tend to agree that the Qur'an is the word of God, transmitted more or less verbatim (there were several "qirat" or subtle variations in wording and vowel intonation that were lost when Caliph Uthman burned existing mushafs and created a unified manuscript about 25 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad aliahi salaam). One thing the Qur'an says repeatedly, is that sectarianism is bad, really really bad. So bad, that sectarianism can ruin your afterlife, while making your life here on Earth more unpleasant and filled with rage. And every sectarian says, yes of course, those people in other sects are very wrong, but my sect isn't really a sect, it's just the correct way. But the Qur'an doesn't task us to figure out which sect is the right one. It says: have nothing to do with sects. Quranists often don't like the label, because it makes sectarians of them when they don't want to identify with a sect, however, there are many Quranis who really are sectarian, in that they fall into the same mindset, "they're wrong and I'm right", and hurl insults at traditionalist Muslims. There has to be a way forward for the Ummah where we can all gain in knowledge and taqwa.

Let's learn something, and move above the serious trap of sectarian division, insha'Allah.



Why not Quranism?

Is it haram to be a Quranist? Are Quranists kafirs? Does Allah love them or hate them? Maybe God is neutral about them? Are there any fiery reasons why someone should not be a Quranist?

This is how many Muslims are used to evaluating questions of should or should not: will there be hellfire associated with making this choice?

Zoom out a bit: why are not all Muslims by default, Quranists?

Why are not all Christians by default, Gospel-ists? Or Bibleists?

Why are not all Jews by default, Torahists? Or Torah + Tanakhists

Why aren't Hindus Baghavagita-ists?

First, for the Hindus, the Baghavaghita is not representative of all of "Hinduism", which is as amalgamation of a lot of different religions and cultures across thousands of years on the Indian subcontinent. What about the Upanishads? What about Kashmir Shaivism? The trimurti, an almost trinity-like idea that there are three major deities, was not an idea brought wholesale to an entire civilization at one time, rather it amalgamated the Shiva religion, the Vishnu religion and the idea of a Brahman deity as an incarnation of a greater, non-embodied, Allah-like deity, to create political peace between peoples, then the philosophers among them came up with the Upanishads after millenia of this amalgamation, and we get the near-Islamic concepts of Vedantism.

Muslims often recite Surah Iklhas: He is Allah, the One; Allah the Eternal; He is not begotten nor does he beget; and there are none comparable to the One.

Vedantists say: He is Brahman, the One; Brahman the Eternal; He can incarnate or beget other deities; and there are none who are not a part of the One. It's a little different, but it's something that originated from people immersed in Vedic religions' reasoning and contemplation.

Then we face that "Hindu"-ism, is really a glom, about the religious mixture of the Hindustani region, there was no single founder with a single text defining it, they call it "Sanatana Dharma" the way, or sunna, you might say, of living eternally. One cannot however say that there was a pure Upanishad monotheistic drop that got corrupted, as many Indian Sufis like to insinuate it was seeded many millennia ago by the Prophet Adam alaihi salaam. I wish that were true, because it would mean Hindus are in a sense Ahl Kitab and would be great for peacemaking between Muslims and Hindus, but we don't have any hard textual record to strongly suggest it.

So then Christians of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are not Bible-ists. They teach the Bible plus, the "sunna" of the lived tradition of those churches, which they claim has an authentic chain of apostles going back to the Prophet Isa alaihi salaam, who by laying of hands imparted spiritual energy to the first pope/patriarch, Peter, and on down in a chain, giving their priests powers to transubstantiate bread into the living flesh of God the Son incarnate, and other powers, such as making forgiveness stick when a private prayer might not be sufficient.

But then Christians, *sola scriptura* Protestants, are Bible-ists. They argue from the fundamentals of different interpretations and translations of different curations of the books from the Bible. Some look at the Hebrew and Greek original text, some love the King James English translation, claiming it as being divinely guided, some like to translate it based on their reading of what they think it means, some take a modernist reading that it's all an inspired metaphor, while others take it very literally, but they are strictly loyal to the letter of their version of the text. They reject the sunna of the earlier churches as bringing with it idolatry, statues of Mary and the taghut of fallible popes or patriarchs. Yet, yet, unlike Quranists, most protestant Christians think that what is fundamental to Christianity is belief in the divinity of Jesus alaihi salaam and a trinity concept of God's attributes as involving 3 personalities, or persons, or hypostases. It would be like Quranists who reject most hadiths but still revere the Prophet Muhummad alaihi salaam as being God's most special representative on earth - they are few but do exist.

The Jehova's Witnesses, the early US-based version of Seventh Day Adventism, and a few other protestant strands of mostly US-born protestant Christianity, do/did reject trinity and conceive of Jesus alaihi salaam as a created entity, though one of high sultan sent from Allah. Whereas Quranists largely reject the Sunni doctrine that the Prophet Muhummad alaihi salaam, was the greatest of Allah's creation, not finding that supported by the Qur'an (we'll do a whole chapter on this later).

With Judaism, we'll make this shorter, there's the Talmud, a lot of Jews in Israel tend to respect the Talmud as being the Sahih Bukhari of a second "oral torah" that came down to Moses but wasn't written, only transmitted among the Levantite Priests of Aaron. A lot of

religious Jews in the US, as well as those in the Mae Sharim neighborhood of Jerusalem who resist the Zionist state, follow only the Torah, and in the time of Isa alaihi Salaam there were Saducees who only followed the Torah, and the Pharisees, who conspired to kill God's Prophet, believed in the Tanakh as well, with its incipient foretelling of Messiah, they just didn't see the pattern match to the one God sent. But it's definitely telling that the Jews who are the closest to being Torah-ists, rejecting additional authority from expertise in the Talmud, are the ones who get arrested by Israeli police for waving Palestinian flags.

One of the big things that made me a Mu'min, mashAllah, was how the Qur'an seemed to be to be denigrating of this whole business of peoples having traditional ways, sunnati al salaf, and emphasizing the importance of following laws sent directly from God. Yet across major sects, Sunni, Shia, Ibadi, you read Quran + Sunna. Not every Quranist wants to identify as a Quranist, they mostly want to identify as Muslims, yet even the Ibadi school, which is closest to Quranist understandings, will tend to say that Quranists are not Muslims, but part of a modern umbrella religion, because the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad alaihi salaam is so inextricable to submitting to God. The idea is, you cannot submit to God without submitting to some understanding of the prophetic way, which includes the dispute resolutions and commands that prophet gave to his people, which are endorsed by the Qur'an, and which are binding on the Muslim ummah until judgment day.

All the sects and madhabs have endless debate about what exactly those commands and dispute resolutions entail, but they all agree that you're not **really** following the Qur'an if you try to follow **only** the Qur'an. This is actually quite a mind-bender for someone new to the religion.

There's no line in the Gospels where Jesus alaihi salaam is alleged to have said, follow the commandments, follow me, and follow things that people say I said later, based on the curation of an authoritative body of scholars.

Though this is what happened with Christianity.

In Mark 10:18 Jesus alaihi salaam rebukes someone who calls him "good teacher", saying: "why do you call me good? Only God alone is good." - which seems to both feign extreme humility as well as disassociating his identity from God's. Yet the Gospel of John has him saying "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one can come to to the Father except through me" which motivated a lot of confessional conversions, exclusive theology, hatred of Jews who refused to convert, and made belief in the Trinity a necessary requirement for salvation from a burning torture at the hands of a just God. The reason being, if you cannot accept that God sent the people of Israel a law, with the greatest law being, O Israel your God is One, and then later accept that God sent a Son and there's also a Holy Spirit, and they're all One, if you can't get your head around that, you're worthy of being tortured forever. Or perhaps briefly tortured before being annihilated, as early Christians believed following Jewish understanding of the word "alma" - eternal - in the book of Isaiah, as being "forever closed". Hell as an eternal torment was a doctrine that largely emerged in the 3rd century after Christ,

codified by Augustine in “City of God”, Chapter 22, before which, it was a matter of much debate.

Modern scholars think the Gospel of John came later, and then was selected from among many Gospels of the century following Jesus alaihi salaam’s prophethood, based on the guidance of God via holy spirit, because it was important, essential, that John’s message be tacked on to Jesus’ message in Mark.

Every Muslim would probably agree that there was a conspiracy against the true teachings of Jesus alaihi salaam. The Qur’an strongly critiques those who follow, or at least those who originated, the conspiracy, and condemns them to eternal torture on a basis of justice, that they lied against God and did great evil. Surah Maidah is replete with this criticism, while simultaneously offering the door of salvation to Christians who are righteous, this is a challenging legal criteria to evaluate for Christians reading the Qur’an, yet it may also apply to Muslims by analogy.

Even if we do not interpret the law 100% correctly, even if we follow seemingly harmless traditions, as long as we do not sin at the level of promoting lies about God, and we follow the guidelines of good behavior, we honor our Lord, we can make it, insha’Allah.

Many Quranists think that Quranism is not the default of Islam due to a swift conspiracy against the Quran. Other Quranists think that Quran-only or Quran-centric Islam was indeed the default, and this was skewed away by a slower conspiracy.

Critics of Quran-only Islam cite verses 4:xxx, 6:xx and xx:xx of Qur’an to claim that, no, the Qur’an was not sent as a comprehensive law book, the door was open for the prophet to make discretionary law givings and judgements, and we have to try and follow traditions or historical recordings of those to truly follow the law.

In the next chapter we’ll take a closer look at the early history and try to figure this out.



Why weren't there early Quranists?

Or were there?

There's a Quran Only YouTuber named Baba Shuiab - channel: "The Correctional Officer" - who likes to call Sunnis and Shias Mushrikeen, and deems those who follow any traditional interpretation of Qur'an Mushrik, and there's a Hadith Traditionalist YouTuber called Farid - "Farid Responds" - who put out a video questioning, if Quran Alone makes sense, why do all the Muslim traditions, even the minority ones that rebelled against the

authority of the Ummayyad Caliphate, share respect for the Sunna? Shia and Ibadi also all pray tashahhud in their Salah, even though it's not in Qur'an, and they all follow some variation of the rakat, or prayer unit count, structure that Sunnis pray, even though that isn't in the Qur'an either.

Shuiabs response was that the hadith with the most mass transmission was the Prophet Muhammad aliahi salaam prohibiting the writing of hadith and warning damnation of those who narrate a lie - there is a variation in that hadith where the word "intentionally" is there and one where it's missing, hence the Ibadi school always describe hadiths by saying "it is narrated" instead of saying "the Prophet said". Shuiab also cited hadith where the second caliph, Umar Ibn Khattab, stopped Muhammad aliahi salaam from writing down a final testimony to the Muslims, on the basis that "the Qur'an is sufficient for us". Other Quranists who are strictly at odds with Traditionalists, such as Muhammad - of the "Muhammad from God" - YouTube Channel like to portray Umar as an ardently Qur'an Only champion of Islam.

That may all be true, but it seems a bit paradoxical to refer to hadiths to disprove a historical question when the historicity of hadith is questioned in a strictly Quran Only methodology. But as an argument to people who believe in hadith, it's not a bad strategy to persuade them by appealing to hadith, and there are plenty more hadith that support key points that Quranists tend to make. But let's look at the historical information outside the hadith to answer this historical question.

It's true that every major sect and group in early Islam had some concept of Sunna transmitted as a living tradition, but the degree to which hadiths defined that Sunna exist on a spectrum that becomes progressively more hadith-heavy over the first few centuries. Abu Hanifa had about 17 hadiths he considered mutawatir, mass-transmitted, and relied mostly on the Qur'an for making jurisprudential rulings about how best to approach Islam. Imam Malik had about 700 hadith he considered highly reliable, based on him interviewing children and grandchildren of the prophetic companions in Medina. "The Muwatir of Imam Malik" is usually omitted from the major 6 books of hadith that were later codified as canonical by Shafi and Hanbali schools, even though the Maliki madhab is followed by hundreds of millions of people and is the second most populous form of Islam after the Hanafi madhab. According to Mufti Abu Layth, Abu Hanifa was criticized for being soft on hadith even in his time, and Imam Malik, being a wealthier man ensconced in the prophetic city, was also at odds with the Abbasid caliphate at the time but stood firm against critiques from those in the growing hadith movement.

When we get to Imam Shafi, the idea that the Qur'an needs the Sunna equally, that one can only interpret Qur'an in light of hadith, came about, along with an embrace of hadith that only have one chain of transmission. Then with Imam Hanbali the idea of using hasan (rated "good" but below "authentic") and even daeth ("weak) rated hadith for legal jurisprudence.

Mufti Abu Layth makes a good case that even within a Sunna-accepting Sunni Islam, there was a progression away from appreciating Sunna as a lived tradition, which Imam Malik embraced through his ethnography of the 2nd and 3rd generation Muslims of Medina, and towards a growing list of additional beliefs that segregated the in-group from various fringe

movements. The Mufti makes it sound like the tendency to venerate hadith as Sunna and therefore, as religion, was a growing movement during the second half of the first century hijri. Like most things in history, the trend wasn't linear, the Ahl Tawhid e Adha, (the People of Justice and Monotheism), became the dominant interpretation of Islam early in the Abbasid Caliphate, and they took a more minimal use of Sunna.

The Ahl Tawhid e Adha became known as the Mutazilites, the Refusers, because they got burned out on debating followers of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali madhab. They called themselves People of Monotheism and Justice, because they focused on the Qur'an's message of pure monotheism and they believe that God, being Just, gave humans enough free will to be truly accountable for their good or evil actions, that God had no authorship in any evil, and they emphasized using reason over fundamentalist readings of scripture, whether that be a literalist reading of Qur'an or accepting thousands of hadith. They didn't believe in the Miraj story based on hadith, where the Prophet Muhammad aliahi salaam travels to the highest levels of heaven and meets the Prophet Musa aliahi salaam, who advises him on how to negotiated God down from 50 daily prayers to 5. As we'll briefly explore in another short chapter on Salah, the Qur'an does mention 5 prayers, just not with explicit naming. They didn't believe the Sirat al Mustaqeem was a literal bridge connecting Al Araf, the middle place where Judgement Day is staged, to the gates of paradise. They accepted a lot of Sunna but rejected a lot of hadith, including the single-transmission hadith Jibreel (alaih salaam) that we'll cover in a short chapter on free will and Qadr. The Mutazilites merit their own short chapter.

After the Mu'tazilites went too far in their beliefs and persecuted the Hanbalis, which maybe the Abbasid Caliph is more to blame for, but they abetted the Minha, the persecution of those who believed the Qur'an is uncreated, and this lead to radicalization. Eventually the 3rd Abbasid Caliph to prosecute the Minha was impressed by Ahmed Ibn Hanbal's strong faith while enduring torture, and flipped, persecuting the Mutazilites and making the Hanbali creed the official position of the state.

Sometime after this, we got the academic push to codify hadiths at large, with Imam Bukhari and his student, Imam Muslim, who rejected hundreds of thousands of hadiths to arrive at about seven thousand that were rated "authentic", about 2000 of which are not variations on each other. Both scholars used different methodologies to rate authenticity on a probabilistic scale based on disqualifying narrators, but generally accepted narrations with a single chain. These tomes, along with 4 earlier books, have become deemed the essential hadith collections of Sunni Islam. Shia have their own hadith books telling history from their perspective, and are highly critical of the top narrator by volume, Abu Huraira, for being an ally with the Umayyad caliph Muawiya. The Ibadi have a methodology of rejecting hadith that contradict the Qur'an, citing many hadith that this is indeed the Sunna, but happen to believe in the hadith Jibreel and associated predestination.

In conclusion, there's a trend from Quran + Sunnah as a lived tradition embodied by generationally passed down practices with a limited number of mass transmitted hadiths, to

many thousand single-transmission hadiths over the first few centuries after hijri. That this trend occurred is an indisputable consensus among scholars and evidenced by the existence of the Hanafi and Maliki schools at the most practiced codifications of Islam by population. The Quran Only position takes this a bit further and asserts that the ideal base state of the Din was not the lived tradition Sunnah plus the Qur'an, but just the Qur'an.

The thing about belief is, you never quite have all the information, there's always a preference to lean into one uncertainty or another. The other thing about belief, is that it frames your actions, someone can act contrary to their beliefs sometimes, but usually most people act in a way that is - not necessarily pre-determined - but pre-biased, based on what they believe.

Umar Ibn Khattab is often attributed as narrating a number of hadiths. Was he an ardent Quranist and those narrations were attributed to him against his wishes? Or was he a proponent of following some semblance of Sunnah, that he maybe didn't even consciously distinguish from following Qur'an?

There seem to be 4 major positions here: Qur'an Only, Qur'an over Sunnah, Quran + Sunnah as equal and complementary guides, or Sunnah as the final ruling over Qur'an. Even if Qur'an Only wasn't a major position in the early history, it may have been the default position at the very beginning, but we don't have much documentation of it other than a few hadiths and readings of the Qur'an with that lens. Qur'an over Sunnah seems to have been the major default position, followed by a migration through Qur'an + Sunnah with Shafi, towards Hadith over Qur'an with Hanbali and in recent centuries, Salafism.

Let's explore some of the implications of these positions when it comes to key aspects of religion.

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Should we leave Itjihad to the Experts?

The two main arguments against relying primarily on Qur'an are these:

- 1) There are verses that condemn those who disobey the Rasul, the Rasul and the Nabi are synonyms, thus everything the Prophet Muhammad SallAllah alaihi Wasalaam said is Wahi, law-giving, and binding on believers. Quranists are therefore, maybe not Kafirs, they haven't rejected the book, they seem to really be into it, but they're Fasiqs, they're rebellious. They want to follow their desires and not perform Islam properly based on the diligence demanded in the Sunnah.
- 2) Itjihad is difficult and requires a high level of training in Arabic language, hadith, principles of law, and many other things, that the average person simply cannot meet because of the time and intelligence required. Therefore, everyday people reading Qur'an and deciding what it means on their own, is dangerous for their souls, they can come to all kinds of wrong conclusions that are contrary to the interpretation of scholars (Sunni Islam) or divinely appointed Imams (Shia Islam) and people really need to be more humble before they wreck themselves.

Let's leave #1 for another chapter, and explore #2. The core idea that we can take from this movement, even if we disagree with their reading to answer the theological criticism in point #1, is that people *can* and *should* read and contemplate the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself commands people to use their aql, their reason, to think about what God is asking of them, and says on the Day of Judgement we will be questioned on our hearing and seeing. On this basis, Quranists suggest that the idea held for over 1000 years that only scholars are qualified to make sense of the Qur'an, either was always a false idea, or no longer applies.

In the middle ages, the average literacy rates were very low, and there was no internet, not even 2G. So it makes sense that the vast majority of Muslims would rely on ulema, the people of knowledge, to make sense of both what the Qur'an says, as well as the extended details of how to perform their Islam diligently, according to interpretations of the Sunnah via hadith, the consensus among scholar's interpretations, and the reasoning by analogy of individual scholars. Omar Ramahi calls this the Muslim Quadrinity, that Muslims invented 3 Gods besides Allah, who commands us in Qur'an, they elevated the Prophet Muhammad as someone we must also obey separately, they elevated the consensus of scholars (Ijma) and they elevated the reasoning of only qualified scholars (Qiyas). He coined the term Quadrinity as a parody of how Christians have a Trinity, but that at least the Christians have the belief that their Trinity is somehow One God, but Qur'an, Sunna, Ijma and Qiyas are all at odds and together form the complex tapestry of fiqh across various schools.

I'm going to be a bit more charitable and say, that since Qur'an says Allah demands no more than what a soul will bear, and we'll be questioned on our hearing and seeing, then Allah's mercy will extend more to people who are not literate, who lived in these earlier centuries and couldn't really choose what authority to follow. This may also apply for Christians living under dogmatic rule of churches in medieval Europe. It's useful to have a madhab to follow, where experts tell you what to do and think, when you're far way from having the capacity to do so, and when the circumstances of your century make that capacity rare indeed.

Let's then consider the modernist argument: today we have the internet. You can look up everything about Islam. I've been a Muslim just about 1 year, I got versed in a lot of things, like an Orientalist, about 7 years earlier when I had a bout of Islamophobia after being harassed and bullied by Muslims I thought were my friends, so let's say I have spent about 200 hours then and 600 hours in the last year studying Islam on the internet. I have no book shelf with arabic calligraphy and don't even own a physical mushaf - a copy of the Qur'an - but I can put on headphones and listen to amazing recitation on various websites, seeing the Qur'an sorted by Surah order, Juz or alleged revelation order (which I believe is mostly accurate, there are some references to things in early surahs in that sequence that make me think the sequence is ~90% accurate). I have a not-encyclopedic, but gloss-level understanding of the differences in beliefs across dozens of Sufi tariqas, the 3 major sects, the 7 madhabs across them (including Madkhali/Salafist), the differences in the Ahmadi movement, largely extinct sects and madhabs, the difference between Qadariyyah school of free will believers in the early centuries and the Qadiriyya Sufi tariqa, the difference between Abkarian adeeqah as reviled by Salafis and as portrayed by Ibn Arabi and a middle-ground on it from Maimonides, the differences between Ashari, Maturidi and Athari aqeedah, the differences between Moroccan and Kashmiri Sufi tendencies, the controversies around translations of many key words in the Qur'an such as ibadat, kufr, emaan, shirk, the history of all the caliphates and kingdoms, history of recent centuries, the pro's and cons of Imam Ghazali's work and also the ever-controversial Ibn Tammiyah, the differences in Isnad methodologies in the big 7 hadith books and why Imam Malik's Mutawattir isn't considered part of the big 6 that scholars tend to prefer, which hadiths contradict each other, why some scholars consider some hadith to be daeeth while others

consider them hasan or sahih... I probably know more but this paragraph is bloated, and maybe that's a sign.

I accumulated all this knowledge not just through sacrificing work time but also by listening to endless podcasts while working. While I don't believe that listening to music is a sin or a sign of hypocrisy, maybe it is? So to be safe, I mostly hear music, ads will play it in between podcast pauses on YouTube, it's in commercial venues in the west, etc. Instead of spending time listening to music to fill up my brain's B-track, I listen to speech, discourse, ideas, history. Reading is also a useful way to absorb information and in my first year as a Muslim I was very blessed by Allah to have a remote job that afforded me a lot of slack and thus was able to read Qur'an, hadith, many Wikipedia pages, essays, and books about Islam.

This book itself is a work of minor scholarship. Did I go to Al Azar university and spend 10 years becoming a Mufti? Definitely not. But one thing that attracted me about Islam when I was in the process of converting last Ramadan, was how we're not really supposed to have special clerical hierarchies of priests or rabbis, Surah Tawbah has a very pointed verse about that. Instead, people who are really into the religion are scholars, it's academic, scientific even, you read, you write, people read what you write, maybe they try to kill you, mashAllah may Allah preserve you from that. It's not really academia if you have to fear death for publishing ideas that people might not like, and this is the sad reality of Islam in many countries, but before I got exposed to wave after wave of hating and even violent assassinations for minority scholars' publications, I had a naive belief that Islam had this egalitarian abolition of clerical hierarchy, replaced with the meritocratic pursuit of knowledge.

You might be thinking, this guy is only a 1 year revert, why should I listen to anything he has to say. If you had that though, hold on to it, taste it, contemplate it, this is exactly the question at large - can someone simply read and write and be read and have a valid thought about God's legacy to us children of Adam?

Some, like Tim Winter, a.k.a. Abdal Hakim Murad (AHM), embody the scholarly tradition in institutions like Cambridge University or Sheik Hamza Yusuf at Zaytuna, taking refuge from being able to be killed for being deemed apostates in oases of western-protected Islamic scholarship institutions. They tow the party line on orthodox Sunni Islam while trying to emphasize the rich tradition of knowledge seeking and the pacific value of practicing spirituality, which Sufis call Tasawwuf. They still get called apostates ("murtad") or hypocrites by hardliners, but hey, that's life in the big Din.

Here's [a lovely essay](#) by AHM with only the slightest Sunni sectarian bias, where he lists the criteria that the Ulema has established to become *one of them* and qualify to perform **ijtihād** or "effort", in other words, reading and thinking about Islam.

"In order to protect the Shariah from the danger of innovation and distortion, the great scholars of usul laid down rigorous conditions which must be fulfilled by anyone wishing to claim the right of ijtihad for himself. These conditions include:

- (a) mastery of the Arabic language, to minimise the possibility of misinterpreting Revelation on purely linguistic grounds;
- (b) a profound knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah and the circumstances surrounding the revelation of each verse and hadith, together with a full knowledge of the Quranic and hadith commentaries, and a control of all the interpretative techniques discussed above;
- (c) knowledge of the specialised disciplines of hadith, such as the assessment of narrators and of the matn;
- (d) knowledge of the views of the Companions, Followers and the great imams, and of the positions and reasoning expounded in the textbooks of fiqh, combined with the knowledge of cases where a consensus (ijma) has been reached;
- (e) knowledge of the science of juridical analogy (qiyas), its types and conditions;
- (f) knowledge of ones own society and of public interest (maslahah);
- (g) knowing the general objectives (maqasid) of the Shariah;
- (h) a high degree of intelligence and personal piety, combined with the Islamic virtues of compassion, courtesy, and modesty.”

Omar Ramahi deconstructs this in his talks about the marginalization of Muslims:

- a) The Arabic language as defined in the *Lisan Al-Arabe* (a popular Arabic dictionary not to be confused with the *Lisan al Gaib* from Dune) is itself a product of how the language was defined by the Qur’an. This is actually a cool argument for the Qur’an’s divine inspiration and the Prophet Muhammad alaihi salaam being relatively uneducated - the book pulls a Shakespeare on the language and accelerates its written form, giving us words and constructs, despite being in a very colloquial form relative to the fancy poetry of the Arabs. In other words, mastering Arabic that came after the Qur’an is redundant because Quranic Arabic is the predecessor of defined Arabic language, in the same way that Shakespearian English is a predecessor to modern English.
- b) Omar Ramahi thinks the hadiths are so full of contradictions that it becomes a huge obstacle to reading the Qur’an with simple clarity.
- c) Maybe the hadith sciences, with their emphasis on degrees of probability, detract one from thinking about words directly from God with the weight of certainty.
- d) Maybe the companions weren’t the best Muslims to ever live and departed from following the Qur’an very early with wars of aggression that are not endorsed by what many Quranists believe to be the Qur’an’s defensive war rules.
- e) Omar Ramahi thinks Qiyas is illegitimate, the Qur’an describes itself as having clear verses and allegorical verses, and that the allegorical verses are a test for people to

project their desires onto, and therefore elevating Qiyas to a science invites premature confidence in interpretations and invites us to fail God's test. This is an interesting point because it can also be applied to criticizing some of the wilder interpretations among Quranists or among the extremes in the Salafist movement, which we'll discuss later in this chapter.

- f) This is an interesting one that I haven't heard Dr. Ramahi speak about, and a good example of it would be the Maliki Fiqh, where Imam Malik was very specific about being enmeshed in the society of Medina. But in our age, what is my society? The one country I live in? The country I'm a citizen of? There are pretty different societies but with the latter having a lot of colonial influence over the prior. What about my relationship to Syrian refugees? The people of Gaza? The people of Iran, UAE, Saudi, Kenya, Somalia? I'd argue that we're in this global village situation on the internet, I can subscribe to SubReddits for every Muslim country and soak up local color from people who live in those places, ask them questions, do an ethnography of each if I had the time. I'd argue we have to increasingly think globally to try and contemplate and propose useful solutions to the problems that the Muslim ummah face. This is actually much harder than fulfilling the requirement of knowing one's society at any point in the past.
- g) This is another interesting one I haven't heard Dr. Omar discuss but which Mufti Abu Layth uses to, for example, debunk the kill-apostates hadith using hadith science, that freedom of religion is one of the maqasids of the Sharia from the Qur'an and Sunnah, viz the Prophet Muhammad's (alaihi salaam) treatment of Jews in Medina, his patient dawah, his forgiveness of many the mushriks of Mecca after the war, and so on. Also what are the maqasids of civilization in general? If God's guidance into the progress of modernity has had any impact, if modernity and progress are not just humans indulging ourselves with Uber Eats and the rule of law and Netflix and reduced infant mortality, but God actually willed it, then what many Muslims think is "godless" secular culture has actually absorbed some maqasids from the Qur'an into its institutional fiber. Contemplate that one.
- h) And it helps if we're really polite with people who disagree with us!

Now let's talk about Mufti Abu Layth. This man actually put in the years to become a credentialed Mufti, it's like becoming a medical doctor in terms of time to get an Ijazah and then going back for a Ph.D. Then he decided to become more individualistic, get Zoolander hair and a You Don't Mess With the Zohan facial hair cultivation, and preach very liberally but with the criteria of all of the above. He'll say things like, women can indeed travel with a mahram, or borrowing for a mortgage at 5% interest is not like the riba that was outlawed in the Qur'an. For this, he is often reviled by Salafists and Shafi/Hanbali traditionalists, or even disavowed by conservatives within his own Maliki Madhab. His house was broken into in 2021, not by thieves, but by Muslims who wanted to intimidate him and his young daughters, because they disliked (makruh) a video he made suggesting Arab states use Palestinians as a symbolic sacrifice and they should be allowed to migrate to easier locations to live in if they choose (this is more extremely put to a point in 2024 where the Gaza crisis has killed over 30,000 and displaced the surviving population with hospitals, food, water, electric and internet infrastructure destroyed, and refugee camps the target of final assaults by the Israelis on Hamas).

Mufti Abu Layth is not a Quranist, he has friendly dialogue with Quranists like Edip Yuksel because he shares a lot of the same critiques of the hadith maximalist versions of Islam. Imam Malik's Mutawatir is a hadith compilation with far fewer hadiths than Sahih Bukhari, based on ethnographical interviews with the residents of Medina in the late 1st century hijri, many of whom were children or grandchildren of Sahaba (companions of the prophet). There are plenty of Malikis who are more conservative than this Mufti, but, the point still stands that the Madhab is built on a totally different hadith methodology than what became dominant in the later Abbassid Caliphate, and asserts itself as the most dominant today. While the Hanafi Madhab started out more liberal than it is today, and it's still loosely considered more liberal than Shafi and Hanbali, it did a lot of taqlid, conforming to the hadith-based rulings of the other schools to not seem like a bunch of liberal hypocrites, even though Abu Hanifa's mutawatir hadith requirements are not met by Sahih Bukhari and the other 5 big hadith books. The Maliki Madhab on the other hand, has its hadith book, written by their founder, and this has given it a constancy to dissent, deeming things makruh when others deem them haram. As Mufti Abu Layth puts it: "I don't think this is good so I was going to call it haram, but then I remembered I'm not God" and then puts out a rich bellowing laugh.

So while Quranists will reject hadith based on a categorical loyalty to Qur'an and a partial or complete rejection of Sunna as a secondary authority, Malikis reject many hadith such as the kill-apostates hadith, the hell-will-have-mostly-women hadith, the Aisha-child-bride hadiths, and other chestnuts of violence, sexism and oppression, based on hadith science. They had narrators with clear sectarian biases to lie. Mufti Layth is just running with the loose thread of the sweater to represent an Islam that is ardently faithful but rationally liberal. The Qur'an says, this religion was meant to be easy for you.

Mufti Layth is someone who meets all the qualifications for Ijtihad and takes it in another direction than the "mainstream" scholars, or at least slightly off to the left. People will make clips of him saying permissive things as a self-evidence of his apparent apostasy, and commentators will cite hadiths saying, worse than the Dajjal are misguided scholars. Which brings me to my next point: sure everyone running around down their own Itjihad can get messy and have adverse consequence, look at the Salafist movement. Whereas Quranists, especial new reverts, young people and born Muslims who nearly left but found renewed faith in Quran-Alone study, will tend to have wild interpretations that belie the (so-called by a hadith) pillars of Islam - is ritual prayer really what Salah means?; is Hajj to Mecca legit or is it really petra?; do we really need to fast in Ramadan? The Salafist movement has produced literal terrorists and for everyone violent jihadist, there are 20 or 50 internet jihadis going around just being very dark and angry and threatening to their fellow Muslims on the internet, casting a shadow of hellfire over anyone they disagree with citing any of the many thousands of hadiths in Sahih Bukhari or, if they're really reaching, the Sunan of Tirmidhi.

Say what you will about Ottoman or Mughal Caliphs executing dissidents, even the Christians did plenty of that until a couple centuries ago, at least they weren't blowing up mosques, taking their neighbor's wife as a sex slave after a theological debate, or being rude on Twitter.

The Quranist counterpoint would be, the hadiths are the ruse of Shaytan. The Maliki ante-point would be, many of the “sahih” single-narrator hadiths are really daeeth, (as Mufti Abu Layth would put it: DAEETHHH!!), they are weak, therefore these hadiths are probably lies concocted by a major sinner, and thus by implication, influenced by Shaytan. The Ibadis would be a bit more cautious but generally also throw out any hadith that goes against Qur’an, and shy away from saying “The Prophet said” when reciting a hadith, so as not to unintentionally lie against the prophet and incur a major sin, instead they say “it is narrated”.

When Quranists do bad tasfir and sloppy Itjihad to become more permissive in the Din, they maybe commit sins, but these are not blowing up masjid level sins, though a few of them can be occasionally rude on Reddit. I don’t know the fiqh, if being rude on Reddit is less makruh than Twitter.

Quranists are often criticized for having wildly disparate interpretations of Qur’an, but if you give millions of people the idea that they have to read and think for themselves, and that scholarly authority is a potential taghut, a shirk-inducing oppressor, then of course they will come to different interpretations. We’ll cover this rich diversity of opinions later in the book.

The most sticking critique a traditionalist can lay against Quranists, other than saying they’re kafirs and are disqualified for paradise due to disbelieving in their interpretation of key, pro-Sunna verses in Qur’an, is that they’re missing out on a lot of details that they *need* to have their prayers accepted, or some Sunna-based harams they should be abstaining from, or that they’re not following pillars of Islam. But there was a Salafist who dropped into the r/Quraniyoon subreddit for a Q&A session, and he said that if a Quran-only follower were not departing from the pillars of Islam, he considers them to be Muslims? Isn’t that nice? I think that’s nice. Perhaps the moral of the story is to please Itjihad responsibly.



Obey the Rasul or Obey the Nabi?

Ok, let's cover this quickly, these are the talking points you'll hear debated endlessly.

Pro-Sunna verses of Qur'an:

- 1) Repeated demands to Obey Allah and Obey the Rasul
- 2) Verse in Surah Nisa saying if you disobey a clear Command of the Messenger you will go to hell. This is a bright red line.
- 3) Verse about the spoils of war and saying, take what the Rasul gives you and leave what he forbids.
- 4) Verse saying your faith isn't complete until you submit to the Prophet's dispute resolution in all matters.

Pro-Qur'an-Only verse of Qur'an:

- 1) In what hadith will you believe after this?
- 2) Don't let idle hadiths distract you from the path of Allah.
- 3) We (Allah) bring the best tasfir.
- 4) The Prophet will testify on Judgement Day, my people have abandoned this Qur'an.
- 5) They claimed to do the thing because they worshipped God, but they are liars.

- 6) Most people don't do monotheism without adding some kind of associate, when they're called to worship God alone they get rankled but when they hear the name of an associate added their hearts are at ease.
- 7) O Nabi, why have you made unlawful the good things that Allah has made lawful for you to please your wives?

So which is it?

The Quranist argument against the Pro-Sunna verses implying we're responsible for hadith law-making, is that 1) Rasul means Messenger, Nabi means Prophet, so obey the Rasul means you're obeying God by following the message e.g. the Qur'an's law-making. Nabi is the lifetime-only role of the same individual to lead the people in governing Medina or in battle.

The traditional argument is that in the Sharia about how scholars traditionally read Qur'an, words that are synonyms can be used interchangeably. Nabi = Rasul. Rasul = Nabi. Anytime you see Rasul used, you can just assume it means Nabi and visa versa.

So which do you believe?

Let's zoom in a little more, why would God send us this book all about not associating partners with Him, and then add these authority clauses extending very serious consequences to disobeying certain people? Does this mean the prophets are associates?

Ok let's zoom in a little bit more: why did Iblis not bow to Adam? Was it because he was trying to be a really good monotheist? The Qur'an seems to make it clear in multiple parts that Iblis was arrogant because he thought it was beneath him, his arrogance and refusal of a direct command from Allah is why he was cursed - maybe Iblis could have even repented on the spot and been forgiven when called out, but Iblis double down until the end of time.

There's a verse where the Nabi is ordered the issue the edict - Qul: - if God had chosen to make a Son (e.g. Jesus alaihi salaam) then humanity *would* indeed be in ibada to that divine Son and this prophet would be the first to serve his lawgivings.

On the other hand, there are several verses about what God did and did not send sultan, authority, over.

Therefore we can conclude: sometimes you can serve persons who aren't God because God ordained such, and there's a difference between serving authority ordained by God, which is being a slave (abad) to God (Al Ahad), and *sharing* in ibadat by serving God and someone else that is contrary to God's commandments.

The hypocrites who tried to get out of military service that are condemned in Surah Tawbah, were disobeying God by disobeying their military orders. They weren't conscientious objectors, they just slinked away, they're also cited for hoping they don't miss out on war booty,

but also don't particularly want or care for the Muslim victory. They were in ibadat to their own desires in addition to God, and the desires won.

The hardline Quranist idea that there's not validity to anything the prophet said as Nabi instead of as Rasul, may not be valid in light of the above.

A more moderate Quran-centric view is that if something is alleged to be a part of the Sunna and it goes against the Qur'an, then you avoid shirk by following what the Qur'an says.

Traditionalists sometimes accuse progressives and/or Quranists (who aren't always the same) as being hypocrites, and visa versa, but I think as long as people sincere, they might be on batil (falsehood) and shirk (associating idols with God's authority) but they're true believers.

If clear commands of the Nabi and dispute resolutions of the Nabi are a part of the Qur'an's commands, it would make sense that people would become obsessed with cataloging what all those dictums might be in later centuries, even though one of the clear commands in the most mutawatir hadith, was not to write down hadith.

But don't do shirk by confusing Ibadat to those extended commands, which are by proxy, from God, with ibadat to the man.

Or, assume that Allah's use of words is extremely precise and "Rasul" means that Muhammad aliahi salaam was primarily a postman, in addition to being a governor, general and imam of a masjid. But not any postman! A postman from the creator of the universe, which has a better retirement package than the United States Postal Service.

There's a verse that says something to the effect of: He doesn't speak of his own desires and he is only mean to convey the message *clearly*.

Quranists will read that verse and say it proves that he's just a postman.

Traditionalists will read that verse and say, the "clearly" implies the Sunna.

It's a rorschach test from God.



Making distinction between the Messengers?

It's repeated 3 times in Qur'an that being a Muslim means taking the messages from Ibrahim, Yusuf, Isa, (alaihi salaams) and so on, and making *no distinction* between any of them. Quranists really latch onto this and re-imagine Islam in contrast to traditions, as not revolving around Muhammad (alaihi salaam). In Sunni and Shia Islam there's this notion that Muhammad (alaihi salaam) was the greatest creation of Allah's. Because Muhammad (alaihi salaam) in the Qur'an is in the 2nd person, referred to by name four times, but as "you" or Nabi or Rasul a number of times, these injunctions against making distinctions between "them", sets of messengers cited in the verses, never quite catches the last prophet in that history. Thus traditional Muslims see the door open to assuming that Muhammad has a supreme place among them.

Is there support for this idea in the Qur'an? Other than the absence of a specific inclusion of one name among all the other messengers with the thrice repeated injunction not to make distinctions? The Qur'an calls Muhammad (alaihi salaam) an uswan hasanah, a good example, for those who wish to do well in the next life. But it doesn't say an uswan hasan, the *best* example. The word "sunna" doesn't occur in the singular in the Qur'an, instead it occurs

in two senses, as the Sunattiillah, the Ways of God which do not change, and the sunnati of those who came before, it's always used in the plural. Omar Ramahi deconstructs that argument by citing the story of Ibrahim (alaihi salaam) in Qur'an where it says he was a uswan hasanah, except for when he prayed for the forgiveness of a mushrik (idolator), his father (possibly surrogate father-figure). So there's a sense that being a good example to believes it not an exclusive post, and indeed, is distributed throughout the messengers. The ways of tradition are also often condemned in Qur'an, particularly when the clash with the ways of God.

The Qur'an has a verse asking believers to send salutations and blessings upon the Nabi. Quranists often believe this is meant to be within his lifetime, and not a command to do special prayers to bolster one human individual. They tend to say "alaihi salaam" in regards to all messengers equally, and refrain from the durood sharif, a special dua ending the salah that invokes blessings upon Muhummad and his family. You've probably noticed me using a similar convention, just to shake things up from now on I'm going to say "salawatu alaihi wa salaam" in regards to all the prophets, just so I'm not delinquent in case that is indeed a commandment that was meant for all time. Some would take the opposite position and say it's inappropriate to wish blessings, instead of merely peace, on all prophets, but we stand on our sincerity.

Omar Ramahi notes that if someone really wanted to make distinctions between prophets, the one the Qur'an gives most distinctions to is Isa (salawatu alaihi wa salaam), who has miracles, the paternity of holy spirit, and a unique title, the messiah. The role of messiah and Jesus (saws) is something that does polarize Qur'an alone followers and indeed many Muslims across many sects, and we'll explore later. The Qur'an notes that Allah gives messengers different ranks, but that is Allah's business, our business is to not be distracted from the message all these people have brought.

The Qur'an often refers to its messenger as "your fellow human" and the ending of Surah Kahf, as well as other places, has him say "I am just a man like you". The hadiths notably go to opposing statements. There is a hadith where he claims to have existed before Adam (salawatu alaihi wasalaam) and on the basis of that hadith, there is a movement of four "orthodox" Sufi tariqas, the Naqshbandi, Chisti, Qadiriyya and Suhrawardiyya are associated with the Barlevi movement. I'm more familiar with the teachings of Naqshbandi and Chisti sheiks, so I don't want to speak so much for the other two or the Barlevi movement at large, but generally they hold the Prophet Muhummad (salawatu alaihi wa salaam) to be a cosmic-level entity who was created by God first, like the Logos in the Christian Trinitarian tradition (they attribute such to Jesus, salawatu alaihi wasalaam). The version I've heard from Canadian Naqshbandi Sheik Nurjan Miramahi is that there is a unique connection to God through Sayyidina Muhummad (saws) and *not any other prophet*, because they're all dead men, only one is a cosmic-level being. The version I've heard from Chisti-descended Pir Zia Inayat Khan, is a softer interpretation where a spirit of guidance has been embodied in all the messengers, sort of like the Ruh Qudus or holy spirit, the orthodox Chisti version may be more strongly stated like the Naqshbandi version.

Salafis and most traditional Muslims hold a more moderate interpretation that the Barlevi idea is either shirk or at least false, but they still hold the man, Muhammad (saws) to be the best of creation. There's a lot of emphasis on doing things with your right hand and emulating other aspects of the personality of this man, as told by extensive hadith collections.

Some Quranists hold a very special place in their hearts for Muhammad, salawatu alaihi wasalaam, and think about his Sunna as being important, as told in the Qur'an. Being humble, discounting your own grandeur, serving God transparently, having patience and sweetness for all life (at least, when they are not at war with you).

There is a hadith where Muhammad (saws) claims to be the standard bearer on the Day of Judgement and repeats as he follows this claim up with others, that he is not boasting. There is a hadith where he says, he is no better than Yunus. There is a hadith where he warns the ummah not to make too big a deal about him as the Christians did with Jesus, salawatu alaihi wasalaam.

Instead of the du'ood sharif, some Quranists have tired sending Salawats on a number of prophets, extending the outro of Salah, or saying "Salamun" (the n is silent) towards a number of prophets, per Quran 38. Others omit it entirely.

Some Quranists take objection to even the shahaadat, the dual shahada, since its only context in the Qur'an is when hypocrites cite it and Allah cites them as being liars - they hide behind their oaths. But this context implies that this was an oath that was commonly circulated and not one unique to hypocrites. There is a shahada in Qur'an where one cites la ilaha illa Allah and then mentions a number of prophets, acknowledges their message and makes no distinction between them, but that's a long verse and lacks the punch of a 24 syllable shahada which is considered a pillar of Islam (from hadith). Some Quranists even think the "and" after testifying to God, is itself shirk, it's association at some level, and omit tashahhud from their salah entirely. Others say tashahhud but mention other than God at the end, in the 2nd rakat they do a shortened tashahhud that only mentions Allah. Many Quranists who do recite tashahhud in salah, use the "As Salam ala Nabi" wording that the people of Medina adopted after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, salawatu alaihi wasalaam, so as to not evoke a dead person as if they were present.

We've got a spectrum:

- 1) Barlevis: Christians were right to assume a prophet would also be a cosmic entity, but picked the wrong one
- 2) Twelver Shia: the progeny of one prophet are infallible (some of them at least)
- 3) Mainstream Sunni: one prophet is the greatest of the prophets and therefore of all creation
- 4) Salafis: we should not make distinction between the prophets except for some, Barlevis are mushriks, Mainstream Sunni Sufis who make dua to the prophet or celebrate Mawlid are also mushriks - belief that Qur'an is uncreated also means

the original Torat is also uncreated. But it's ok to make dua for one prophet to achieve a position in paradise that only one person can achieve, to guarantee intercession.

- 5) Ibadi: The Blessed Messenger's Sunnah is an extricable part of the guidance Qur'an left us, but he cannot intercede for major sinners on Judgement Day or after.
- 6) Moderate Quran-centric: Try not to make distinction between messengers, one prophet is a good example, other prophets are a good example, but saying traditional tashahhud in the "ala Nabi" wording and the shahadatain is ok, it's not shirk or necessarily making a violation of the "no distinction" commandment.
- 7) Moderate Quran Only: Refrain from tashahhud or salawat unless adding in other prophets.
- 8) Hardline Quran Only: Shehadatin is shirk, don't say it, repent if you have.

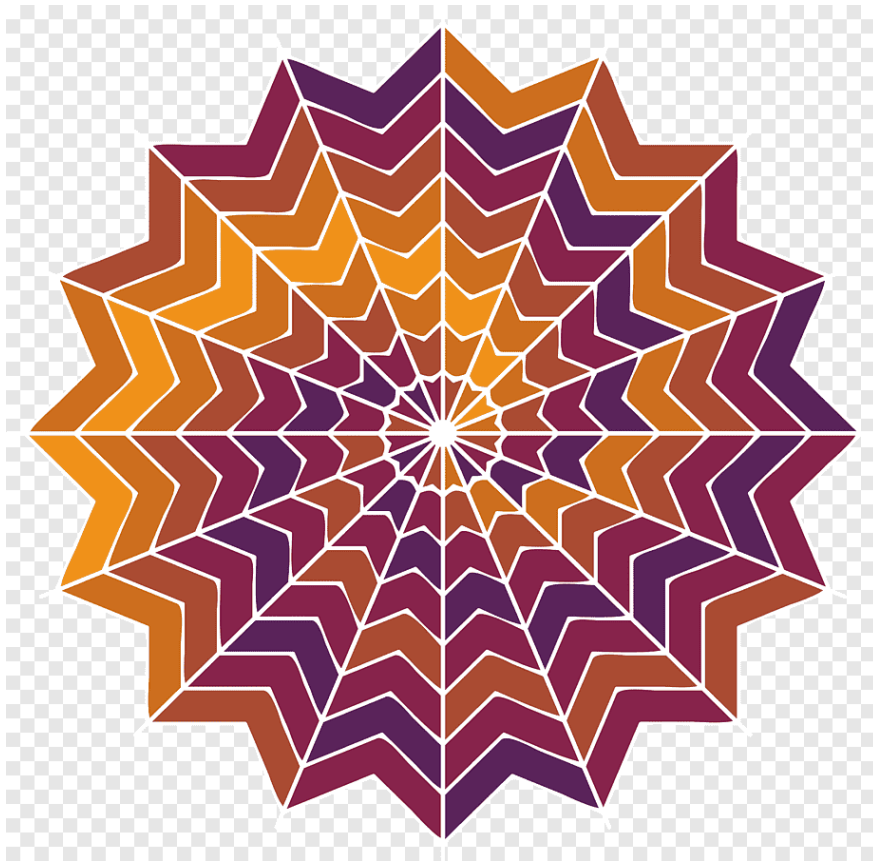
Anyway, a big part of my conversion journey into Islam was the idea that it's a universal religion across all the prophets and across all the millenia, and not a supremacy for one century, people and prophet. Regardless of the above spectrum's details, Allahu alem, I found a strong light in the idea that there is a guidance permeating our history that we can inherit and participate in.

Thank God for the messengers!

Salamun ala Mursaleen, Alhamdullilah al Rabbi Alameen.

Indeed, a common denominator among most people who are interested in the Quran Only or Quran First movement, over traditional schools, is a belief that being a Muslim and not making distinction between Mursaleen, positive or negative, are inextricable. There are different degrees of interpretation, some think that just as Surah Nisa condemns those who disregard some prophets as kafir, those who put any prophet above all the others are mushrik. Others think it's just violating a commandment, and makes one an imperfect Mu'min, but not outside of Islam. Others think it's just a slippery slope but don't cast wide judgement against traditional Muslims who hold Prophet Mummad (saws) over Prophet Isa (saws), Dawood (saws), Ibrahim (saws) and so on (we're talking about a lot of people).

This no-distinction rule is one thing that unifies the many interpretations of Qur'an, it is arguably a new, or old but revived, Usooli principle.



What is Shirk?

The word shirk in Arabic is a cognate of the word with a similar pronunciation in Hebrew: להשתתף

For non-Muslims or those who have read the bible, a good analogy for shirk is the 1st commandment revealed in the Torah, thou shalt have no other gods upon My Face. Tovia Singer, a Jewish scholar, compares it to adultery on a spiritual level.

Many traditional Muslims will say that shirk is the same as idolatry. However

Jews, who are categorically averse to shirk on the same level that Muslims are, will point to the second commandment - don't make an idol and bow down to it - Tovia Singer says this is like fornication, which is bad, but you're not married so there's more room to repent from it.

Traditional Muslim scholarship makes a distinction which seems to be supported by the Qur'an, that making prayers for help to other than Allah is Shirk ad Dua and being in ibadat, or moral obedience, to other than Allah is a more serious Shirk ad Ibadat. The Qur'an says shirk is the only thing Allah will not forgive, this is usually met with a footnote in translations "unless repented from before dying". Many Muslims assume the Christian Trinity is shirk but some Muslims just think it is kufr.

Salafists have a more sophisticated philosophy (if that isn't a bad word to them) about shirk, that there is a, funnily enough, trinity of Tawhid. To truly have Tawhid (belief in the Oneness of God) you must have Tawhid in Lordship, Tawhid in Divinity, in Lordship and in Creation. Salafism as embodied by Ibn Tammiyah is notably defined by his speed in the 1200s against pilgrims going to visit the grave of the Prophet Muhammad (salawatu alaihi wasalaam), he basically accused them of shirk ad dua and was put in jail for it, making him a hero for a reformist movement. Then about 500 years later, Al Wahhab took this further and make takfir upon the Hanbali Sufis of the region, accusing them of being too into sending salawat upon the

Prophet Muhammad (saw), forms of prayer known as durood sharif, which can escalate into making zikr mantras calling upon the man as if he can hear you.

What did Wahhab do with this conclusion? He, like Patrick Bateman in the book *American Psycho*, just had to kill a *lot* of people. Reasoning that their practices drifted into shirk, thus they were kafirs, thus not Muslims, the normal rules against murder didn't apply to them, their blood became halal. Wahhab was involved with a 30 year long war, though he maintained that everyone they killed came after them and they were fighting defensively within the guidelines of Qur'an. After his death his followers killed approximately 5000 Shia in Karbala who they accused of shirk for praying to Husayn (RA) and Hasan (RA) for intercession, though the Shia point to 12:97-12:98 as evidence that this is a sunnah of earlier prophets.

Despite being associated with intolerance and terrorism, Wahhab was actually a pretty nice guy, when you got to know him. He believed that cultural sexism was overriding women's Quranic rights, that people rely too much on Madhabs and should look to scripture (which for him included Sahih Bukhari and other hadith books), and that the Ijma (consensus) of scholars was no substitute for individuals reading and thinking for themselves (ijtihad).

Now let's fast forward to 2024. Baba Shuiab is a YouTuber (The Correctional Officer) from Ghana living in Finland who says that if you go to the Masjid on Friday you are a mushrik, because that's not the right interpretation of the word "Jumaa". Baba Shuiab has not, as far as I know, killed anyone, nor has he called for it, and he's done a pretty minimalistic translation of Qur'an called *The Great Qur'an* which shows the Arabic words next to the English words, so you can question his translation by cross-referencing those transliterated Arabic words through Google, and it doesn't do any reframing of sentences to make them more readable in an English semantic flow. He has a good tasfir of what *malakat amani* ("what your right-hand possesses) means in a context beyond slavery (people you have sworn to be liable for with your right hand, who may then work for you, like an immigrant maid) who are not for fornication or secret marriage, but simply for marriage on the same tier as anyone else. He does videos where he plays back clips from polemic traditionalists, then says back slowly what they've said, then has a laugh about the apparent inconsistency or scriptural incongruity about it. People call him kafir and he calls them mushriks, to the point where it's become a whole thing.

Muhammad is another YouTuber (Muhammad from God) who has a series of funny shorts parodying traditionalist opinions and taking a tough critique on them. His take on Qur'an Alone Islam is not particularly liberal or permissive, rather, having a tough but just veneer. He also has gotten into a lot of debates with traditionalists who try to make him look foolish, and takes a steady flow of commentators who call him a kafir, and he calls them Sunni Mushriks (by volume, most Muslims are Sunni, there are some Shia who will also come and engage with Qur'an Only Muslims).

There's an idea that saying the dual shehada, testifying to One God and that Muhammad (sawalatu alaihi salaam) is his slave and messenger, is shirk, because, the word *and* is an associating word, because the idea that you can't just testify to One God and be

submissive to God, and also a lot of traditionalist Muslims really do think that the 2nd part of shehada implied not just believing in Qur'an as God's word, but believing that the hadiths are also holy.

There's an idea that any rite of Hajj that is not in Qur'an is shirk, such as drinking zamzam water (zamzam water goes back to the bible, Book of Genesis, Khajar gets the well water as a relieve to save her and her son's life in the desert, where God made her a covenant that arguably manifested in the prophethood of one of her descendants). There are different degrees of opinion that having calligraphy of Muhammad (saw) next to calligraphy of Allah is shirk or at least a contemptible bidah. There's an idea that relying on consensus of scholars (Ijma) is shirk, or at least, that believing dissent from Ijma is kufr that God would punish, would be shirk, because it implies that God automatically sides with the consensus of scholars, making divine mandate a matter of republic.

Omar Ramahi takes a much softer approach to criticizing traditional Islam from an angle of shirk, without condemning the vast majority of Muslims as mushriks. He semi-jokingly says that traditional Muslims have a quadrinity, instead of a trinity:

- 1) God as communicated to us in the Qur'an
- 2) God's sultan represented by the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) in the hadiths (Malikis and other traditional scholars disassociate Sunnah from Hadith but that's a bigger topic)
- 3) The Ijma of scholars in interpreting the above two
- 4) The qiyas of scholars in ruling on matters that are not within Ijma (such as details of Islamic Finance)

A lot of Quran Only Muslims see the whole idea of Sunnah as shirk, because the major message of the Qur'an is that people need to cut shirk out of their supposed monotheism and get on some pure monotheism, which involves submitting oneself to a set of laws revealed by God. The laws in the Qur'an are more similar to those that Jews follow from the Torah, but with some aspects looser and other aspects tighter (such as the ban on interest). Notably the Qur'an mentions the concept of God sending sultan, or authority (the term for an Arabic ruler, sultan, is a direct cognate) and also the concept of a khalifa (e.g. God made Adam (saw) as a khalifa, or vice-regent). There's also a mention in Surah Hajj about different groups of monotheists having different sharia (laws). Then for Muslims the question of, is the sharia just what's revealed in the Qur'an or is the Qur'an pointing to an authority granted to the Prophet Muhammad (saw) being able to make additional rules?

Nisa and Nur both make a lot of mentions about obeying commands from Muhammad (saw) and referring to him in disputes. These verses can be read either as contemporary to those people alive at the time, or as binding on all Muslims for all time. The latter interpretation caused hadith collectors in later centuries to go ahead and compile hadith, trying to sift together a more maximally complete picture of the true sharia, despite the command from the man in the most mass-transmitted hadith that nobody should write down anything he says but Qur'an, and that anyone who narrates a lie from him will be damned. The hadith compilers developed a

social science for judging narrators and chains of transmission, based on the very real problem, that many, many people had indeed fabricated millions of hadith.

The most strongly worded voice in the Quranist community that has a very broad concept of shirk is probably the author of the Quran Talk YouTube channel, which represents the masjid in Tuscon founded by Rashida Khalifa. The author - who remains anonymous to probably avoid being prematurely martyred while his kids are still young - says that praying in a Sunni masjid with not-Allah decorations, mentions of companions in the dua, and other common trappings, is forbidding. He says that we can commit shirk by liking our money too much, liking our children too much, and so on. Thus we have a definition of shirk that really takes the typical translation - association - to its logical extremes, associating any *thing* with God is shirk. He quotes passages from Qur'an about human and jinn devils distorting the message with fancy speech as a test, or of the prophet testifying against Muslims on judgment day that they abandoned the Qur'an, and a few other key passages.

It feels for a new Muslim, like kufr is not believing enough in perhaps a lot of things, and shirk is believing too much in the wrong things (e.g. anything other than God's Oneness). So, you're on a tightrope, not just in keeping up with the prayers, getting rid of haram habits, but also, Salafists tell you it's shirk to wish people Merry Christmas. You read parts of Qur'an about how it's damnable to cut-off family ties but also you shouldn't associate with family members who are against Islam. You want to do dawah (evangelism) to promote your new faith but fear speaking without knowledge. There seem to be catch-22s all over the place, and they keystone question of - what is shirk and kufr and how can one avoid shirk without accidentally committing kufr? - dominates. Then you get so tired out from this bipolar questioning, that you start to despair, and then you read - that's a form of shirk! Like Tweak, the South Park character, who is told "calm down Tweak, have some coffee", the solutions seem worse than the curse. Then you start to wonder if it's all a bunch of malarky, and then freak out that maybe you're becoming a hypocrite!

To get out of that phase, I recommend making dua to God to infuse you with protection from shirk, kufr, nifaq, waswas and fasiq on a regular basis, and increasing your optional prayers and charity. Also, don't be afraid to not have all the right answers, and trust in God's mercy, do not despair of it.

It turns out that the key verses that traditionalists quote against Quranists are in a context where hypocrites are being discussed. But these aren't hypocrites in the sense of just pretending to believe when they really don't, or of preaching extreme piety when they have a double standard, but rather, the Munafiqoon are those who hold open a tunnel to outside of Islam, they are hedging their bets, and in the historical context that one can glean from the Medinan surahs, their selfish waffling got good Muslims killed in battle. If you were playing a sports game and someone on your team just decided to stop playing right when you needed them to pass the ball, you'd be more angry at them than at the other team. The Munafiqs were not conscientious objectors, they were greedy, they liked war when they could be on the winning side and stealing assets, but not actually getting cut. The translators often inject [hypocrites] into

other verses that are warning about corrupted behaviors, but it's reasonable to not interpret Munafiq, those worthy of the harshest punishment on judgment day, as being *so* encompassing, it might merit to read Qur'an in context.

Indeed, the way that translations and footnotes that insert dogma from hadith and scholarly consensus, spins the way new Muslims read Qur'an, is an example of the critique that Quranists have of traditional Islam. Basically, the sin, the injustice, is not just a formal association with God, it's lying against God, getting in the way of God's message by making it less clear, while ostensibly trying to make it more clear with imposed conclusions. And the traditionalist have the converse claim, that by interpreting Qur'an as-is, without taking the hadith as the guide of tasfir, the Quranists are kafirs who are misleading people from the correct interpretation.

The problem with the Quran Talk side of the issue, is that it implies that for 1400 years, the whole project of the Muslim Ummah has utterly failed at increasing the % of the population who deserve Jannah. The problem with the traditionalist side of the issue, is that the Qur'an says we will be questioned on our seeing and hearing, that the Qur'an repeatedly says "will they not reason" and "for those who contemplate", and that critique of those blindly following traditions of forefathers is a *major* theme of the Qur'an. One might even say, that what makes the Qur'an distinct from previous scriptures isn't its repeated, horrible scenes from judgment day (there are briefer mentions in Daniel and Isaiah in the Jewish Tanakh and brief mentions by Jesus (saw) in Gospels as well as Revelations at the end of the New Testament), and it's not the laws (the laws are somewhere between Torah and abrogations therefore in the Gospel of Mark), but rather that as God's final testament, God is criticizing the errors made in the previous millenia of religious tradition. In other words, with the problem with the traditionalist argument is it's too confident that Muslim tradition has gotten things terribly right.

A more moderate approach to understanding shirk in the Qur'an comes from Khaled, the owner of the Quranic Islam Youtube channel. Khaled is a student of Hassan Farhan bin Maliki, a Saudi Scholar who has spent the last 6 years in prison for his repeated television appearances criticizing the Muslim tradition (he was mentioned in the introduction). For the better part of a decade Khaled compiled and translated Maliki's videos and then added some commentaries of his own, and in the last 3 years began a "Caravan of Quranic Contemplation" where he presents his tasfir on a particular topic and then invites people to come on. His presentations are good but the chat part is actually pretty great, because, it's difficult to find Muslim content that is simultaneously Qur'an-focused, amicable and accessible to diverse voices. It's like the opposite of Speaker's Corner.

Khaled's theory of shirk can be summarized with these points:

- God is just
- God, being just, is not petty
- The formality of idol worship is not as bad as shirk, which is something more sinister

- Ibadat doesn't mean "worship", it means "service", coming from the root-word abd meaning "slave". The Hebrew equivalent is pey-lammed-chet (my note).
- Shirk is about Ibadat.
- The prime injustice of shirk is mixing God's pristine rules with other sources.
-

To give an analogy from my imagination, the homicidal Kali-worshipping cult in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* were committing sins by believing in a false deity and praying to it, but if they were like Kashmir Shaivists, just being really grateful for the infusion of divine essence in reality and maybe being nice people, God might forgive them their errors of religious worship. But because the Kali-worshippers were listening to the villain of the movie and he's telling them we have to enslave kids and burn people's hearts in sacrifice - murdering them in the process! - that is the true shirk. It's not the idol that is the taghut, it's the religious authorities behind the idol, Pharaoh being referenced as taghut in Qur'an is a proof of this more expansive definition. And after the religious leaders die, the idol remains, inert but symbolically intact, and people follow the bad rules and keep doing evil deeds in the name of it. The Qur'an's criticisms of Judaism and Christianity are likewise hinged on how people made lords of priests and rabbis, opening the way for bad practices and repeating lies about God.

Khaled's theory is not that one act taken in mixed service is going to void all your good deeds and send you to hell, rather, that sin will not be forgiven, it'll be there on judgment day, but sins done out of error or self-interest could be forgiven if repented of or God simply decides to forgive it. This way, you don't need the footnote on that verse in Surah Nisa saying shirk is the only unforgivable sin.

For shirk maximalists, shirk seems like something we can all fall into, even by liking our family too much, and then we go back to Salah and repent and stay pious and focused on the One. Therefore, it *must* be forgive-able, because otherwise probably everyone would go to hell for shirk. To Khaled: no, the sin will be on the record, other sins might not be if one prays for forgiveness, and when it says that a mushrik is forbidden paradise, that's because someone who habitually lives in service to false leaders, ideals or deities is going to have a very pock-marked record on the Last Day, without much that can be forgiven.

Are Christians mushriks? We know Jews who are observant aren't generally on shirk, tawhid is their thing too, they don't interpret the 1st commandment as having this exception to be revealed later, that it doesn't count if you're still worshipping the 3-in-1 God. Like Muslims, Jews don't believe in a 3-in-1 God, they believe God is One - period. Huwa, allahu Ahad, from Surah Iklhas, Ahad is related in language to the Hebrew word for Unique One, אחד. The criticisms of the Jews in Qur'an do verge on shirk insofar as many Jews follow the Talmud and thus, have made rabbis as lords, if you talk to observant Jews in Israel for example, they will tell you how there was an unwritten Torah given to Moses that got passed down between the priests of Aaron and then the Talmud finally wrote that down. It sounds a lot like the Sunnah as a chain of narrations (because part of the Sunnah was forbidding the writing of anything Muhammad (saw) said) and it also sounds like the split between Catholics and Protestants, about the lived tradition of the Catholic Church. But otherwise, the criticisms of Jews in Qur'an

are mostly on fisq, Jews being rebellious to God's laws, which is very concordant with the Tanakh, the Tanakh is mostly prophet after prophet coming and saying, Israel you deviated from the law and now you're suffering, stop it! The book of Hosea may be the coldest instance of this, where Hosea is commanded to marry a woman of harlotry so he can appreciate how God feels dealing with the unfaithful nation.

Many Muslims believe the Christian trinity concept is shirk. Jews also think so, it's a big part of why they haven't converted to Christianity, they don't want to break the 1st commandment. But Christians definitely don't think that the trinity and its associated statements is shirk, or violating the 1st commandment. Why don't they think so?

Do Quranists think Christians are Mushriks, Kafir or just on Batil?

In Gospel of Mark, Jesus (salawatu alaihi wasalaam) is addressed by a wealthy young man who calls him “good teacher!” and is rebuked with “why do you call me good, God alone is good!” Muslims or unitarian Christians or people on their way to becoming Muslims (like myself when I re-read the bible as an adult) read this and go: wait, where’s the trinity in this? He seems to be disassociating his person from God, and also being extra-humble. But Christians say: no he’s actually implying that he *is*. Like: don’t call me good unless you know my secret.

Now, you can imagine many lay-Christians reading the bible without guidance and coming to the first conclusion. So they emphasize: this is why you need to read the bible in accordance with the *sunnah* of the church. In other words: listen to the scholars. But *that’s* definitely shirk right?

Later on Jesus (saw) repeatedly refers to praying to the Father, all glory to the Father, etc. So you ask a traditionalist Christian: “why would he say that?” And they say: *because* he *isn’t* the Father, he’s the Son. And then you go “bruh, you’re blowing my mind” and become a trinitarian Christian, or you try to find a rare unitarian protestant church, or you give up on religion entirely because it’s all a bit much, or you become a Muslim.

Then the Gospel of John comes along later in the chronology and spells it out. There are, by the way, hadiths where the Prophet Muhammmad (saw) allegedly claims to have existed before Adam (saw), and many Muslims don’t want to reject that hadith, so they contextualize it as a metaphor, he was speaking from a vantage of the spirit of guidance, but he was a man surely was born in the late 500s Gregorian calendar. There are Barelvi Muslims who believe this is literally true and basically adopt the Gospel of John Logos concept but applied to a different prophet. They’re making distinction between prophets and many Salafists as well as Deobandi Hanafis think that is shirk, but maybe it’s more like being a Jehovah’s Witness who think Jesus (saw) was not God but an incarnation of the Archangel Michael.

Ok but Christians who are learned know their Torah and Tanakh. The actual crux of the reading of the gospels comes from Isaiah and Daniel.

Daniel 7:13-14 (Orthodox Jewish Translation)

¹³ I was beholding in visions of the night, and, hinei, one like a Bar Enosh (Ben Adam, i.e., *Moshiach*) came with the clouds of Shomayim, and came to the Atik Yomin (Ancient of Days, i.e., *Hashem*), and before Him He was brought.

¹⁴ And there was given Him (Moshiach) dominion, and honor, and sovereignty, that all people, Goyim, tongues, should pey-lammed-chet (see [Dan 3:12](#), *serve, reverence as deity Him (Moshiach)*). His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His (Messianic) Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

In other words, a khalifa who we should be in ibadat to, that's the door hinge of Christianity. Psalm 110 and passages from Isaiah also back it up, and they project many interpretations going back to Genesis, in what Tovia Singer calls "exeJesus".

Now, Tovia Singer is probably doomed according to the Qur'an despite being an ardent defender of the 1st commandment and imagining that he is loved by HaShem, because, he rails against Jesus (saw) a lot. And he has a very warm following among Muslims because he's a good source of knowledge. But according to Surah Nisa those who try to make distinction between the prophets in a negative sense and find a compromise, believing in some and disbelieving in others, are condemned. I wonder if that negative-distinction sense that is so sharply condemned in Nisa equally applies in the positive sense, e.g. if one holds any prophet above the others, because if so then even unitarian Christians and most Muslims would be condemned also, and basically only Quranists Muslims would go to Jannah, along with a handful of Salafists who do try not to make distinctions between prophets (such as saying 'salawatu alaihi wasalaam' after every prophet's name).

So Christians are damned for believing the Messiah is Allah, and Jews are damned for not accepting Jesus was the Messiah, where does the word Messiah show up? In Daniel 9 it shows up twice.

²⁵ Have da'as, therefore, and get seichel, that from the going forth of the decree to restore and to rebuild Yerushalayim unto Moshiach Nagid shall be shivah heptads, and threescore and two heptads; the rehov shall be built again, and the charutz, even in troublous times.

²⁶ And after threescore and two heptads, yikaret (will be cut off) Moshiach [[Yeshayah 53:8](#)], but not for himself [[Yeshayah 53:4-6,8](#)]; and the troops of the coming nagid shall destroy the Ir and the Kodesh (Beis Hamikdash, *i.e.*, 70.C.E.); and the end thereof shall come with a flood, and unto the end there shall be war. Desolations are determined.

Moses Maimonides took that and elaborated a whole concept of messianic eschatology for the Jewish diaspora which is part of the Zionist agenda, not that Maimonides intended for there to be genocides in the name of his ideas.

Brother, can I just worship God without tripping over shirk?

The concept of Messiah is definitely in Qur'an. There is a stark disagreement between Ibadi Muslims, plus the majority of Quranists, vs traditionalists Muslims about the second coming of Jesus (salawatu alaihi wasalaam), with a minority of Quranists being into the bible and tending to believe it also. How can we even make sense of all this. Mesih is definitely mentioned as Jesus' (saw) title in Qur'an, but returning is not listed as one of the many blessings he got. It doesn't mean it's an exhaustive list, the Qur'an often mentions that it doesn't contain all the information on a topic, such as, it doesn't mention all of the many prophets. There's a surah that starts out saying this is a clear Qur'an, and has a verse saying roughly - surely it is a sign of The Hour (43:61), and two verses earlier it mentions the blessings upon Jesus (saw), with the previous verse saying if God wanted to make everyone as moral as angels He would have.

The Ibadi and Quranist readings tend to be, each of these three verses is its own thought, and the [it] mentioned as a sign of The Hour, is merely the Qur'an referencing itself as an authoritative source, which definitely talks about The Hour a lot. Whereas Ibn Kathir (student of Ibn Tammiyah) and the mainstream Sunni consensus is that the "it" here is referring to Jesus (saw) as a sign of the hour.

If the traditionalist argument is correct, it makes some sense of the Messiah mystery. You can't throw it out just because Daniel or Isaiah aren't explicitly mentioned in Qur'an, Elisha is for example and he's one of the Tanakh prophets, and "mesih" is used all over to refer to Isa (saw). The Muslim interpretation would be, the Christians went overboard with it, and the Jews went underhand with it. But what about this cognate for ibadat in Daniel? You could say, throw Daniel out the way Muslims would generally throw out the Gospel of John, but Daniel is the only place where the word Moshiach shows up. Likewise the Nagid mentioned in Daniel 9 as a nemesis for Moshiach rings as the Dajjal that is completely absent from Qur'an but not the hadiths, which Quranists and Ibadis generally don't believe in.

An American revert who found his way to the Ibadi school (but thinks Quranists are not Muslims and constitute their own religion) has analyzed the corruption in the bible and notably found the phrase "their deeds will be as bloody rags" in Isaiah to be evidence it's not from God, because it's a vulgar metaphor. The Qur'an instead says things like, their deeds will be as scattered ash. The Qur'an is very consistent for using non-vulgar euphemisms for things, for instance men and women are referred to as garments for each other, and conception is said to occur between the ribcage and the tailbone, which detractors cite as a scientific mistake, but it's actually a euphemism for intercourse. However just because Isaiah, or Isaiah's descendants writing in his name, let a bit of vulgar sexism bleed into the metaphor when describing judgement day, doesn't mean that there's no signs from God in that body of work. After all, Isaiah is the intermediate source of Judgement Day discourse in the procession of literature between the Zoroastrian apocalypse and Mark 13 and then Revelations and then Qur'an.

Getting back to the practical matters of shirk, if Christians are following an epistemology that is grounded in not-necessarily Qur'an approved revelations, but there are translation twistings of Psalms (many Quranists aren't sure that Psalms are the Zaboor given to David (saw) in Qur'an (17:55)). If Christians are following the God-approved texts, then maybe they're not taking monks as lords. Shirk on popes and other human authorities may have been true of Catholics, but not Protestants after the printing press, Protestants are also very into avoiding any statues and turning to pray to Mary, etc. So then where's the shirk? Well, they may commit sins based on the idea that Jesus (saw) will intercede for them on judgment day and it's fine. But the Qur'an says that Jesus (saw) was given authority to abrogate some of the Torah law; it doesn't say which. Paul believed it meant pork, circumcision and other things. Surah Hajj says they have their own sharia, so the idea that there's a Christian sharia that God approves of, distinct from Torah and Qur'an rules, but maybe also distinct from Paul's interpretation, is basically in the Qur'an.

Qur'an says in 43:81, after the possible second coming allusion: Say, "*Had* the Beneficent *God* really *had a son*, I would certainly *have* been the *first* one to worship him.

So I'm really confused, and maybe you are too. Because Daniel says "And there was given Him (Moshiach) dominion, and honor, and sovereignty, that all people, Goyim, tongues, should pey-lammed-chet". Unless pey-lamme-chet is not the linguistic cognate of ibadat, but a lesser degree (like sultan or khalifa entails) then this is a knot at the center of the Abrahamic tradition that cannot be untangled until judgment day or perhaps a bit before.

Now, you can definitely say, Catholics following popes is shirk because they have no sultan from God. Whereas Shia Muslims who have a similar structure with their lineage of Imams, would argue, their guys have it. And obviously, Catholics argue the same thing. Whereas Sunnis and Protestants look at an historical epistemology based on having some confidence in chains of narrations from companions of their favorite prophet. Furthermore even Catholics argue they're not worshipping three entities but rather, One God, who has 3 persons in Its (His?) nature. So God has 3 forms? No that's modalism. So there are 3 Gods? No that's tritheism. So God adopted Jesus (saw) as his son? No that's adoptionism. All are condemned in the Qur'an as well, according to Dr. Khaled's nuanced reading of Surah Maidah, whereas - he asserts - the orthodox teaching of Trinity as a paradoxical One God may not be.

Is that true? Let's zoom in.

Dr. Javad Hashmi had a debate with Dr. Shadee ElMasry where Dr. Hashmi took a very perennialist interpretation of Qur'an and Dr. ElMasry took a very particularist interpretation. Dr. Hashmi's reading of Quran 5:72 is interesting. Dr. ElMasry is an orthodox Ashari-Maliki, whereas Dr. Hashmi is a neo-Mutazila-esque modernist and not a Quranist, but does specialized academically in Quranic Studies. Here's the verse from Surah Maidah:

"Those who say, "Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary," have certainly fallen into disbelief. The Messiah himself said, "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah—my Lord and your Lord." Whoever associates others with Allah in worship will surely be forbidden Paradise by Allah. Their home will be the Fire. And the wrongdoers will have no helpers."

Within the logical statements that can evaluate to true in the system of trinitarian thought, "Messiah = Allah" is one of them, but Dr. Hashmi says "Allah is the Messiah" is a different statement. This is called non-commutative logic: $a-b \neq b-a$. If a is 10 and b is 5, then $a-b$ is 5, and $b-a$ is -5, a very different result. What Christian heresy would that resemble? Marcionism was similar to Valentinianism in rejecting the supremacy of the Israelite God, they asserted that some other divinity was intervening with a more relaxed and liberating vibe in the case of the Messiah. This is straight-up polytheism, so it makes sense to condemn it, both in Qur'an and in Christian orthodoxy. I am not, however, convinced that this is what 5:72 means, I have loved ones who are Christians who say Christian talking points and I'm willing to accept this is a sin, speaking lies against God. I just hope it's none a one-off disqualifier, and that other good deeds can outweigh the sin of repeating Christian orthodox theological talking points.

There's a split in the Quranist community about whether Surah Imran's statement is exclusivist or not (3:19) - "religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" another verse says whoever chooses other than Islam it won't be accepted, what does that mean. Many traditionalists think it abrogates the repeated verses saying that Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sabians whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good deeds can make it, you have to be an orthodox Muslim for your prayers and good deeds to count. Some of the verses saying many can enter paradise come in later-revealed Surahs like Surah Maidah, so the abrogation theory of traditionalist scholars doesn't make sense, how can Verse A abrogate Verse B that is revealed later? We'll cover this more in the chapter on abrogation.

The solution to this apparent dilemma may be that there was a qiraat (variation) of the Qur'an that Islam and hanifiyya were synonyms and the only religion in God's eyes is hanifiyya.

Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but **he was a true Muslim Hanifa** (Islamic Monotheism - to worship none but Allah Alone) and he was not of Al-Mushrikun (See V. 2:105)

And for those who venerate Sahaba, there was a Sahaba who preferred that Qirat and allegedly refused to accept payment from Uthman to have it burned during the codification of the standardized version. Good for him. That man was Ibn Masud, and his legacy was not so simple, we didn't believe the last two short surahs of Qur'an were meant to be included, some see him as a rebellious fasiq for that, and others saw him as a tool of Uthman in spreading contemptible innovations, or bidah. Maybe Ibn Masud was the first Quranist Reformer, and maybe God hated him for that, or liked him for that, hard to say, he was certainly controversial in his time. However, he was not controversial specifically for his use of Hanifiyya, righteousness, as a synonym of Islam, suggesting that the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad (saws) were not as particularist about what Islam means as later scholars.

Even without Ibn Masud's curious qiraat, many Quranists assume that "Islam" in 3:19 didn't mean all of the associated culture and tradition, it's a loose reading based on an intuition about God's justice and the Qur'an universal message for all Ummahs. The Qiraat story backs up that reading.

But we then run into something of a circular definition, Abraham was righteous because he wasn't a Mushrik. God will condemn the kafirs among the Jews and Christians, some but not all, maybe most? Qur'an make it sound like it's most sometimes, though the statistical sampling may be more favorable in an age where imperial Christianity is over and prosperity affords them more opportunities for charity, plus the Catholic Church has revised their exclusivism and says maybe even nobody will go to hell. You've got the Catholic Church saying Muslims can go to heaven if they're mystical Catholics, nice people I guess, which is a similar ethos as this reading of Surah Imran and the other verses repeating in different wordings. Salvation could be open broadly to all righteous monotheists who avoid shirk. But the Catholic Church used to burn people for having slightly discordant opinions, in a different age.

The Qur'an talks about killing people in formal executions if they have murdered, done violent robbery, or spread corruption in the land, which could be interpreted loosely enough to include speech of heretics or apostates. There's a hadith traced to Ikrima who was a freed-slave and a Khawarij that attributes legalization of killing apostates to the Prophet Muhammad (saw), and the sort of people the Khawarij would do terrorism against adopted it and executed *so* many people. But even if he hadn't made such a (probable) lie to justify his sect's terrorism against the majority of Muslims, people could have willfully interpreted that verse's use of corruption to mean, basically anyone they thought was corrupt.

Then we have the Catholic Church, whose prophet was executed *for speech* by Jews *who deemed him a mushrik*. What was the speech? *He is quoted Daniel 7:13 and accedes to being Messiah!*

I feel like I'm taking crazy pills.

So even under a soft theory of shirk critiquing the history of Islam, most Quranists would say, that Muslim leaders executing people for speech was shirk, because they were judging based on Ikrima's terrorist, fabricated hadith instead of God's law in the Qur'an. But, if gambling were halal, I would bet money that in a different timeline where that hadith hadn't been transmitted, many Muslim rulers would have executed tons of apostates and Sufis and deemed heretics anyway. The Catholic Church's whole thing is, look at this amazing person being executed for speech, that was terrible, but also, it was God's plan... therefore, let's not be so violent, unless... we want to? The Catholic Church had an entire city liquidated, everyone was killed, Cathar and Catholic alike, "let God sort them out" the crusader guy said, this was in France.

God will indeed sort them all out.

The Qur'an says that Christians are cursed to have enmity with each other until Judgment Day. The history of sectarianism in that religion speaks to that, there are a plentitude of denominations and there have been many bloody wars fought over reformation and, a millennium earlier, what was called heresies. If politics weren't so monolithic in the late Roman Empire, we're probably called Arian Christianity (suggesting that Christ was created) a denomination instead of a heresy, the printing press and a shift in history being written by just the winners (plus Protestants won a lot of political power in Northern Europe) shifting that dynamic. And then at some point the American revolution happened and the Free Masons got us freedom of religion, which spread as a standard in many nations, this allowed Christianity to take a more relaxed view of mutual respect between denominations.

In the Quranist critique of traditional Islam, the traditionalists are guilty of shirk for having put hadith above the words of God. In Islam's history we have a tremendous amount of sectarian conflict and theological bickering (does God have literal hands? Is the Qur'an created? Is Free Will real or not, or just a little? Answer correctly or die.) Maybe God cursed Muslims in

the same way as the Qur'an says He cursed Christians. Yet Christians cooled it with the sectarian violence. How can Muslims follow in reducing our own sectarianism? Quranists might take a sharply sectarian contrast and say that most Muslims are actually Mushriks. But maybe there are other degrees here between being all-good and all-bad. Maybe traditionalists Muslims are People of the Book, believing in the Qur'an, but not getting it as correctly as Quranists do. Or maybe traditionalist Muslims are indeed Muslims, members of the same religion, but not true believers. The same way that we reason about the Qur'an drawing lines between Christians and Jews who are believers vs. kafireen, can help us to reason about reducing sectarianism in the Ummah and drawing a nuanced distinction between a hardline Quranist position and the hardline traditionalist (Quran wa Sunnah viz Bukhari wa Ijma wa Qiyas) position.

The way we think about Christians is a key to how we think about the Muslim Ummah despite our differences.

How do Quranists know how to pray?

After digesting those spicy meatballs, let's tackle a simple platter of dates and grapes: how do Quranists know how to pray without hadith? And how do Quranists pray?

There's a common tafsir in the Qurani community of the story of the cow in Surah Baqarah ("The Cow", the longest surah of the Qur'an that is second in sequence after Al-Fatihah). The Prophet Musa (saws) is asked repeatedly by the Israelites in the desert for more detailed instructions about sacrificing a cow. What kind of cow? How old? What color? Each time the requirements get more specific and strict until it becomes nigh impossible. In Qur'an the result is a golden cow of a perfectly median age that was difficult to find, in Torah there's a red fur requirement, this has been made possible millenia later through special breeding and possibly genetic engineering, and the red cow is the center of a plausible conspiracy theory that the state of Israel in 2024 is planning to bulldoze Al-Aqsa Mosque to build a third temple and kill that red cow ritualistically therein.

The golden or red cow for Muslims is the perfect salah. The different madhabs have different rules about the particulars of salah and makes makes it invalid. Everyone agrees that you're supposed to enter into a humble, pious, meditative state of mind during the salah, and Sunni, Shia and Ibadi alike mostly agree on the contents of it, but there are different rules as to what *invalidates* a salah, as in, you better start it over.

Hanafi think you can fidget only three times. Ibadi think if you mis-pronounce "Allahu Ackbar" and don't have your nose to the ground in prostration, it's invalid, Ibadi prayer fiqh is probably the most exacting. The Shia think the prayer is deficient if you do not prostrated onto soil, ground flora or a clay disc. Most agree that farting audibly requires going off to make wudu again. Laughing during prayer is generally considered invalidating, as is voluntary belching loudly, while involuntary burps or barely-noticeable diffuse flatulence is given a pass so that people don't lose their minds with anxiety. Some say closing your eyes for several seconds invalidates the prayer, others say it's just makruh, disliked. Most agree turning your head and talking to someone breaks the prayer, but what about a side glance? How many seconds of side glance is ok?

The implication of offering prayers that have been invalidated by some mis-step or omission, if you believe in the Qudsi Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra about salah being counted first on the Last Day, is that you go to hell for not following prayer fiqh to the minimum requirements.

Quranists tend to take a different view on salah, that it is prescribed as qualitative, for our benefit to become more pious, chaste, charitable, patient and so forth, and many do not believe that people who are deficient in prayer quantity or quality are going to be dumped into hell automatically. Indeed, between 20% (in very traditional Muslim countries) and 70% (in more peripheral Muslim countries) of Muslims do not keep up with the five daily salah routine. So the

question of how merciful is Allah about Salah is essential to the salvation of the majority of Muslims.

If you read the Qur'an as admitting all ethical monotheists to paradise, then perhaps over half of the human population can make it. If you read Qur'an as admitting to paradise all ethical people, even if only with grains of faith, perhaps after a long wait in Al Araf, then only a rather evil minority (which could include lots of overtly pious people who hide disease in their hearts) will deserve hell. But if you read Qur'an + Qudsi Hadith + Madhabi Prayer Fiqh as the absolute binding truth, then indeed most Muslims won't make it, along with >95% of Christians and Jews, probably 100% of everyone else, and then among the ~35% of global Muslims who keep up with 5 times daily salah, at least half of them would also be condemned for having some invalidated salah that they didn't repeat.

In the face of this legalistic quandary, Quranists tend to emphasize that salah is nourishment for the soul, and the particulars of salah are not precisely specified in Qur'an as a mercy.

Or... are they?

There are some Quranists who take a constructivist approach to salah, searching throughout the entire Qur'an for bits and pieces that can comprehensively add up to a One True Quranic Prayer Fiqh.

The Qur'an does detail:

- Praying with clean clothes
- Praying in modest clothing
- Praying at both ends of the day (Fajr and Maghreb)
- Praying for a part of the night (Isha)
- Praying the best Salah (Salah al Wusta) in the middle of the day (Duhr)
- "And into the afternoon" (Asr)
- Praying optionally in the night to be elevated to a Mahmoud Macam (Tahajjud)
- Ruku (bowing)
- Sujood (prostration)
- Praying in a group, men and women together (Surah Miriam)
- Adhan, call to prayer (but not what exactly the wording is)
- Praying in Jumaa (some difference of interpretation if this means on Fridays especially or when one is out in the marketplace/fair as "Jumaa")
- That one has two angels on each shoulder recording deeds (but not to say Salams to them necessarily as a bookend to prayer)
- Subhan a Rabbi a'Ala (said in sujood by Sunnis)
- Calling upon the Lord (Du'a) by any of His exalted names
- Optional prayers are nice
- Duha is loosely alluded to in Surah Duha (but not very explicitly)

- How to make Wudu and basic things that cancel out Wudu
- Making Wudu with dust (tayammum) in cases where water is not available
- Shortening prayer under duress and/or during travel (details are open to interpretation)

The Qur'an does not seem to detail:

- The Tashahudd
- The Takbir ("Allahu Ackbar")
- Number of Rakats
- Any mention of prayers being invalid due to mis-steps or distractions
- Any explicit threats about missing one salah (it does say that the people who go to hell do so, because they are not of the People of Salah, but this may well include a lot of people who are somewhat deficient in their salah form or frequency, it's not explicitly strict on those requirements)

There's a key verse in the Qur'an saying, woe to those who perform salah and are not mindful. Translators often insert [hipocrites] in this and other places where the word Munafiq is not in the original Arabic, but maybe this is overstating the case - many people perform salah on time and on frequency and do not have 100% or even 50% Khushu (mindfulness/heartfulness) every single time, but that doesn't mean they lack faith or decency or will be doomed to the bottom of the hellfire. Qur'an does say that the Munafiqoon *only* pray half-heartedly, so praying with >50% khushu is not something they can muster, and they tend to do it for show in the masjid.

If anything, the Qur'an seems to be putting the punitive emphasis around salah being deficient on the qualitative nature of it, that the point of the exercise is to cultivate piety in the practitioner. If one is doing more quantity, lots of nalf/sunnah rakats, adding in Duha, getting up for tahajjud, you are probably going to be getting closer to the qualitative objective, because, look at all the effort you are making. But one could possibly pray a lot of tahajjud and duha and sunnah/nafl rakats and go brag about it and never really tap into heartfelt embrace of the connection to Allah subhana wa talaha - it sounds improbable but it's possible.

It seems like a lot of people are very preoccupied with prayer fiqh, paranoid about their gas pains, what might invalidate their salah, the passing of a pedestrian or a dog - or even worse, a woman! - and a variety of other salah ruinners that come from various hadith and madhabi fiqh. This preoccupation can then lead to one having generally lower mindfulness in one's salah. That would be a victory indeed for the shaytan.

There are some people in the Qurani community that pray 3 times based on the formally named salah, however they tend to pray longer than 5 minutes in these periods, and their routine looks more like Shafi or Shia combined prayers, with more prayer done in 3 instances, for roughly the same (or more!) total time spent. Muhummad of the "Muhummad from God" YouTube channel as well as Baba Shuiab fall into this category. Others like adherents to the Rashida Khalifa brand of "Quranism" do stick to the 5 times daily routine based on the "and into the night" and "and into the afternoon" language in Qur'an. When polled, the majority of

respondents in the Quraniyoon subReddit claim to pray the 5 times, with a smaller number praying 3, a stark minority praying 2, and a smaller minority claiming that salah is not ritual prayer at all. Additionally when polled, the majority pray in the traditional etiquette, a minority pray with a slightly modified etiquette and a stark minority pray in a more free-form fashion.

However what is generally common in the community is that, for instance, Buddhists meditating and having some monotheistic intent, does make them “people of salah” in God’s eyes, fitting with a more inclusive understanding of “Islam” in the context of various verses citing anyone who believes in God, the Last Day and performs good deeds as being admissible to paradise.

Also of note on timing, the Hanafis actually say it’s recommended to delay the Asr prayer based on a hadith, but one can imagine such also because “and into the afternoon” implies a broad range of times, and the hadith about waiting until shadows are twice the height of a stone, are not totally specific. The idea of minute-precise prayer times, codified by the large clocktower overlooking the Masjid Al-Haram, seems to be a focus of the more recent Salafi tradition. I have myself consulted Shayk Google about when to pray and then wondered if my reliance on Google to tell me how to worship God was a type of corruption. There is some degree of consensus that if you pray even *one minute* before the appointed prayer times, you’re praying nafl (optional) prayers and not fard (mandatory). However even the Abu H. Qudsi Hadith says that nafl prayers cover deficits in fard prayers.

Hadiths define times where it’s forbidden to pray, at sunrise and sunset due to the rays of the sun appearing like the horns of the devil. A lot of Qurani-affiliated Muslims read that and go, what? Where in the Qur’an does it say that Iblis has horns even? Isn’t he a Jinn made of smokeless fire? Then it’s also considered haram to pray at high noon, you have to wait until the shadows tilt a bit, this is generally consensus of scholars. Where does that come from? Yet many Quranis will still shy away from praying at these times out of general trepidation.

Some critics of this can argue that Quranists, or Quranist-adjacent thinkers, are kafirs or at least fasiqeen because they may not be adhering rigorously to God’s commands, or that by neglecting Sunnah and Fiqh based rules, they may be invalidating their salah heedlessly and thus accumulating a deficit for judgment day that will invalidate their other deeds. Likewise those who perform salah with an inadequate frequency are more probably accumulating a deficit. Or that, by assuming this qualitative, vitamin-theory of salah, they’re not being humble enough about worshipping Allah. However as stated above, if these strict requirements such as in the Abu H. Qudsi Hadith are enforced on judgment day, then the majority of Muslims will also be among the losers, indeed the population of Jannah would be <10% of the total population when we account for full-time prayers who repeat any invalidated salah, but are still hypocritical or major sinners.

In other words, if these Quraniyoon are kafirs then most Muslims are also condemned for other reasons. Insha’Allah, Ar Rahman is more merciful.

What about the minority who believe that salah is not a ritual prayer at all? For instance a Scottish gentleman who goes by the cunya “Ironman” appeared on Brother Khaled’s Caravan of Quranic contemplation a number of times and expressed this sentiment, and the author of the Lamp of Islam blog has begged the question as well. This interpretation sends to read salah as being related to doing good deeds in general, or salihawn, and they do seem like linguistic cousins that have a common root. Ironman cites how the salah of birds is when they fly in formation, which has a direct analogy to salah al jamaa, but also, to his thesis that salah is about groups of righteous people coming together and trying to reform society to be more just. Ironman criticizes the ritual salah as not achieving the desired goal of making people more righteous, given the preponderance of injustices that exist in Muslim-majority countries and in geopolitics between Muslim-majority countries.

Even if the salah-isn’t-ritual-prayer people are wrong in fact, they bring an important point to the table, which is that salah is a means to making people more righteous, and if we’re just imagining ourselves earning ajr by doing lots of ritual prayer, but not actually striving in the cause of righteousness, then we are deluding ourselves.

The Sunnah argument is that we must follow commands of the Prophet (which prophet? The one we make distinction about, ok, good to clear that up). One of the commands of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) was “Pray as you have seen me pray”. Fitting the context-based argument that many commands were contemporaneous to the sahaba and not part of the eternal Quranic covenant binding on all Muslims, nobody alive today or for the last 1330-odd years has actually witnessed such prayers. Instead, there are different lineages of prayer tradition passed down.

One key example of how the tradition has gotten mixed up, is cross armed vs. arms-at-sides prayer. The Maliki Sunnis, Shia and Ibadis pray with their arms by their sides, while the other three Sunni madhabs pray cross-armed, based on one hadith citing a guy who got frustrated at the masjid over dissension on this matter, and spelled it out. Therefore the majority of Muslims who pray with crossed arms are doing so based on that one individual’s testimony amidst lack of consensus. Malikis are often chided when praying in Sunni masjids by other Sunnis who are not educated that the ijma of scholars is that both forms of prayer are fine.

Then there’s the particulars of heels placed together, fingers placed together, hands in a neat U shape rather than a cat-like ^ stretching, elbows up but also not too wide. Is God almighty, the creator of heavens and the earth, the Sustainer, the All-Knowing, the Elevator and Debaser, really going to do people raw for not matching perfect form physically when they bow in humility to Him? I don’t mind praying in the form-fit that is prescribed by tradition, but, I don’t think God is displeased with people whose fingers are a little bit apart, or whose heels are a bit apart, and so on.

Then there’s fiqh about, always pray at least 2 rakat, pray in sets of 2, the witr rules, the tasleem every 2 rakat in nafl prayer, and other things that are documented as practice of the tabieen. The Hanafi consider putting the hands up by the head to be an innovation while others

consider it Sunnah. There are a lot of things that Madhabs will say are recommended Sunnah for prayer but not obligatory.

What about the old orthodox Jewish prayer? Jews in modernity tend to just bow their heads in respect but only do the full prostration on Yom Kippur when they are fasting for atonement of sins. Ibrahim Maimonides, son of Moses Maimonides, started a multi-century tradition of Jewish Sufism that restored the prostrative prayer form of ancient Israel, and there are Orthodox Jews today who practice such. This shows that the ancient Muslims, before the advent of the Seal of the Prophets, had a prayer fiqh, and it matched roughly what the Qur'an specifies, and not all of the other details necessarily. So the appeal to tradition can transcend the narrow confines of the Qur'an vs. Hadith debate.

What, if anything, is wrong with the traditional salah from a Quran-centric perspective? Perhaps the mentioning of other than God in it? The making distinction between messengers as well?

This was for me, a point of extreme anxiety. On one hand, I'm told that without tashahudd and wishing for blessings on a specific messenger and his family, my prayer is invalid. On the other hand, I have hardline Quranists telling me that it's shirk. I would cry as I deliberated between committing shirk and kufr, and every few hours as the next salah would come up, I'd research with a frenzied pace trying to beat the clock and solve the riddle.

What I ended up with, was removing mention of the Nabi (prophet) and the Saliheen (righteous predecessors) in the Tashahhud in the 2nd rakat, and using the wording adopted by the citizens of Medina after the Prophet Muhammad (saws) died, "peace to the prophet" instead of "peace to you O'Prophet!", which they inferred was better because he was dead and not present, and they didn't want to *evoke* his ghost or anything like that. The Hanafi and Maliki madhabs say that saying Tashahhud only in the 4th rakat is acceptable, albeit makruh. I also adopted "Rabun salli ala Mursaleen wa ana alaihim" instead of "Allahumma salli ala Muhammad wa ana ali Muhammad". Maybe that helps some people who are trying to navigate between shirk and kufr, not adopting a fringe position but also not going against Quran 6:126 - Surely *my prayer, my sacrifice, my life, and my death* are **all** for *Allah*—Lord of all worlds. The honorifics for messengers, like for one's family members or the starving victims of wars and so forth, are kept outside the formal salah and relegated to du'a, yet they still cap off the salah.

One thing that I've observed is common across the Quran Only and Quran-centric movement(s), is not making distinction between Messengers, and a strong sense of worshiping God Alone as the objective of Islam, without overly focusing on the Seal of the Prophets. While many people in the Quran movement respect prayer fiqh from the lived tradition of Muslims, there are usually alterations to subtract references to other than God in the salah. Some also substitute mentions of one prophet for mentions of all the prophets, "alsalam ealaa al'anbia" or "Rabbihi salli ala mursaleen wa ana alaihim" in substitution for "Allahumma salli ala Muhammad wa ana ali Muhammad". Some add other prophets to the shahada to avoid making distinction.

Quranists tend to never pray silently as the Quran instructs prayer in a moderate tone.

I'll close the chapter with a note that not many Qurani pray the witr and they should try it, it's a nice striking chord to top off a salah session.

Section 2

Sects

What do Quranists have in common with Shia?

You spend your childhood immersed in a religious tradition, reinforced by your family and community, and you love it. But as you grow older, you learn more and start to question more, and you begin to lose faith... until, you discover, that the things you dislike about your religion are not the *true* religion, it's actually a *big conspiracy*. Unlike your family and community, you have dug deeper and found the *real* form of the religion, where answers are provided to the issues you had doubts about, and orthodox assumptions that gave rise to those doubts are defeated by deep wisdom. This kind of wisdom is so filled with God's light that it's not for the mainstream, only an elect minority can handle it. Congratulations Neo, you took the red pill and escaped the Matrix, now the real struggle begins, not just to convert people to religion but to resist the injustices of the false-religious authorities!

Sound familiar?

This is the vibe that many Quranists feel when they either convert to Islam, find it has a lot of issues, and then dig a tunnel of guidance to a deeper reality. The first time I heard of Islam was in regards to the World Trade Center bombing in the 90s, then I was reminded about Islam again when Saudi nationals finished the job and killed 3000 people in the year 2001, there are surely some problems in Islam. When I converted I was getting a lot of the dawah from YouTube that comes with hadith-heavy Sunni orthodoxy, it's the predominant form of Islam after all. I definitely had to dig down and figure out how much of the ideas, vibes, rules and theology associated with Islam come from hadith vs. Qur'an. Many other Quraniyoon have even more intense feelings of being renegades standing against the misguided majority. What traditionalists often shoot back with, is how can people get it so wrong for 1400 years?

What if there was actually a tradition of people in Islam thinking the majority had it wrong all along these 1400 years?

That tradition, is the Shia of Ali, commander of the faithful.

Whereas the Quranist conspiracy is that scholars built a man-made religion on top of God's pristine words, using political and military commands in the Qur'an as an out-of-context excuse to idolize the messenger of Qur'an as a *Messenger* who gave us 80% of the laws of Islam outside Qur'an, the Shia conspiracy is that the majority did not extend that privilege to Ali (radi Allahu annam) and we're actually not hadithing hard enough.

Quranists and Shia would agree that Sahih Al Bukhari and Sahih Muslim are filled with corrupt fabrications from shaytan. But they would disagree that the right methodology for Islam is just following the Qur'an.

Most Quranists are filled with lament for what they consider corrupt practices in the majority of Islam, they have a sort of hopelessness that the idolatry will remain dominant until judgment day, and they are the saved few who are upon guidance. Some Quranists then question, because the nature of jihad vs. munafiq is a bit open ended in the Medinan surahs, if they should go out in jihad against the majority of Muslims they consider mushrik.

Well, the Shia, let me tell you folks, they have had the same thought from time to time. There's this nation called Iran, they've been fomenting civil wars through the funding of Shia governments and militias for the last 50 years or so. There was a war in Syria, a war in Yemen, there was a terribly violent war between Iran and Iraq in the early 1980s, the dream of destroying Israel is there but also of smashing Riyadh and conquering Mecca, or one might say, liberating it from the false Muslims. So any Quranists who are seriously contemplating the path of violent struggle in the reformation of Islam can study the Shia and get a lot of notes.

Why is Iran the home of Shia Islam today? In the 1500s the Safavid empire emerged from a Sufi tariqa with a special love for Ali (ra), they imposed Shia Islam on a then mixed population in Iran and over a few generations managed to purge out non-orthodox Twelver Shia belief from the state and all but the margins of the population. The modern Islamic Republic of Iran is then reinstating that same project in the post-colonial era. It's idea is simple: Islam is perfect, but only we are getting it right, so now we will undertake a utopian project of an ideal society. In practice though, they spent a lot of their oil money on killing Sunnis and trying to force their own people to be good Shia, and it seems like they've missed a lot of opportunities for utopia.

Twelver Shia Islam adopted the Mutazilite theology after the Hanbali flip at the end of the Minha persecution during the Abbasid Caliphate. A lot of Quranists find that free will exists in the Quran to some extent, there are also some verses in Qur'an suggesting that free will has limitations or that God has appointed destinies for us, so it makes sense that the anti-free will theological ideas would become big in Sunni Islam. Every major theological rift in Islam is based on probably legitimate readings of different verses in Qur'an that one can use to argue different sides. There's a cliché that the Mutazilites were the reasonable Muslims who were closer to modern day Quranists, and this got pushed underground, with Twelver Shiism being its most popular home. The truth is a bit more complex but let's go with it.

The Shia don't accept a lot of the problematic hadith that Quranists and progressive Muslims tend to reject. There's no child marriage to Aisha in Shia hadith, that was a sectarian lie used to buttress Aisha's status prior to the Battle of the Camel against Ali. There's more room for feminist or at least not-so-sexist interpretations of Islam in Shiism, just because the really sexist hadith in Bukhari are rejected. Shia are very skeptical of Abu Huayra who gave us more hadith than anyone, including 25 out of 40 Qudsi Hadith, thus making a big impact on Sunni theology in ways that Quranists would say smears shaytic mud on the clean Quranic theology.

Yet, one of the really great things in Sunni Islam that Quranists might like, the ability to make academic arguments with earned credentials, is somewhat constrained in Shia Islam. There's no mercy of iklaf between madhabs, there's one Madhab, it was founded by the 6th Imam Jafar, and in Twelver Shiism there's a hierarchy of scholars who are mostly descendants of Jafar who get to approve fatwa. Take Bitcoin, Sunni scholars have said its haram because they don't think it's a real thing, typical shallow argument, but then a few scholars said it's ok, now we have a few Gulf states investing in mining and permitting trade in Bitcoin, even making large investments. The majority of Sunni scholars still think it's haram, but the college of academics model in Sunnism has enabled a minority to speak well of it and that's opened some doors. In Shiism, we have a more narrow avenue of change in elite opinion. Iran has had Bitcoin mining and use for years because they've been under capital controls and sanctions, things that Bitcoin is especially useful for, but the mawlanas ("masters") haven't given it tacit approval.

This speaks to both the big opportunity and big disadvantage of Shiism. If you had a Pope Francis type Ayatollah who had a Back to Qur'an interpretation of Shiism, then an entire nation with 80 million people, advanced science and manufacturing capabilities and plenty of natural resources could start implementing the revised bold utopian vision of Islam within a generation, within a decade. Suffice to say, the Ayatollah of Iran is not a Pope Francis type religious leader, he's not as close to Pope Benedict as the 1980s/90s Ayatollah, but he's definitely not an Argentine Leftist. Shiism can do radical things with the right leadership and be more stagnant than Sunnism with a status quo leadership.

["And Then I Was Guided"](#) by Muhumamd Al-Tijani is available as a free e-book on the main Shia website, it's an interesting example of a man's journey from one religious frame to another. The process for him mostly involved Sunnis being rude and Shiites being nice to him, but then a series of reasonings and observations about Wahhabi extremism lead him to Shia as the more enlightened Islam. Ultimately though his reasoning is that, differences between Madhabs are unacceptable, we have to go back to Jafar who taught Abu Hanifa, and that's the right madhab.

Jafari fiqh does get several things right in a Quran-centric perspective, you're supposed to only get divorced with cause rather than at-will, and the primacy of charitable giving is there. Whereas Sunnis will tell you, if you have less than six thousand dollars on you during Ramadan, you don't owe, that zakat is charity and it's only 2.5% of your excess wealth, that you can exempt your house and car's value, your rental property investment only owes zakat on 2.5% of the rent income - but if you want to do nafl sadaqat knock yourself out. As a result, whether Sunni Muslims follow one of the most important commandments in the Qur'an is left open to their conscience, a lot of Sunnis give less than they probably should. Jafari fiqh is extra tough in other respects though, such as their halal food criteria, you can't even have an egg unless the chicken feed has been certified halal, and there's no such thing as Christians and Jews saying "bismillah" over the meat, it's got to be a Muslim.

Quranists tend to read "until layl" in the Qur'an's instructions for fasting, as meaning either total darkness at nightfall, or at least the majority of the sky getting dark (maybe a little

redness in the western horizon). Shia also wait to break fast, usually they will combine Maghreb and Isha prayers, ooh so hungry, extra piety in these prayers, and then make a dua and then break the fast. Whereas Sunnis will have a few grapes and dates and a glass of water when the Maghreb call to prayer is made, then go to pray 5-10 minutes later, then have the big Iftar meal between Maghreb and Isha. Quranists will feel right at home making Iftar with the Shia.

Many Quranists think that praying at three occasions during the day is acceptable, so do Shia. Shia follow a sunnah of praying on clay discs since, in their hadith, the Prophet would pray on bare earth or grass, Quranists might find this unnecessary formalism. Then we get to the rakah where Sunnis pray silently, Shia also pray these silently, here's where a Quranist is going to be awkwardly praying quietly but not silently to try and follow the letter of the Qur'an.

Shia think that the idea of all the Sahaba being infallible is utter insanity, some of the Sahaba did major crimes, Muawiyah had a lot of people executed for refusing to curse Ali. Sunnis tend to say the biggest crime of most Shia is cursing companions, yet Muawiyah killed people for refusing to do so. Muawiyah's son Yazid was alive when Prophet Muhammad (saws) was alive, so he's technically also a Sahaba, yet even Sunnis don't extend this blanket of amnesty to Yazid because the man not only permitted the prophet's grand sons and great-grandchildren to be killed, he sacked Medina! Color me confused, but I think if you militarily invade Mecca and Medina and start violating the women folk, setting things on fire and so on, maybe you're not a very good Muslim. Most Sunnis stop short of exonerating Yazid for this reason, it would force a confrontation with the Sahabi-did-nothing-wrong Sunni orthodoxy. Shia don't have this problem. Quranists are used to going to Sunni Masjids and keeping private a lot of these kind of thoughts, but you can go to a Shia Masjid and talk jibber jabber about all the problems you have with Sunni orthodoxy and the Shia will practically give you high fives.

I guess the part where Twelver Shiism got weird for me is when it came time to make dua that Allah be merciful to Solemani, the guy killed by Donald Trump's airstrike, the butcher of Damascus. See, I think killing civilians is bad no matter what sect they are. So the same problems I have with Yazid, I have with anyone who helped exacerbate the horrors of the Syrian civil war, the Yemeni civil war and so on. If you're going to boycott Israel for genociding Muslims, the same should apply to any state that genocides Muslims. It certainly makes it hard for me to raise money from wealthy middle eastern investors.

In the last week of Ramadan I made Iftar with the Shia, it was very interesting. There was a brother who converted to Islam in recent years who was very frustrated with the Salafist Imam at the big Sunni masjid because of his political apathy about the plight of the people of Gaza, so he was drawn to Shiism seeking a more direct and for-real version of Islam that bit its teeth into injustice. He was discussing with a senior official from the Iranian embassy, the plight of the Gazans, and I interjected. I said that we should be protesting the policy of Sisi of Egypt, where people have to raise money to bribe Egyptian border guards to evacuate Palestinians, just let these people go to a camp in Sinai and then on to various countries taking them as refugees. He explained that the policy of Arab states keep Palestinians trapped is to prevent an emptying of the land for Israel to appropriate, I said, sure but maybe the orphans should be

allowed egress to start a new life. Then I explained that the Sunni refugees in Idlib are in a very similar situation, trapped between a border wall manned by an indifferent nation state, a terrorist government and an official government with terrorist policies seeking to call them.

This is where my flirtation with Shiism got really real.

The Iranian embassy official got a little bit flustered, I'm not going to lie. He said "there's no analogy between the people of Gaza and the people of Idlib". I said "there's a *little bit* of an analogy." He said, with verve and tenacious demand, "how is there an analogy?" I said "the bribe to get people out of Idlib is only \$3000 per person instead of \$5000, it's cheaper". He said, the state of Israel has a policy of mass-killing children, Assad is only killing a few children accidentally as collateral damage while fighting terrorism.

Hmmm, it seemed my hopes for inspiring reformation in the nation of Iran were further away than my naive optimism had imagined.

The Sayed called us all for dua, ending the heated discussion. The revert guy then refused my offer to take his email to keep in contact, instead he lead me over to the image of Ali on the wall, he said "I like this picture" - I said "yeah it's like he's making wudu and dua at the same time" referring to the cupped hands filled with water - he said "I mean, the sword... evil exists and we have fight it." And with that he turned his back on me. It seems like he agreed with the perspective of the Iranian embassy official and saw me as some sort of Munafiq for wanting to both-sides this issue of hundreds of thousands of people trapped in refugee camps between border walls and civil wars with high probability of being killed any day and no running water.

And that I think, is the main difference between Twelver Shiism and Quran-centric reformism.

Ismaeli Shiism is a lot more weird and unorthodox and fun, and Quranists will probably find a lot in common with them. Ismaelies believe in a living Imam, they don't cut-off the leadership of Imamate at a 12th Imam from over 1000 years ago. There's one lineage of Ismaelies with a living Imam, Aga Khan, whose family has some wealth and resides in Portugal. The idea of, why isn't there a Shia leader who reforms Islam, has definitely been tried in the Ismaeli tradition, this is why we have all kind of bizarre and fascinating spin-off religions coming out of Ismaeli Shiism like stray meteors or bolts of radiation, the Bahai and Druze come to mind.

Quranists may find a lot of sympathy with the idea of that the more minority a sect or Islam is, the closer to the truth they are. Thus Twelver keeps a lot of good stuff but also gets some of the worst of Madhab rigidity and political jihadism, Ismaeli is more about esoteric wisdom and thinking outside the box. But if there's only one Twelver masjid in a western nation, probably there are 0 Ismaeli ones to visit. Perhaps a Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa, but the esotericism doesn't hit the same.

Thus we can see in Shiism a lot of lived examples of both going against the majority in violent jihad with a bold, assert political project - could possibly go horribly wrong - and having odd minority dissenters peacefully speaking wisdom to power but also opening the door for total abandonment of anything good in orthodoxy.

In conclusion: I love the Shia and wish they would listen to me more. I'm a descendant of Prophet Dawood (saws) via the lineage of Irish Kings, therefore I am a member of *an* Ahul Bayt, not the specific People of the House specified in the Shia mutawatir hadith, but one of them. I like the idea that the descendants of the prophets have a duty to God to be kind, wise, religiously motivated and provide guidance to the rest of humanity. After hanging out with an Iranian Shia Mirza (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad [saws] and Ali [ra] via matrilineal side-passages) who was a lovely fellow, I started wishing blessings on all the messengers and their families (which is a lot of people over the millennial, including myself) in dua. God's messengers have left more than just a memetic legacy in the scriptures they brought or the hadiths that people have scrapped together from them, there's also a genetic legacy and a socio-political heritage. Believing that God will banish to hell everyone who doesn't follow specific descendants of specific prophets is probably not supported by the Qur'an, mercifully, but such guides can still be valuable.

One last thing about Shiism, unlike Sunni orthodoxy and also a lot of Quranists such as the Rashad Khalifa masjid, Shia believe that Ruh Qudus in Qur'an is not somehow an alias for the arch-angle Jibreel (as) but literally a Spirit of Holiness which is another mechanic in God's repotoire, the avenue by which God sends guidance in the form of diffuse inspiration instead of specific verbatim wordings. Believing that then opens the door to believing in Imams, it also speaks to Sufi sainthood, it's used by the Catholic Church to justify their Shiism-esque lineage of leaders, and it can be used by all kinds of esoteric beliefs to justify a whole lot. As problematic as language can be for guiding people - evidenced by many differences in opinion interpreting the same words in qur'an - guidance by subtle, spiritual inspiration can be problematic in a different way: anyone can claim it. *However*, as with the prophet lineage idea in the above paragraph, just because the rainfall is broadly dispersed and highly leaky doesn't mean that it can't water the land, the idea of Ruh Qudus is one that I value because studying the Quranist movement has taught me, even without hadith, language by itself is very problematic. Combining language and inspiration, insh'Allah, can provide more replete guidance.

What do Quranists have in common with Ibadi?

It seems like nobody has heard of the Ibadi. I asked people at the Sunni Masjid, at the Shia masjid, even the Sayed from Iran, nobody has heard of them. There are only a few million of them in Oman and far fewer in Tunisia, so it makes sense. Yet the Ibadi are very interesting, a preserved tradition going back to the Rashidun Caliphate that did not adopt hadith into their religion until the Abbasid Caliphate, and then they developed a hadith minimalist approach to filtering anything that goes against the Qur'an. It was a US Citizen revert who found his way to Ibadism who first gave me the idea that there was a middle ground between Quran Only and Hadith maximalist.

Why hasn't Ibadism been more popular? It probably has to do with it taking the Qur'an at its word on matters of intercession and hell's perpetuity. There's a Qudsi Hadith transmitted by Ibn Abbas, which is a nice change of pace from the majority of the Qudsi Hadith transmitted by Abu Hurayra, and in this Qudsi Hadith we get the picture of Prophetic Intercession. At the end of the hadith God Himself also intercedes for a lot of people in hell who were kinda nice people but they weren't theistic enough, an important distinction from the Muhammadan intercession on judgement day in the first part. It's a very nice hadith, maybe one of the nicest ones theologically, because it relaxes the all-or-nothing contemplation of eternal torment. Maybe you were a Muslim sinner, or a non-Muslim do-gooder, and you get burned just for a little while, to put the fear of God in ya. This swivel door of mercifulness has been an important part of Sunni Islam before the Salafist reformation.

Well, the Ibadi ain't having it. Like many Quranists, they read in Qur'an that there's no intercession on judgment day, except as the Lord wills, and then assume why make such a big point unless the Lord would not will it. Or, as Quranists like to say, if you get intercession on the Last Day, God has already forgiven you and the interceder helping you is just a formality. Either way, those who go into the fire do not come out, this is something many Quranists agree on and it's Ibadi doctrine.

According to Peter Wilkinson's book on Ibadi origins, the Ibadi were basically Quran Alone hardliners for the first century of their practice. These were the hardcore minoritarians who wanted to get away from the corrupt politics of the Umayyad Caliphate and just practice the Din in a clean way. This provides some evidence that the Quran Only position is at least a credible thing for Muslims to arrive at intuitively, with some historical tradition in the early days.

The tendency in Quranism to assume most Muslims are on shirk for overly idolizing a prophet is similar to the Ibadi doctrine that grave sinners are actually kuffar, they lose their faith

by sinning. There's no difference between fisq and kufr in Ibadism. Whereas in hardline Quranism there's no difference between sending salawat on the prophet and shirk. They're both totalizing interpretation of the Qur'an where only a select few are safe.

Islam, if you haven't noticed, can be a very scary religion. The Qur'an is definitely intended to be scary, to cow the reader into submission and the provide a rigorous program to follow. There's also a lot of beauty, wisdom and justice in it, but in a minority of verses, you have to earn those verses by arriving at them in piety amidst all the judgment day scenes, destroyed civilizations and political paranoia during the Meccan wars. Only when you've read the Qur'an a few times, having already accepted it, straightened out your life's harams and so on, can you really zoom in and appreciate the beauty, wisdom and mercy in it. Sunni and Shia Islam introduce a lot of extra texts and human characters to give Islam a more accessible and merciful face, but strict Quranists and Ibadis both say: stop waffling and follow the instructions.

What's interesting is that Ibadis got the political aspect of Islam a lot more correct than others in the history. The Imamate of Oman had 1000 years of peace before Portugal tried to colonize the coast and then the Sultanate of Oman was inspired by that conflict to start colonial adventures of their own. But the idea of electing leaders based on pious merit, and that those leaders would delegate 80-90% of authority to local tribal leaders, worked really well for a small scale isolated society. Would the Shura system of the Ibadis scale to governing an entire Empire? It was tried when they moved the capital to Zanzibar, what is now Mozambique, in the 1700s, but that was a monarchic model and not the Imamate Shura system. The last Imam of the Ibadis died in the 1950s and the sultan became more strict in the religious vacuum, cops giving people tickets for listening to music and such. Then, fearing rebellion, the British induced the sultan's son to take over in a bloodless coup - the best kind of coup - and Sultan Qaboos then initiated a tremendous reform and boom period for Oman.

People criticize Muhammad Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia for turning down the volume on the adhan and permitting alcohol to be sold in the kingdom, letting young women risk harassment in night clubs so they can dance and feel sensual liberty, having a Dragon Ball theme park, a panopticon 1 trillion dollar lineal city, and a variety of other sci-fi ambitions. The question of - is MBS reforming Saudi in a more Quranic direction, or is he just a sell-out? - is probably more complex than an either/or answer permits. But Sultan Qaboos has already done a 50 year campaign of tremendous reform while staying clearly within conservative lines, and there's a lot we can learn from the Sultanate of Oman during his reign.

First off, Ibadī Islam would have come down hard on the idea of *anyone* outside of the tiny Ibadī population making it to heaven prior to the Sultanate of Qaboos. Now, after decades of dialogues with other Muslim leaders, Ibadis pray with hands down next to Shia and cross-armed Sunnis in the same Masjid, Saudis and Pakistanis and people of many other nationalities work and pray in Oman, and the official line from the Grand Mufti is that, basically, the strictness of Ibadism is great for assuring your entrance of paradise, but others can make it too. They still think that dying with unrepented major sins will have no clemency on judgment day, no

forgiveness, no intercession, no escape, but they assume that probably a lot of Muslims at least are not major sinners or have repented of their sins.

Let's apply this line of inclusive reasoning to Quranist's critique of Muslims at large. It might be a sin to mix mention of humans, even a great human, even a prophet, into your prayers, but maybe being a very charitable and pious person in other respects can still earn your salvation. It might be shirk to take laws of hadith above laws of Qur'an, Ibadis are careful not to by the way, but if one is not applying these misunderstandings to doing major sins like killing people, one can still make it. So you can end up with a perspective where Quranists are the most guided Muslims, and it follows logically that following the Qur'an well gives one the best chance at salvation, but, more mixed up followers of the Qur'an might still make it. Terrorists who think, worst-case scenario, their self-destruction in a masjid to kill other Muslims might be punished by God, but they will be saved by the prophet eventually, are actually Mushriks and will have no hope for salvation.

By embracing diversity, taking a more tolerant approach to other religious perspectives, and loosening up on imposing religion, Oman had a huge burst of prosperity while retaining knowledge in its own nationals, without going crazy with building projects and losing its conservative Islamic traditions. This is a great example of how Islamic reform can happen well, hitting economic, social, intra-religious and justice objectives but without loosening up to the point of diluting the religion. This is a great case study for Quranists interested in Islamic-political reform in other countries, Pakistan comes to mind.

When polled, 2/3rds of respondents on the r/Quraniyoon subreddit indicated they believe the Qur'an is created. Why that is may have to do with the association on the Hanbalite position that Qur'an is Uncreated in the wake of the Minha and the Mutazilite flip during the Abbassid Caliphate, which we'll explore in the next chapter. Hanbal was the most pro-Hadith Imam of the 4 major Sunni schools, and the question of the Qur'an's createdness was not up for discussion before the political horrors of the Minha tried to punish anyone who believed in the Qur'an being an associated attribute of God, presuming that this would be shirk. Now in mainstream Sunni thought, if you think the Qur'an is created, that's kufr, as well, always having to choose between shirk and kufr, that's Islamic theology for ya.

The Quranists who believe in the Qur'an as Uncreated possibly take a position similar to the Ashari school, where it's only Uncreated in a metaphysical sense of meaning independent of the language, leaving room for interpretation, multiple qiraat variations and so on. One commentator who believes the Qur'an is Uncreated cited a verse where Allah says He created everything in pairs, so what is the Qur'an's pair? Perhaps the Torah is the Qur'an's pair, one opening the epoch of God sending concrete textual revelations through Messengers, and the other ending it, both legalistic in focus. The Psalms and Injil might then be the other pair, both having to do with the beatific aspects of having an intimate relationship with God and focusing on the spirit within the law rather than its letter. Nonetheless most Quranists tend to see the Qur'an as created, this helps to keep the faith in Qur'an's divine nature while applying more flexible readings, the historical critical method and other methods of revising the meaning of the

text. Additionally the Qur'an has a number of revelations that seem to be reactions to circumstance, and many Quranists believe in free will to a perhaps greater extent than the Ashari Occasionalism idea permits.

The Ibadis believe the Qur'an is created while simultaneously believing in at least a moderately strong concept of predestination as the meaning of the word "Qadr" in Qur'an. It's possible that the Ibadis concept of causation in God's metaphorical hands came from interpreting the Qur'an instead of a hadith. (Unlike Hanbali Atharis, Ibadis definitely believe God is a transcendent reality that doesn't have literal body parts.) There was a hadith that originated in Basra from a single narrator, called the Hadith Jibreel, where the Angel Jibreel is alleged to have entered a masjid in the form of a very clean traveler, and told the attendees that Emaan, or faith, consists of the 5 points in the Qur'an (One God, Last Day, Messengers, Books, Angels) plus Predestination. That such an important thing would only have one line of transmission is considered suspect by many Quranists. Given the theory that Ibadis only adopted hadith with a strong Quranic filter after that hadith was adopted, it's plausible that the Ibadis theory of predestination is not based on that hadith, but rather interpreting the Qur'an to offer very limited choice (so that life, as a test, is fair, and damnation or salvation is earned) but that God basically sets up all the choices we get. Al-Ashar, founder of the Ashari theological school used in the Shafi'i and Maliki schools of Sunni Islam, is said to have adapted his nuanced theory of limited free will, mostly predestination, from the Ibadis school. We'll talk more about free will two chapters from this one.

What would Quranists *not* like about Ibadism? For one thing, they take hadith, even in a minimal fashion, as integral to Islam, and denote that the Qur'an gives room for it. Quran-centric people might not have a problem with that. The author of the Prima Quran blog, not to be taken as representative of the entire Ibadis School, sees Quranists are not-really-Muslims, rather a part of a newly invented religion, and asserts that the formalisms in Ibadiyah are important. The notion that early Ibadiyah were basically Quran Only Muslims, is a rather minute and little-known assertion from a non-Muslim academic and not something celebrated or widely acknowledged by Ibadis. The singling out of one prophet as being very important, if not the most important, would make Ibadis in the eyes of a hardline Quranist, not truly Mumin, even if they are close and admirably rigorous Muslimin. The Ibadis prayer fiqh has a number of requirements, not following them all can invalidate the prayer, making this madhab even more strict than the strictest Sunni madhab when it comes to prayer rigor - most Quranists tend to think salah is meant to be of qualitative importance and obsessing over its formal details detracts from the connection to God.

Ibadis have long held a reading of Qur'an where there is no second coming of Isa (saws), that God caused him to die and he's dead, to be resurrected on the day of judgement like everyone else, and "surely [it] is a sign of the Hour" doesn't refer to Isa/Jesus two verses back, but to the fact that God didn't make us all angles - one verse back - or simply to the Qur'an itself talking about judgment day a lot, which is how most Quranists tend to read it.

Ignorant people will say that the Ibadiyya are basically Kwarij, the early terrorists who assassinated Ali (ra) but failed to assassinate Muawiya. Ibadi are actually the quietists who felt that the best jihad was practicing Islam better than the people they criticized, without actually trying to kill those people. Thus, they flourished in their own remote niche in Oman.

There's a lesson there for Quranists who think most Muslims are mushrikeen.

The Ibadis have traditionally not been too concerned about spreading Ibadism, the idea was, we're running a tight ship, if people want to step up to our level of diligence, great, but most people are pre-destined to do sins and earn hellfire, so why bother promoting. If Ibadis had promoted their take on Islam, they may have had a hard time, because it lacks the appeal of guarantees that come with faith commitment in e.g. Protestant Christianity (faith-not-works versions) or Maturidi theology of Sunni Islam (stay a Muslim even if a major sinner, get freed from Hell eventually). Ibadis also replaced the Khawarij policy of making war on sinners, declaring them kuffar if Muslim and similar violent policies, with a softer version of disassociation. I actually experience this.

An American revert turned Ibadi was talking about how some hardline Sunnis call Ibadis kuffar (implying they will go to hell for incorrect belief despite all their worship, rigor and sin avoidance) because Ibadis generally read the Qur'an as not endorsing a second coming of Jesus/Isa (saws). I replied, in sympathy, that I realized takfiri media is worse than pornography. I got blocked for that.

In Sunni Islam, you're really not supposed to be blocking people left and right, maybe with a good reason like they were harassing you, in Sunni fiqh you're supposed to make amends with a Muslim Brother within 3 days, if you just say Salam and they don't reply you've done your part. In Ibadism, instead it's mustahab (recommended) to disassociate from anyone who admits to sins, or otherwise denotes disbelief (in the Ibadi sense, not in the Sunni sense, clearly there are different beliefs on the checklist). Ibadis don't takfir people explicitly, they just shun you, and remember sin = kufr in Ibadism.

I found it very rude but it was interesting to have experienced a key tenet of Ibadism first hand, later I read the fellow's blog post on the specific fiqh and policy of disassociating from people, I found my comment didn't really suffice. I wasn't making a confession of sin, rather using a spicy and evocative term to make a point: people know pornography is bad, but are tempted by it due to easy access of the internet and human nature being lustful - but people are similarly tempted to takfir and sectarian insults by easy access on social media and human nature being divisive. Yet most people who do takfir and are very sectarian don't repent of it because they think it's actually good. This is a point we'll come back to in the last Sectarian chapter about the long lost Murjites.

But first, let's explore the Kings of Takfir...

What do Quranists have in common with Salafiyya?

It's built into the subtitle of this book that the Quranist movement and associated Quran-centric, chill Maliki, progressive, modernist etc. movements in Islam constitute the *second* reformation movement in Islam's 1400 years, and that the first reformation was the Salafist reformation. Both reformations hinge on a new technology, here the internet, then the lithographic printing press, making scriptures widely available to read by the average Muslim, inspiring new devotion and understandings with a hyper-textual focus.

Yes indeed, Islam has already had a reformation. Quranists and Salafists both value individuals performing their own efforts to understand the Din without relying on schools to tell you what to think. In the case of Salafism, this has led to, for instance, a social media landscape where young jahils casually takfir each other, or even mass-groups, where anyone can give fatwa based on some hadith they read, and where the alliance of different aadeeqah systems and differences in fiqh that forged the umbrella of Sunni Islam is punctured, where a singular system of fiqh and theology wants to assert itself, but it can't, there's just more sectarianism. You might say the Salafist reformation failed to improve Islam, arguably made it worse, and the Quranist difference would be to say: yeah they became obsessed with the wrong texts.

Salafists are really against shirk. A lot of folk religion practices cropped up in traditional Islam before Salafism tried to reform them out, sending dua prayers to the prophet or to saints, generally Quranists read Qur'an as being very much against that, and would agree with this more serious emphasis on tawhid and avoiding shirk.

Quranists might argue that the Salaf were basically Quranists, except that they had customs not explicitly outlined by Qur'an in the prayers and so on, and that this was Sunnah as living tradition, not based on hadith. Since Quranists generally think God in the Qur'an is intentionally being non-specific about prayer formality, they'd say the Salaf's praying by example was fine. Quranists might argue that the Salaf were prohibited by the prophet and later by caliph Umar to not write down any hadith, and this is the real Salafism. Whereas Salafists will generally assume that the 6 major hadith books (which doesn't include the Muwatta of Imam Malik) were accurate and reflect the authentic beliefs of the early Muslims and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (saws).

Most Quranists find that the tenor of a Quran Only reading is much cleaner, more "secular" and "progressive", as loaded as those words are, than the form of Islam loaded with

thousands of hadiths that go all over the place. One key distinction here can be found in an IslamQA post answering [an Ibadi who wants to convert to Sunni Islam](#). Salafism is often at odds with a traditionalist orthodoxy in Sunni Islam due to shedding allegiance to madhabs, yet at the same time claims to be the ultimate form of Sunni Islam. There's a wiff of sectarian exclusivism in the above-linked answer, but the IslamQA people aren't claiming it, they're citing a scholar who does, and that exclusivism hinges on the 73 Sects hadith that only the majority sect will be saved. So, funnily enough, Salafism tries to assert itself above the traditional 4 madhabs despite being an outgrowth of the Hanbali school, but also, hinges on the rationale that the majority is the best, indeed the only saved group, that the Qur'an's warnings about sects actually mean, go ahead and be sectarian, just be in the right sect, the majority sect. Yet! Salafists are a minority, an outspoken minority, among Sunni Muslims.

Salafists are also into sending blessings on just one prophet, despite being very much against taking that too far. In [this answer](#) on the subject, we find an interesting wrinkle in the legal thinking that emerged in this madhab (which is really what Salafiyya ends up being), they're reasoning about the wording of hadith in the same kind of thoughtful way that Quranists reason about precision of language in the Qur'an, and conclude that the prophet-distinction-making Sunnis do for Muhammad (saws) and family, is not a strict requirement, just recommended, because of the wording around commands. The general reasoning in practicing Islam from hadiths is that these are all commands from the Prophet, who the Qur'an *does* single out as a military and political commander of the Muslims of Medina, and these commands are still valid upon all of us, they come with the Quranic covenant. Quranists generally think, no they don't, that authority expired at the death of the mortal man, only the message, the Qur'an, remains.

I guess the moral of the above paragraph, is don't assume Salafists are always going to take the most hardline and legalistic interpretation, they may actually reason their way back to before the Hanbali school, back to before Imam Shafi said that it was obligatory to say "Allahumma..." to finish prayers. And this sort of flexibility in scholarship was a notable innovation in Islam which had some value, and which reflects the effort put in by more brains into reading the books more often and arguing about it more broadly.

Quranists get educated about a progression of Islam away from Quran Only to being more and more hadith maximalist, with Salafism being the most extreme evolution of that, but Ibn Tammiyah was a very complex character who got jailed for accusing Muslims of borderline-shirk for visiting the prophet's grave during Hajj. Say what you will about his takfir, wishing slavery upon the Druze and the rest, he was a complex character who stood up for tawhid, people love him for his independent thinking and fierce devotion.

Finding nice things to say about Salafiyya is indeed an exercise in purification of the heart and stretching the mind, as one might do before going for a jog.

Now let's get a bit harsher.

Terrorism, rampant takfir, sub-sectarianism (where you start drawing divisions among people within your own sect, sectarian-inception), making a big deal about Aisha being a kid at marriage is important if you can't accept that you're a kafir, this general embrace of moral anti-realism, these are all nasty developments that make Islam seem even worse than when the Ottoman invasion of Constantinople had a princess violated on an altar in the Hagia Sophia. Islam certainly had a reputation from the time of the crusades, the sex slavery was also a bad look. So Islam had a reformation and trained legions of twenty year old male virgins to argue that monotheism and sex slavery/child marriage acceptance are interlinked. Somehow Islam had a reformation and it got worse!

Really makes you think.

Madhabism keeps this stuff in the domain of professionals. In the post-colonial era, the money for such professionalism largely dried up, and the proliferation of jahil mini-libraries filled the void. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. One major exception to this was the oil money from Saudi, hence we got waves of Salafi dawah in the West, Islam became more associated with the facets that dawah wanted to promote.

And then, there was the terrorism.

Ibn Arabi's take on kufr was: God would not hold everyone accountable for not becoming Muslim if their impression of Islam was the risk of being enslaved on a galley by barbary pirates, or if your impression of Islam was towers collapsing on 9-11, then living in a liberty-minimized USA with code orange and code yellow. If Muslims are so influenced by Shaytan that they not only make Islam look like a religion of Shaytan, but they actually make the rest of the world worse in reaction, how can God blame us for staying Methodist or Californian yogis. It would be beyond our capacity to somehow puncture through and say "ahh but the Sufis are nice, maybe Islam is really deeply spiritual, more than my own religion." Because guess what, every time someone would try to find the good in Islam, Salafis would say, "Sufi Kuffar!" The idea proposed by hardline Christian conservatives, neo-con warmongers and the like, that Islam's true form was the violent, intolerant, child-marriage celebrating form, this idea was *roundly reinforced* by the Salafiyya tendency.

Truly I could not have reverted to the Din in the wake of 9-11 or in a time where the Salafi dawah was dominant in representing the religion. I had to get flown to Israel by a bunch of VC-funded Jewish people and meet a Sufi in Jerusalem to even get the seed of love for this Din planted in my heart. Mash'Allah. Shayateens make plans but Allah plans better.

It doesn't help dawah to see the religious community that wants you to join as constantly fighting and accusing other people in the community of being actually, doomed and outside the community. There's a hadith where it's said that whoever accuses a Muslim of being a kafir had *better be super sure* because, if they're wrong, they're actually a kafir. In other words: don't go around accusing people of being kafirs. It used to be that a takfir was a formal excommunication issued by the local Qadi based on credible arguments that a person said xyz and these

statements violate the orthodox idea of what the Qur'an or hadith mean, that person then got a chance to recant their statements. We can reason, taking the hadith at face value, that most of these people issuing takfir statements, including the educated ones with big platforms accusing Quranists or Mufti Abu Layth of being kafir, are actually dooming themselves to hell in the process, either Quranists and Mufti Abu Layth are going to hell, or those people are, or the hadith is false, or the hadith is an authentic statement but the Prophet got to overstate things for rhetorical effect and was forgiven by God for not saying 100% true things.

This idea that we don't have to reject all hadith but that there's a lot of rhetoric in them, and Qur'an says God forgave Muhammad (saws) for his past and future sins, suggests hadith would have a special nature that later scholars can't imitate: a license to exaggerate. Whereas hadith rejection tends to assume fabricated hadiths were done for either selfish reasons or for a good cause, people reasoned they could make up hadiths to inspire good behavior or win a theological argument or denounce a sect they were fighting with. According to the most muwatir hadith, making up hadiths is also a ticket to hell, maybe the Prophet was overstating that a bit as well? Maybe some hadiths that people made up constituted a major sin on their part, but their other good deeds outweighed it, or that the damage done by the hadith was minor. There's a hadith that the Prophet was going to require everyone to brush their teeth at every wudu but decided it was too much, the hadith maybe assigns too much power to the Prophet to assign fard religious obligations outside the Qur'an, but maybe it got people to value brushing their teeth multiple times a day! If that hadith is false, perhaps the sin in it isn't so great because it's a pro-oral hygiene impact.

What basis do I have to suggest that the Prophet didn't have the power to assign fard outside Qur'an? There's a hadith from Aisha (ra) in the Muwatir of Imam Malik where she is alleged to have said she prayed Duha a lot but the Prophet refrained from it so people wouldn't think it an obligation, this is a great example. We'll come back to this sort of reasoning in the chapter of Maliki Sunnism.

If the anti-takfir hadith is true but overstated, then maybe God will forgive all these people throwing around takfir on their fellow Muslims, maybe it's a major sin or a minor sin, maybe doing it just a few times can be outweighed with a lot of good speech, maybe doing it a lot can be outweighed by doing lots of charity. The point is, don't worry about people takfiring you, if you're standing up for what you think is right, God is going to judge you on the Last Day based on your seeing, hearing and sincerity, and probably on the results of your speech and actions. The people takfiring you are actually incurring a far steeper penalty. And you could be totally outside Islam with your minority opinions, keep them to yourself, nobody on the internet or the masjid takfirs you, and you still get judged by God as a kafir. Despite its asymmetric downside for the takfiris, takfir is irrelevant to your salvation as a potential target, and getting takfired seems like a standard part of being a public figure in Islam these days. We have the Salafi movement to thank for that.

So, Quranists who want better for Islam, you can study Shia to see where fighting the majority fails, or where going off into esotericism fails, you can study Ibadi to see where hardline separatism fails at doing mass dawah but also see in Oman a 40 year major transformation in

both religion and society without compromising principles, and then you can see in the Salafi Reformation a 300 year saga culminating in 9-11 and Muhammad Hijab (no offense to the Brother, but, there it is). Another example of the culmination, cresting and washing out of the Salafi reformation might be Shaykh Yasir Qadi, who was trained in that vibe and then burned out on it. Lately he talks about how we shouldn't be so Sectarian, even to non-Sunnis, we don't have to respect their rafidi ways or whatnot but let's tolerate them, and he's very much appreciating the value of Madhabs containing debate and takfir issuances like how nuclear reactors contain radiation.

Islam's second reformation, this Back to Quran movement, or tide of movements, has roots in the 1800s. Chronologically we're just a century ahead of Ibn Tammiyah by analogy to the Salafi history. Yet things are more accelerated in the information age, whether that's a sign of the Last Day approaching or not I'll leave to you. We haven't had a Quranist Ibn Wahhab going around killing people, we do have Muhammad Bin Salman adopting *some* tenets of hadith minimalism and streaks of relaxing Islam that might be concordant with progressive Qurani thought. Maybe Hassan Farhan Bin Maliki, who is still in prison under MBS as of this writing, is our Ibn Wahhab, maybe Bin Maliki is the opposite of Ibn Wahhab. Honestly, it makes me weep a little bit, making this comparison. We can know a thing by it's opposite, but Allah has no opposite, kufuwan ahad. There is none like The One. May Allah see the release of Hassan Bin Maliki.

Would the trajectory of this Back To Quran reformation end up like Salafism? A bunch of Quraniyoon jahils on the internet arguing in circles about rejecting all hadith and calling everyone who prays traditional salah a mushrik? Is that going to get us anywhere? Maybe we can follow up with some terrorism. God forbid.

The lesson we need to learn here isn't that madhabs are good - maybe this movement ought to produce a few books of fiqh to get people thinking - but full-blown institutionalization is probably not the answer. The opposite, detailed sardonically in the above paragraph, is not the answer either. I believe the real answer is somewhere in the middle, to awaken in the hearts of Muslims a sincere love for the din, by highlighting the pearls of wisdom and justice and jurisprudence that are in the Qur'an, not based on anyone's loose reading, but based on clean scholarship breaking down the etymology of the Arabic. And then, we need to develop a Quranic dawah that outperforms the Salafi dawah.

Consider that for every Salafi dawah convert, there are probably 5 or 10 or 20 people who get irradiated by the disgusting message of moral anti-realism purported in their defense of the most obscene hadith, in defense of sex slavery and child marriage. Quranic dawah can do better simply by making Islam look decent even to the majority of message recipients who don't convert. Indeed Surah Hajj suggests that we can do well in dawah just convincing Christians to lighten up on their Christology while praying and fasting more, or convincing Jews to accept Jesus (saws) as Messiah and Muhammad (saws) as a legit prophet who stood up for God's oneness - we don't strictly have to get everyone on board with this Quranic covenant.

Finally, we can give people a sense that religion is about using your brain, reading, and contemplating the text, followed up with a diverse and differences-respecting range of fresh scholarship that helps people get past the fear and paranoia in the Qur'an to isolating the beautiful justice that it promotes in about 5-8% of the verses.

What do Quranists have in common with Mu'tazila?

When people with western values, intellectuals, people with minority opinions, come into Islam, whether or not they gravitate to the Quran movement or not, they tend to learn about the Mu'tazilites and go "ahh, I don't have to worry that I like philosophy, using my intellect, and questioning, there's actually a strong tradition in Islam of this, but it got buried!" This is a shallow understanding of the complex situation of the rise and fall of the Adl Tawhid e Adha in the Abbasid era, but it's a sign of moral health if someone feels affinity for them.

The term "Mu'tazilite" is a slur, it means "those who withdraw" and is generally associated with the rationalist Muslims getting tired of debating the literalist Muslims, who were followers of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, the last of the four major Imams of Sunni Islam and founder of the Hanbali Madhab. They called themselves the People of Monotheism and Justice, because they were actually very faithful religious people, and their interpretation of the Qur'an was that God cannot *help* but be Just, that God in a sense is Justice, and that this Justice corresponds largely with our human nature's intuitive idea of justice (maybe not 100% but close enough, the killing of the boy by Al Khidr in Surah Kahf being a notable exception). They also believed that God was practically like the deist idea of God that Thomas Jefferson liked, God used exclusively efficient causes, the laws of physics, to get things done, and their idea of Free Will was very strong in a similar theology to that of Roman Catholicism, not just an occasional or frequent gift from God, but replete in our brain's physical functioning (even though they lacked advanced brain science back then). The Mu'tazila are credited with having the inventors of algebra (Al-Jabri) and cryptography (*Al-Kindi*) among their ranks. When people talk about the Islamic Golden age being an early jump-start to the 700-years-later European renaissance, it's generally associated with the scientific work of members of this sect.

Why don't Quranists just call themselves Mu'tazilites? Well, the Mu'tazilites didn't reject all hadith, for one thing. They tended to not believe in a literal bridge over hell that one must cross to get to heaven, "Sirat Al-Mustaqeem" was an abstract idea of living a morally pure life to them. They didn't believe in the grave punishment (based on a hadith, but arguably with some evidence for it in Qur'an). They believed that God's attributes were not created but also not separate from God, hence the strong sense of Tawhid, rather these attributes were merely descriptive of the way God is, and therefore, the way reality *has to be* fundamentally, with Justice being the primary curvature, and the mercy, generosity, wisdom, kingdom and so on being reflections of that concept.

Sounds pretty great, like everything Islam should be or could have been, and it sounds like a set-up for a utopian sci-fi alternate timeline where Islam created steampunk technology by the 1500s and took over the world through cultural trade instead of conquest.

And yet... and yet! Alas... the People of Monotheism and Justice really let their Monotheism get ahead of their Justice. The Qur'an says there is no compulsion in religion. This has been interpreted as a statement of fact and a commandment by most Muslims, yet it hasn't stopped most Muslims from executing apostates, making war on each other over theological debates, or even giving women fines for not wearing hijab in modern Iran. And it didn't stop the Mu'tazila from signing off on the Abbasid Caliphs' hardcore persecution of the Hanbali hadith literalists in the 15 year Minha period.

Imagine that you are a liberal democrat in the US, and you hate MAGA conservative Trump supporters. You think they are so morally ugly, so stupid, so evil and destructive, that they are basically enemy combatants, domestic terrorists, and while you nominatively believe in free speech, justice for all, due process of the law, you're willing to make an exception for your moral enemies. So you, in the name of liberal values, sign off on the government rounding up all the Trump supporters, putting them in camps, torturing them and so on. You think: ya know, it's ugly business, but it has to be done, to protect democracy we have to take a hardline against Nazis. But then guess what happens? After 15 years of this, the government flips, and does it to you! Whoops! It sounds almost like poetic justice.

This may be a reasonable analogy to what happened with the Mu'tazila sect. They were rubbing elbows with the elite! They were the scientists, the wealthy traders, the technicians, the theologians, the scribes, they had the ear of the powerful, they had the keys to the cosmopolitan consensus. They were the brightest people at the time, arguably in the whole world, the intellectual vanguard of the greatest civilization yet, ordained by God! Maybe they were not directly to blame for the savagery of the Minha, arguably the blame was on the pride of the Caliphs to try and assert their opinions and lead people theologically, demanding belief in a created Qur'an when this wasn't a big issue before. Shaytan is to blame, he whispered in the ears of the Caliph, his son, and grandson.

But the Mu'tazilites, for all their smug self-assurance of being intelligent and just, were not intelligent or just enough to speak out for their enemies! What courage and wisdom that would have taken! To swallow your pride in your age of triumph, and say wait, these guys might be idiots, they might be on batil, wrong about God, exhausting to debate and chronically wrong, but the Qur'an says - No compulsion in the Din - and if we don't respect these fools' rights to not be compelled, we will be cursed by Allah.!

But they didn't say that.

Quranists tend to believe predestination is not really in the Qur'an, and focus on other verse talking about how you make choices and God changes your destiny, you choose to follow God and God makes it easier to do the deeds that will earn you paradise. A radical free will

perspective where only efficient causation exists, like the Mu'tazila espoused, is perhaps harder to read in the Qur'an than something where humans have a little choice, or a moderate amount of choice, and God constructs reality around that. Quranists tend to think free will is more abundant than the Ashari Occasionalism and Ibadi perspective entails. Thus, the Qur'an would have to be created because God is reacting to a bunch of humans making choices. Of course God creates everything, but also God created the world to intentionally have a decent dose of free will in it, not just occasionally, this is the predominant reading. There are, for example, verses in Qur'an where it's revealed not to bug the Prophet after dinner, was it always pre-determined that people would bother the prophet? There were allegedly women complaining how the Qur'an seems to mostly address men, so there's a lovely verse that addresses male and female submitters, believers, charitable, humble, fasting people, chaste people and so on, which is said to have been revealed *in response* to those women's concerns about a one-gender bias in Qur'an.

In an Athari, total predestination model, God was predestinated in His (notice the gender pro-noun) eternal thought and resulting kalamAllah, God's speech, to make books that mostly address men. Addressing men predominantly was not just a tactical approach to the pragmatism of a more primitive society where women had few jobs in banking and government, addressing men was just the destiny God set out, and then those women in Medina were destined to complain about this, and God was destined to then react by revealing that verse.

In an Ibadi or Ashari Occasionalism concept, God's intention to extoll virtue of fasting men and women, charitable men and women etc. was an eternal meaning but there were occasions where women hearing earlier verses might have thought - eh this seems a bit sexist but I will choose to let it go for now - and eventually some women made the occasional choice to say, hey what's up with all the verses addressing men, but God foresaw the branching tree of those choices, knew eventually women would chose to ask about the male-bias, and had pre-conceived of the verse to express the eternal principle that the virtues of fasting, charity, belief, prayer, truthfulness and such belong to both men and women.

In a moderate version of free will generally popular among modernist, Quranist, progressive and other Muslims today, those women really had a lot of opportunities to voice their concerns or not, eventually it came up, and God reacted dynamically in His wisdom, but those women probably could not have decided to form an Amazon tribe of break-away feminist bandits who look like Charlize Theron in the Mad Max movie, or something like that.

In a Mutazilite view of total free will with an extremely hands-off God, if those women had decided to form a proto-feminist breakaway tribe, the lead-up to that event and the result would have come down totally to efficient causes in the physical world - who decides to fight them, what tactics they took in battle, who good the women might be at diplomacy - and you can see how this type of thinking might go too far and lead to unexpected political reversals.

The failure of imagination in the radical free will concept of the Mu'tazila, was to imagine a flat causality based only on physics, without taking into account the element of surprise. In the

book *The Witcher*, a queen offers the titular Witcher a prize for his service and he casually suggests “The Law of Surprise - that which you have but do not know” and then it turns out she had a daughter she didn’t know about it. So the Witcher raises the girl to do magic and have adventures. It’s based on a story from the Book of Judges in the Tanakh/Old Testament, where the last Judge in an increasingly corrupt line, foolishly makes a vain oath to God (that he didn’t need to make) that he’ll sacrifice whatever comes through his door next, and it turns out to be his daughter. Some people read that story like he had his daughter killed to fulfill his oath, regretfully, others read it as, God abolished human sacrifice with Abraham and Issac (alaihi salaams) and she was sent off to serve religious duties in cloister, but still be away from her regretful father.

There’s this poetic notion of unexpected results happening despite all our information, knowledge and planning, that God or reality at large exceeds our best abilities to control and apprehend it, and the crux of our stories will be, if we are arrogant, a dramatic twist that we could not have anticipated! This is what befell the Mu’tazila, such that we mostly know them by their slur-name and not by the title they gave themselves. The 3rd Abbasid Caliph, tired of their vain attempt to enforce theological rationalism through violence, found himself impressed with Hanbal’s faithful endurance under nightly whippings as an elderly man, and found himself swayed to their hardcore faith-over-intellect approach to Islam. But instead of saying, hey maybe all this persecution and torture was a mistake - the lesson he took away from it was, we’ve just been torturing the wrong people.

This is one of the most fateful twists in the history of Islam. Instead of getting cryptography and algebra we got >7000 “authentic” hadiths that all became obligatory to believe in, the mainstreaming of the idea of the Qur’an being Uncreated, and the supremacy of the Shafi’ization of Islam. The Mu’tazila ideas of free will and reason got sublimated into the Ashari school, Al-Ashar was a Mu’tazila but had dreams of visitation by the Prophet and decided being a traditionalist was the way, but he kept some reasoning about free will alive in a bunker that we call Occasionalism. He also forged a compromise with the Hanbalites about the ok - OK SURE, the Qur’an is Uncreated, and attribute of Allah, but like, as a metaphor? Occasionalism was similar adapted by the different-but-thorough intellectual tradition of the Ibadiya - OK SURE, there’s total predestination, Allah controls all causation, but since he created the dunya to test us in who is best in deeds, he gives us just a little bit of free will, as a treat.

The more robust concept of free will and efficient causation that th defeated Mu’tazila held was adopted by the Twelver Shia and is reflected in the sci-fi utopia that is modern day Iran. Since the Shia have been the minority for all of the history of the ummah, the idea that God sides with the majority and predetermines that, protecting them from bad ideas, is anathema, they have the opposite stance, that evil caliphs making bad decisions has made Islam harder and more corrupt than it *should* have been, that there could have been other timelines where Ali was Caliph, where more people respected the Imamate, and so on. Like the Mu’tazila, the Twelver Shia didn’t have enough respect for - No compulsion in the Din - to resist imposing Twelver Shiism on Persia in the 1500s during the installation of the Safavid dynasty.

So whereas the positions Quranists tend to read in the Qur'an *do* often tend to overlap with many of the ideas of the Mu'tazilites, the major difference other than rejecting more hadiths than the Mu'tazila (which is more in line with the Ibadi-esque, most-things-are-shirk sort of Quranists) is that Quranists appreciate that No Compulsion In Religion is a seriously important commandment that has been neglected by basically every instance of Islamic governance in the past, other than respecting minorities rights to pay a jizya tax.

Indeed many Quranists, especially those who would resist the label of "Quranist" and are more "Quran-centric", accepting a small number of hadith, perhaps dozens or a few hundred, tend to read the Qur'an in line with Mu'tazila theology about God's justice. The whole vibe that the Qur'an isn't a fire and brimstone doom sentence for most people, but a clarion call for everyone to be righteous even if they aren't in the ummah of Muhammad, this is a modern revisiting of the Adl Tawhid e Adha. Brother Khaled of the Quranic Islam channel is a very good example of this, he talks about God's Justice and Mercy being one, hell being much smaller than paradise, people being judged primarily on deeds; he is not of the sectarian doctrines of the Mu'tazila wholesale but the ethos if similar.

We can imagine, assuming we aren't in the end times already, a future where Mu'tazilite-esque reformed Muslims win power democratically in alliance with leftists, labor advocates, Christian democrats and maybe even conservatives and libertarians, and then get too emboldened by their power, start cracking down on the vilest of free speech. For instance, alleging that a prophet of God married a child could be punishable by imprisonment, deportation or even death, along with a host of other markets of ideological Islamism. After all, these people are at worst a serious security threat, and at best, enemies of Islam. But no matter how good the cause, we can go too far, and repeat the mistakes of the past, causing a blowback that derails the advancement of the "just and intellectual" understanding of religion and civic order, leading to a thousand years of stagnancy until another civilization succeeds us.

Imagine that judgment day is not to come for a million years. We could have a storyline like in Dune, where human, scattered across the stars, keep repeating the same political cycles of violence, victory, reorganization, arrogance and decadence, and it wouldn't matter if sometimes the empowered were hardline literalists while the other half of the cycles the empowered were self-righteous "enlightened" intellectuals, the cycle would still be viscous indeed.

The lesson for the reformation that the Mu'tazila offer is even more profound and useful than that of the Salafiyya, the Ibadiyya and the Shia put together. The Salafiyya are the demon dog mutant children of Hanbal, but Hanbal would not be very relevant to the history of Islam if the Mu'tazila had stood up for his right to be wrong about God and judged on the Last Day instead of the public square. The Ibadiyya's idea of a dry and unforgiving causality provided the intellectual structure to keep Sunni Islam from becoming dominated by Hanbalite ideas of a God with literal hands and 0 free will whatsoever, while the Shia's violent resistance to majority was the war bunker than the Mu'tazilites nearly-discredited ideas took shelter in.

There's a phrase that I love in the Qur'an, used in reference to disputes between Christians and Jews or in allusion to future sects that the Qur'an warns us about: God will judge them based on what they used to do.

What do Quranists have in common with the Sunni Malikis?

If you watch a YouTube video about Hadith Rejectors, which is the negative term for Quranists, it will usually start by citing a hadith in which the Prophet is said to predict a time where people sit on couch cushions and say that what is in the Qur'an is enough for religion, what's halal and haram in it are adequate, and la de da de dah. In other words, Quranists are prophesied to come in the future, their advent being one of comfort and entitlement. What they never mention is that this is not a Sahih grade hadith, it is merely Hasan, the intermediate grade. It is not to be found in Sahih Bukhari or Sahih Muslim. There's a version of it which is considered Daef (weak), where the cushion dweller says we should check hadiths against the Qur'an. There's a reason it's considered weak, and that is, if you think it's impermissible to check hadiths against Qur'an and therefore follow hadith above Qur'an, you may be led by baseless hadiths away from the path of Allah.

The first version is considered Hasan (good) because hadith collectors saw wisdom in it, and perhaps that hadith was fabricated during early debates between people who liked hadith and people who preferred to rely on the Qur'an. Indeed, checking hadith against the Qur'an and rejecting contradictions is a part of the methodology of the early Hanafi school, but why so early? The Hanafi school later did a lot of taqlid, joining consensus by agreement, with the later hadith maximalist schools of Shafi and Hanbal. But this is not so true for the Maliki school, because they have the Muwatta.

Mufti Abu Layth was once asked, if he likes using reason so much why is not not a Mutazilite. He thought it was funny, he thinks a lot of things are funny, he said "this is like asking me why am I not a Roman Catholic? Well first of all I'm not a Roman." The Mufti explained that using one's reason has always been a part of Islam; it's in the Qur'an, people of tafakur, contemplation, the Qur'an asks many times "will they not reason?" in grand rhetorical allusion.

So if this apparent divorce between faith and thinking wasn't *just* due to one historical twist at the end of the Abbasid Minha, but something more complex, then what happened?

According to Mufti Abu Layth, there was no distinct Sunni Islam for hundreds of years after the Qur'an was revealed. Instead, there was a notion of people who didn't sign up for sects, the proto-Sunni form of the religion was defined by what it wasn't rather than by specific additional beliefs. Proto-Sunnis were just Muslims who didn't do takfir and fight other Muslims, like the Khwarij, and who did not curse Sahaba, like the proto-Shia. Lacking the direct guidance on how to read Qur'an that the Shia Imams gave, or the specific interpretations formed by the

Ibadi school prior to their acceptance of some hadith, the proto-Sunnis were largely adrift between conflicting hadith narrations, many of them fabricated, and increasingly undertook a project of trying to codify and define which hadiths were true.

Abu Hanifa was not a Quranist, he rather took a very minimal and strict approach to accepting only mutawatir hadith, and was deeply vilified by more ardent hadith-followers in his time. He died in prison for refusing a Qadi (judgeship) appointment from Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur, being cheeky about it, and later giving fatwa in favor of people resisting the Caliph, leading to his poisoning. Abu Hanifa was said to have supported the right to rule of Zaid Ibn Ali, the breakaway Imam of the Zaydi branch of Shiism. The Hanafi Madhab is the most populous form of Islam today, and is in many respects very "liberal" about fiqh, but in some other respects it's become very conservative. While Abu Hanifa had a strict mutawatir (mass-transmitted) criteria for accepting hadith for law-making, he told his students to over-rule his own opinions if they found hadiths to counter-effect. This arguably got taken too far, as the Hanafi madhab has changed a lot since its early days, by process of taqlid, or acceptance of mutual consensus with the other madhabs that were more influenced by the growing body of hadith literature in the following centuries. A striking example of the contrast is that the early Hanafi school permitted drinking modest amounts of non-wine alcohol for about 500 years until they caved to the majority opinion that taking a single sip of beer is a major sin.

Notably, the author of Sahih Bukari, Muhammad Al-Bukhari, called Abu Hanifa a heretic.

The Maliki school is arguably more strict in some respects than the Hanafi Madhab, and less strict in others. And certainly, Mufti Abu Layth is one of the most unorthodox Muftis of the Madhab in our time if not in the recorded history of the School of Medina, Dr. Shadee Elmasry for example is also a Maliki, and there are Malikis with stricter interpretations than he has. Dr. Elmasry has said that a woman wearing full niqab is an excess which goes against the Islamic principle of moderation, whereas Middle Eastern Malikis have said that them wearing face coverings becomes recommended or obligatory in times of fitna - the modern social media reality can be argued to qualify. So there's a lot of room within the Maliki Madhab to be very orthodox, borderline-Salafi, to argue for Quraniyoon-levels of freedom of self-expression and unorthodoxy within a traditional Sunni framework, or somewhere in between.

What's notable about the Maliki school is how their methodology has done arguably less taqlid with the later hadith-maximalist schools of Imam Shafi and Imam Hanbal than the Hanafi Madhab has. The reason for this is a relativist approach to hadith, rather than rejecting all hadith or accepting all hadith, rather than rejecting most hadith but leaving the door open to accepting more later, the Muwatir of Imam Malik is a key book of hadith and fiqh in the Maliki school that helps one to appreciate the difference between Sunnah and Hadith. Hadith are data points with chains of narrators who may have been trustworthy or not, with often only a single transmitter somewhere in the chain, hence they are called ahadith, hadiths of a single transmission source. Sunnah are customs of the early Muslims. Imam Malik lived in Medina almost his entire life and loved its people, and he based his school on the understanding that the people of Medina were mass-transmitters of knowledge from the time of the Prophet. Thus the details of prayer and

other key things that aren't defined in a single hadith, and that people often ask Quranists about, in the Maliki school are simply a lived tradition embodied by the people of Medina.

Every Quranist, or anyone interested in defending hadith, ought to skim through the Muwatta of Imam Malik, even if you don't believe in everything in it, it's an ethnography, a reasonably detailed journal of social science. Even if some of the things people thought in Medina at the time were wrong, we can reasonably assume what is documented in the book was actually practiced in that time period. It's then a modest leap of faith for Malikis to assume that most or all of it traces back to the Medina of the time of the Qur'an.

Modern scholars who are often not motivated by faith have adopted the historical critical method (HCM) to taking a chainsaw to the hadith traditions, and have tried similarly to disassemble the Qur'an as being a hodgepodge of late antiquity influences from Christian syriac churches, late Gnostic traditions and so on. While the HCM scholars often end up baffled at how many references the Qur'an contains despite an archeological evidence that Mecca lacked all those faith communities, the HCM treatment of hadith often has more teeth. An example of this is the work of Dr. Jonathan Little, whose dissertation thesis focused on debunking the hadiths about Aisha (ra) being married as a child. Dr. Little found that the Aisha-child-marriage hadiths all had a geographic locus in Iraq and stemmed from a common-link transmitter who ostensibly had sectarian motivations to elevate her status in the wake of the proto-Shia vs. proto-Sunni controversy about the Battle of the Camel, where forces aligned with Aisha battled forces aligned with Ali. Say what you will about a culture that would see a child marriage as an elevation of status, putting her in the household of Muhammad (saws) at the same time as a child Ali, yet not many apparently objected to the idea of a child marriage. Dr. Little's dissertation adds to other evidence from comparing Sahih hadith contradicting other Sahih hadith that the child marriage never happened.

In later work Dr. Little evaluates the geographic reach of early hadith and how many of these hadith were not largely attributed to the Prophet directly but to companions, followers or even tabireen (3rd generation) and mostly reflected the customs of how people practiced the Din in Mecca vs. Medina, Kufa vs. Basra. The Muwatta of Imam Malik fits squarely into this pattern of the late 1st century Hijra Sunnah books, which may explain in part why the hadith maximalist scholarly tradition does not play the Muwatta among the 6 major hadith collections: it lacks thechutzpah of trying to pin quotations on the Prophet and settles for presenting a more modest history of Sunnah as living tradition.

Yet many will stop short of saying, oh great I'll just follow the Muwatta, Dr. Little explores the mapping of early custom hadiths and cites that the issue of a father forcing his virgin daughters to marry who he chooses, despite her consent or lack thereof, varied by region and Medina supported forced-marriage while Mecca believed consent was necessary. Now it has become consensus that a nikah is only valid with consent of both parties.

A hadith critical perspective might say that the preponderance of direct quotation showing up later implies that the direct quotations are less reliable and more likely to be a

rhetorical technique for hadith fabricators to assert authority. That this assertion of authority became a near-monolith of Sahih Bukhari as a second source of revelation next to Qur'an is not just lamented by Quranists and those who reject 100% of hadith, it's also stood against by the Maliki tradition - to varying extents.

Unpacking the end of that last paragraph: people like Mufti Abu Layth are taking the authority of their Mufti credentials and the usool (methodology) of the Maliki school to strongly lean into the idea that Sunnah is not hadith and Islam is truly, in its historical roots, a more relaxed religion than the myriad rules of thousands of Sahih Bukhari and Muslim hadiths would suggest, with a cleaner concept of who the Prophet Mummamah (saws) was than a lot of those traditions narrate. It helps us to escape the moral anti-realism implied by e.g. Salafi Islam, where all kinds of strange, obscene, violent and indecent behaviors are attributed to someone who we're simultaneously expected to believe is God's fine example for us, and thus Islam becomes all about submitting to anything presented before you, instead of being about mercy, peacefulness, and a common sensical frame of decency and justice.

Mufti Abu Layth gets tarred as a heretic by many, and the majority of Maliki scholars do different degrees of taqlid, agreement with the majority, where they also take the other hadith books and merely temper their interpretation with the standards describe in the Muwatta. After getting his house broken into, the Mufti went through a new transformation where he grew out the Zohan beard into a proper fuzzy Sunnah beard, started chuckling more infrequently and reverently, and adopted a more Sufi-esque slow, waves-of-the-ocean cadence to his speech, showing us perhaps that God is guiding him and he isn't actually a dajjal with a little 'd'. The early years of Mufti Abu Layth's YouTube career provide us with a rare example of someone with the credentials to outrank many critics has a proper go at them with humor, making their extreme interpretations of the Din seem properly comical. Yet the downside of that is, if you laugh at everything, your brain's dopamine momentum may lead you to make fun of, even if indirectly, God and his Messenger in some sense, which is severely criticized in Surah Tawbah as behavior of munafiqeen, hence worthy of the harshed punishment in the black-fire deepest hole of hell, and this explains why jolly Muftis are historically quite rare.

Dr. Shadee Elmasry is an interesting counter-example. He debated Dr. Javad Hashmi on how much perennialism or salvation for non-Muslims there is in the Qur'an; to summarize the debate, Dr. Hashmi cited the numerous verses saying X, Y and Z groups can also get into heaven - this is a topic of particular interest for reverts to Islam who have a lot of loved ones who are not formally Muslim. Dr. Elmasry cited the numerous verses criticizing those groups for various moral or theological shortcomings, and in particular the verse in Surah Nisa condemning those who believe only in some messengers but not all. I felt that Dr. Elmasry actually won that debate, if by a slight margin, because Dr. Hashmi didn't have a strong response qualifying the selective-Messengership condemnation verse. Dr. Elmasry also completely overlooked Dr. Hashmi's very valid point that Surah Hajj explicitly says that God intentionally created a plurality of religious traditions with different laws, thus implying the criteria of a saved Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian is not about their adherence to Qur'an and Sunnah, but perhaps merely their acceptance of Muhammad (saws) vis their acceptance of Qur'an's specific critiques of their

behavior and theology. Thus a Jew who does not support violent Zionism but accepts the Messiah already came and has no problem with Qur'an's limited critiques of Jews (the Tanakh is full of similar critiques) is theologically safe, and a Christian who is a unitarian is theologically safe, and lesser degrees of that form-fit may be subject to God's mercy. That's my reading on the perennialism debate, it's a yes-but answer.

Dr. Elmasry doesn't chuckle. He doesn't use the Muwatta to suggest we can all listen to music, even though the people of Medina were not anti-Music the way that latter hadith would imply. He makes decent points like how the Qur'an endorses defensive warfare but non-aggression in foreign policy and how the US would be more peaceful if it adopted such. He stands up for the Ashari theological perspective that verses in Qur'an about God's hands, face and throne are metaphorical and God is actually transcendent, making him a lightning rod for Atharis to swarm his Twitter asserting the opposite, which just shows you that there's no amount of orthodoxy one can adopt as a public figure in Islam to avoid getting brigaded by trolls. Since we're on this subject: why is there so much aggressive call-out behavior among Muslims even on subjects which there's fiqh or theological difference of opinion? Perhaps Muslims believe they are performing jihad and therefore safe from hipocrisy if they go to war for their religion, and if they can achieve that by being keyboard warriors instead of it's a relatively easy deal.

There are a lot of Malikis in the world today, probably over 300 million, there are more Maliki Sunnis than there are Shia, perhaps slightly more people than live in the USA. There are probably millions of "professional" grade Muslims who adhere to the Maliki school, Imams and Ulema, and especially at the rank of Mufti where one has formally earned the right to make ijthihad and issue your own fatwa, there are great differences of opinion.

Here's a list of things that are sticky issues from Sahih Bukhari hadiths that the Muwatta of Imam Malik suggests were not issues to the tabirren of Medina:

- The idea that your prayer is not valid if you don't send blessings specifically to Muhammad (saws) and his family (that comes from Imam Shafi)
- Permissibility of music
- Aisha's age
- Prohibition on "free-mixing" (though a lot of Malikis will still discourage it)
- The idea that making a 2d image, like a painting, is equal to the worst sin, though 3d sculpture is still ruled haram due to its potential use as an idol
- The idea that sending a lot of salawat on the Prophet (saws) is a top-tier religious activity is not reflected in the practices of the people of Medina
- Adult breastfeeding - it was clearly a meme back in those days in Medina but its roundly refuted
- The idea that Bidah is 100% guaranteed to lead to hell, Umar is quoted as citing something as a good innovation in the Muwatta

There are some things that the Muwatta, on the other hand, foregrounds as problematic from some of the reformists perspective. In the hadiths dismissing the idea of adult

breastfeeding as transmitting mahram (familiar) status, a man is having a lot of intercourse with his female slave and his wife makes a loophole move to resolve her jealousy, she breastfeeds the slave woman thus making her mahram to the husband and illegal to have intercourse with. The man is a good God fearing man despite his problematic sexual relationship, and he seeks the counsel of Ibn Umar, son of the second caliph, who gives him some sage advice:

Ibn Umar's remedy:

- 1) Beat your wife (just to set the tone)
- 2) Go have sex with your slave (the core legal remedy)

Because: the idea that adult breastfeeding transmits Mahram status is ridiculous, it's clearly something to do with a woman nursing an adopted son as an infant only.

Thanks Ibn Umar, for clearing a lot of things up! Most of all, showing us how to be a great husband.

Quranists love to cite the adult breastfeeding hadith as an example of the insanity found in the hadith corpus. A scholar at Al-Azar university, one of the pre-eminent traditional schools that mint Ijaza's and Mufti degrees, suggested that the issue of gender mixing in modern office environments could be mitigated by the married women simply, simply offering to put an exposed part of their body into the mouth of an adult male co-worker so that he might intimately suckle upon it until the point that this stimulates a flow of breast milk, and in so feeding, they became like family. Problem solved! How was your day at work honey? It was good you remember how you told me you were wary of my spending time with other men at the office? Well I breastfed two at a time and worked my way through the entire payroll of 14 guys at the office, and they are now therefore sort of my adopted sons. And the husband says: oh good, and was the traffic bad on your commute home?

Whereas, Ibn Umar proves that this crazy idea is false, and it also casts a light that maybe a lot of the allegedly authentic hadith in the later collections are also false, at least the one where the Prophet (saws) is alleged to command his wife Aisha (ra) to breastfeed male visitors so it's less awkward. But Ibn Umar also gives us proof that wife-beating and slave raping were standard practices at the time, which leads us to a deeper dilemma.

There's a hadith in the later collections where a woman comes to the Prophet with big green bruises on her person, greener than her emerald colored clothing, based on the apparent endorsement of Surah Nisa to beat wives if they have demonstrating nashuz, often translated as rebelliousness. This is one of the most problematic verses in the Qur'an and the hadith suggests that a lot of people were taking it quite literally and hitting their wives with full force. In the hadith the Prophet says something to the effect of - how can anyone treat the handmaidens of Allah like this - and teaches everyone to just give them a little thwap with two fingers, no thicker than a toothbrush. Problem solved! The importance of hadith demonstrated, right? Well the scholarly advice of Ibn Umar does not specify the degree of beating, he just says, beat her.

And there's no intermediate steps of neglecting the wife in bed or giving a verbal warning, by attempting a legal stratagem she has already, in Ibn Umar's estimation, demonstrated enough rebelliousness to warrant corporeal punishment.

A very good Quranist apologia for the wife-beating verse is that the word used is used elsewhere in Qur'an with a specific target, strike the necks and so on, and this is the only place in the Qur'an where there's no specific target. Clearly a lot of Medinans took the verse as permission to strike anywhere. The argument of Joseph A. Islam, author of Quransmessage.com, is that because there is a lack of a direct object the reading that the verse means "strike her out" e.g. initiate a temporary separation as the next step, can be deduced. It's interesting to note that the author of that explanation denies being a Quranist or a traditionalist but overly identifies as non-sectarian.

While I find that argument linguistically compelling and therefore evidence that God didn't mean for people to literally strike their wives, I am still troubled that God would choose such problematic language. It's like if God said to just bite her head off as a last resort, and women were getting bitten as if by vampires and suffering jugular bleeding, and the Prophet had to clarify that it means yelling at them, not too loud, not too long. Why use colloquial language that can be interpreted in an extremely bad way?

The Qur'an says there are clear and metaphorical (or allegorical) verses and we might surmise it's a test to see who can figure out, through a broader wisdom, which is which, yet the other parts of the same constituent verse are clearly not allegorical. Well, to say that men should not have intimacy with their wives, it says abandon them in their beds, it doesn't mean literally abandon the women while she's asleep, it just means to take a temporary break from intimacy. So perhaps that whole verse is metaphorical, and the word "strike" is meant as a metaphor for separation. Thus, the verse is a test, those who actually take it literally and hit their wives fail the test and the action is not a sharia-endorsed halal action, it's a sin, like how most people these days would imagine it, and they'll be held accountable for it on the day of judgment. This kind of makes sense as a revisionist interpretation, but it seems very tricky that God would actively invite men to sin, and this isn't a sin like drinking or looking at naughty pictures, it's inviting them to actively injure people who don't deserve it.

As for the slave thing, we'll talk about that more in the next chapter. But suffice to say that hardcore Quranist Baba Shuiab makes a tafsir of "ma malakat amanikum" as being people you have sworn an oath with your right hand (hence, what your right-hand possess) to take care of, feeding them, providing them housing, a way to become semi-mahram but not legally able to be intimate with, someone who needs help. Then you might expect this person to help out around the house, help with kids, do some cooking, to earn their keep. Sounds like a domestic labor relationship which could overlap with slavery. Shuiab then cites other verses about not taking them for fornication and as secret lovers, which apply to marrying Christian and Jewish women, as also applying to the malakat amani and thus, we unify the fiqh for marriage presented in the Qur'an: marry up to 4 and treat them all equally well, and ideally very well, swallowing anger.

There's a verse which I love, it's one of my favorite verses, that says something to the effect of: we created mates for you and placed Mercy and Compassion between you as signs for those who contemplate. I'm clearly deep in contemplation right now so I'll take a crack at this: The Most Merciful, The Most Compassionate are the general translates for Ar Rahman, Ar Raheem which are probably the most repeated words in Qur'an. A book which has more explicit mentions of hell than any other scripture and a lot of warfare in it, is replete with reminders of God's Mercy and Compassion, and our marriages are a microcosm of that. Yet marriages can have conflict and struggle in them as well. Our test in marriage is to take the best out of it, to use our wisdom and patience to sift the best out, and so too is our test in interpreting the Qur'an.

There's a chapter in Qur'an that specifically addresses Muhammad (saws) as Nabi instead of Rasul, and admonishes him for making something haram for himself to please his wives. This is usually read in the hadith context of the Nabi having had an affair with his Christian slave Mariyah and taking a break from it to abate the jealousy of his wives, Mufti Abu Layth believes that Mariyah was actually a wife and the verse is referencing doing injustice to the rights of one wife to please others. Quranists like to cite these verses as evidence that the Prophet doesn't have authority to swerve around what is halal and haram, which is a core argument for the need for hadith to help us avoid hadith-prohibited sins such as men wearing gold chains and silk shirts or having anal intercourse with their wives.

The hadith where the Prophet elucidates that "be intimate with them in their hearth" is a polite euphemism for God to prohibit anal intercourse, is not found in the Muwatta of Imam Malik, hence there are have been Malikis who have practice anal intercourse with a spouse, presumably with plenty of lubrication and hygienic precautions.

Shifting gears, just a bit: the fear of making images and losing all your prayers, charity, piety etc. and being instantly cast in the deepest pit of hell with traitors is something that Salafists have promoted based on some hasan and daef grade hadiths, and 3 of the Sunni Madhabs prohibit making 2d images where there are characters, animals with visible eyes and such, only the Maliki permit 2d images freely, though they deem it makruh. Thus we have a lot of the art history in Islam coming from Maliki countries, though the Ottomans picked up the slack later despite following the Hanafi Madhab. Abu Layth cites a medieval Maliki who would make a coo-cook clock with an mechanically animated bird sculpture to evidence the school's relative freedoms, putting his own soul on the line to make a point. Abu Layth is then continuing a long tradition of Malikis who pushed boundaries based on the Muwatta's preeminence over Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

There's a verse in the Qur'an referring to Jews and Christians that they will never be happy with you until you adopt their milla (religious way), yet Quranists like to distinguish themselves from traditionalist Muslims in that they follow the milla of Abraham as the Qur'an commands, not to the exclusion of the milla Muhammad, but that the Qur'an commands to a deeper tradition. Abu Layth will make fatwas about psychedelics, men and women praying

together in masjids, and a number of other “liberal” (more on this word in the next chapter) takes on Islamic traditions, to continue Imam Malik’s tradition of using a traditional frame of reference (the Sunnah of the Tabirren of Medina) to push back against the colonizing tide of people trying to make Islam harsher than it needs to be, armed with a mix of true and fabricated hadiths. The amount of hate that Abu Layth has gotten is tremendous. The amount of hate that a lot of people who seem to be reformists of Islam get, is tremendous. It’s hard to call Abu Layth a kafir because he does seem quite Muslim, or a jahil because he has the credentials from reputable universities, Yasir Qadhi called him a “dajjal with a little ‘d’” which Abu Layth took to with humor, playing the clip back many times and giving Yasir Qadhi the title of “beloved”.

Dr. Shabir Ally is a Hanafi from Canada who, following perhaps his own half-traditionalist/half-modernist usool, rejects some but not all hadiths graded as sahih by scholars from 1100 and 1200 year ago. He doesn’t issue overtly libertine fatwa and restrains himself from being overtly jolly, when asked about something like gay marriage he will give an elaborate, arguably waffling answer and sort-of not condemn or endorse it. People question if he is a true Muslim for his approach. Then as we can see from Dr. Elmasry who is squarely traditionalist yet anchoring on the moderate rationalism of the Ashari-Maliki theological school, he will just attract a more extreme crowd who demand that we interpret everything in the Qur’an literally including expressions about God having, they argue, physical body parts. You just can’t win with these people. You can only truly win or lose with Allah subhana wa talaha..

They will never be happy with you until you join their milla and associate things with Allah for which there has been sent no authority.

What’s important for Quranis to learn from the Maliki usool is that you don’t have to take an all-or-nothing approach to hadith. It seems like a lot of Quranists come into the din, change their lives significantly, getting up early for fajr, quitting harams, maybe even moving to Morocco or Turkey and getting married to a Muslim, yet they stop short of totally submitting to the massive body of stipulations, and question if anyone truly does.

For instance, when you go to the bathroom and clean yourself, do you always use an odd number of toilet paper pieces? Do you mean to tell me that sometimes you lose count and maybe use an even number? Don’t you fear Allah!? Whoever has obeyed the Messenger has obeyed Allah, and there’s a hadith that says always use an odd number of stones to wipe. Well we always use 0 stones because we use toilet paper in this age, alhamdulillah for modern conveniences, but does that mean we’re always using an even number of stones since 0 is an even number?! Are well all being fasiqeen every time we clean ourselves in the bathroom?

Don’t worry, the ulema say, via qiyas, reasoning by analogy, that toilet paper pieces are basically like stones in function. Ok so what if I use 3 or 5 pieces of toilet paper, and then 2 hours later before salah I feel like I need to be more thorough, do I use one or two pieces of toilet paper? Because if I use one, I’m on an odd number for that wipe session, but on an even number since the last time I relieved myself, if I use two them I’m on an even number for that session but an odd number since the last use of the toilet. Oh no! I better go on IslamQA and

see what the ulema of the madhabs say. There are thousands of weird edge cases like that and at least 2-3 answers between the schools for each. There's a verse in Surah Tawbah criticizing the Jews and Christians that they made priest and rabbis their lords, and you can see how Muslims have done the same with Ulema out of the fear of God and taking to extremes the idea of total compliance to *everything* that has ever been compiled in the history of Islam and endorsed by scholars.

Quranists look at the above dilemma, asking permission for every little thing we do from human experts, and say, well those people are mushriks. But then you're in this hardline sectarian life where it's you, the enlightened and holy minority, vs. the idolatrous majority. You go online and threaten the curse of Allah on the typical Sunni Muslim who will defend the supposed historicity of the Aisha-child-marriage hadiths, and so on. It's an exhausting way to practice religion, fighting everyone online. Well, I have some good news for you, in the Muwatta of Imam Malik's section on purity it says *if* you use stones. The power of clarity in hadith, and the danger of relying on later collections where the wording skews.

There's a lot of these conclusions we can infer from the Muwatta, either explicitly or reading between the lines by what people in Medina were *not* preoccupied with, otherwise Malik would have probably documented it in his fiqh/ethnography. Thus we can take a more chill attitude towards hadith, not categorically rejecting them nor becoming obsessed with nigh-impossible compliance to thousands of often contradicting ones.

I'll note, very subjectively, that coming into Islam and more so as I practice the Din, I get a feeling about things. When I was reading a lot of Quora question and answer posts during the conversion process, a Salafi lady (US resident I should add) gave me very dark vibes. Quranist guys gave me very chill, light vibes, this was my first experience with the movement. When I see people being strongly sectarian, issuing mass-takfir based on some theological point not explicit in Qur'an, I get a dark feeling, same with some but not all hadith in Sahih Bukhari. It's like how Spider Man has the spidey sense, one can cultivate a shaytan-shirk-sense. The Muwatta of Imam Malik doesn't give me that dark feeling, obviously there are a few parts that are quite problematic which I've discussed here, but overall it feels like a bunch of sane people trying to live good lives in piety with a reasonably degree of formal rigor, but not in an excessive degree where the formal religion becomes an idol alongside God. Am I now ready to confess a faith allegiance as a Sunni Maliki? No and I'll illustrate why.

Of all the great content that Mufti Abu Layth has put out over the years, once interesting note was his defense of Muawiya. Everyone who hates on the Mufti wants to find a fault line to chuck him out of Islam, or barring that, to say "oh he's a Mutazilite" or "he's a crypto-Shia" or "he's an XYZ sectarian" so that basically, he's not relevant to Sunni Muslims. What makes Mufti Abu Layth particularly dangerous to Sunni orthodoxy is that he's arguing everything from within a Maliki usool, even if he is stretching it to the limits or perhaps sometimes beyond the limits. And to assert his credibility as a proper Sunni, Abu Layth said that he actually respects Muawiya for being Machiavellian enough to pull off the complex game of power dynamics and creating some political stability as a result. See? He's a true Sunni.

Being a proper Maliki means respecting the other schools. Do as much or as little taqlid as you want, but you can't call Shafis mushrikeen for following an Imam who deemed Qur'an and Sunnah equal partners, you can't call Ahmed Ibn Hanbal a shaytan or breach the Sunni-sectarian boundary of criticizing Sahaba. The battle of al-Harra and subsequent massacre was in 683/60 and Imam Malik was born a full 28 years later, so trauma-scarring from that event does not mar Malik's benighted experience of the city. I'm not so against Muawiya and his son that I'm willing to make Dua with Shia for Iranian commanders who oversaw the killings of even more civilians than Yazid - in my own lifetime! - but I'm not going to pretend that God is ok with people playing power games to the extent of injustice out of an assumption that this is how life is and there's no better standard. Notably, Yazid died at the age of 40 just a few months after he waylaid Medina, the curse of Allah strikes again (unless you disbelieve in Qadr and think dying at 40 was a coincidence). Indeed, the Qur'an gives us a better standard, even if it lays a few linguistic traps for wife beaters and slave rapists. Which delivers us neatly to the next chapter.

What do “Quranists” have in common with “Progressive Muslims”?

This chapter is truly the beating heart and middle point of the book. Everything has been building up to this chapter in a neat succession and everything after this chapter is a collation of “where do we go from here?” left open by the thematic contemplation. Because reformation of a religion and the idea of progress are interlinked: progress implies we are at a point A and we want to go to point B. Or it might imply, we were at point A, we are now at point B and we want to keep going in a trajectory to point C, instead of point D or F.

Every debate had between Muslims in the 21st/15th century is against the backdrop of the preceding century, which was more different from the 19th/13th century than the 19th century was different from the 16th century. Not only is the present world very different from the medieval world, it's exponentially different. Population is exponentially bigger. Infant mortality is logarithmically reduced. Energy is exponentially more plentiful. People can purchase exponentially more goods and services for one hour worked. Information is hyper-abundant. Slavery is illegal almost everywhere on earth. These all seem like good things, hence, we have progressed as a species from a worse situation in the earlier ages to a better one. That's the baseline concept of progress that almost everyone agrees with.

There are many people, Muslim, Christian and even atheist, who think our best days are behind us. Which days those are depends on the ideological frame, for Muslims it might be the height of the Ottoman Empire, for Christians it might be the 1950s in the US, for an atheist maybe it was the 1990s, the year Clinton ran a budget surplus and The Backstreet Boys dropped their most famous album. For those who wish to remain optimistic about the future, there are many examples of how golden age were followed by times of stagnation and decadence before things got better again. For those resolute that the past was better, the moral problems of the past are often overlooked, Christian nationalists in the US who love the 1950s rarely lament the Hiroshima bombings as an historical mistake, Muslim traditionalists will not critique the use of enslaved Christian boys, forced to convert Islam, as Janissaries, and atheist dark enlightenment thinkers overly romanticize dictatorships.

There's a hadith to this effect, that says the best of people are the companions of Muhammad (saws) and then the generation after and then the generation after them. This hadith is a cornerstone of the traditionalist Sunni worldview (the Shia would not endorse this hadith as a big part of Shiism is being critical of some Sahabi) and for Sunnis who see hadith as

equal to the Qur'an, it makes a dim view of modernity part of the religion. Even luminaries like Tim Winter (Abdal Hakim Murad) and Hamza Yusuf, who are both reverts, very much children of the western tradition and Sufi-oriented yet also decidedly orthodox, cite this hadith and lament how people in modernity eat snacks. Indeed I am eating fried corn tortilla chips with cheddar cheese and Siracha, it's pretty good, my post-Ramadan acid reflux has smoothed out enough that I can eat the spicy stuff without being awoken at midnight, insha'Allah.

One of the key questions that plagues Muslims today, what happened and what can we do about it? Why doesn't Islam have as much power in the world today as it did 1000 years ago? Why are Muslim-majority countries mired in war, poverty and hyper-inflation? From a traditionalist perspective the answers might include: colonialism, adoption of secular attitudes by governments in Muslim countries, adoption of Riba-based currencies which lead to inflation, that the humbled position of Muslims today is a test from God, and of course, that the end-times are approaching and this is prophesied to happen. From a Quranist perspective, God gives the victory to who He chooses and Muslims got disqualified for their adoption for idolatrous practices, much like the Qur'an says Jews were permitted to lose the temple and be cast into diaspora for having rejected the Messiah. A more general progressive perspective would say, this isn't all that bad, Muslims still enjoy radically higher population than ever before (from <200 million in 1900 to over 2 billion today), there is more wealth to go around, and Islamic knowledge has never been more accessible, to solve the problems plaguing Muslim countries, they should further decouple religion and state, permit more economic freedom, and develop better civil institutions that are resistant to corruption.

Where Quranists and Progressive Muslims tend to differ is on the question of homosexuality and same-sex marriages, Quranists will say it's forbidden in Qur'an while Progressives will tend to be sympathetic to the quandary of homosexual Muslims. Many Quranists will assume that homosexuality is a learned condition that comes from culture, exposure to pornography and other developments in one's life, while Progressives will tend to believe that God makes people gay via recessive genetic patterns, and it's a test we should be sympathetic towards, up to and perhaps including having Imams marry them. There was a notorious Tiktok video that went around during Ramadan of 2023, where a guy goes through his Ramadan routine, praying the 5 salah, reading Qur'an while fasting, taking care of his two adopted children, and ending the day by giving his husband a rather tame kiss hello. The Muslims social media sphere was predictably livid, what's interesting about the video is there is a hadith that one who sponsors two orphans until puberty (similar to adoption, but even less involved) will earn Jannat Al-Firdaus, one of the highest levels of paradise, so the video puts a knowledgeable Muslim to a quandary: what would God do on the Last Day with someone who presumably has a lot of sins, having gay sex with his husband for many years, but also has heavy good deeds raising these orphan kids. These are the sort of questions of unconventional justice that Quranists are interested in, though usually it's in a context of non-Muslims who do good, rather than pious Muslims who are also gay.

There is a fair amount of overlap between the r/ProgressiveIslam subReddit and the r/Quraniyoon, the prior is notably about 3.4x larger than the latter, but many people who are not

conventionally gender-conforming, former leftists and other converts who would hang out with Progressive Muslim also tend to take a Quranist position so that Islam is easier to digest for them. There is also a Conservative Quranist subReddit with a much smaller population started by those who want to take a hard stance on this issue and a few others (some Quranists like to assume that khamr just means wine and that marijuana is halal).

I could end the chapter here but for the deep question that is central to the thesis of this book: how does religious reformation work in the full context of history and what can we imagine for the future of Islam rooted in the Qur'an? Every reformation has the challenge versus the old guard to assert that it is not just people reinventing religion to suit their desires, spoiled by the comforts of the current age and divorced from timeless truths, rather the reformists always need a narrative that says - we're actually going back to the roots of the religion that have been lost to decadent institutional revisions. The Protestants leaders in the 1500s were obsessed with Hell and Trinitarian theology and asserted that the Catholic church skewed biblical truths and introduced layers of idolatry and corruption on top of those truths - and they weren't wrong! The Salafists asserted that Sufi superstitions and deference to Madhab professionals was warping the understanding of Islam as practiced by the Salaf, and they were champions of a pure Islam from the Qur'an *and* the Sunnah, the true Sunnah they extrapolate from the six major hadith books but not the Muwatta of Imam Malik. Likewise Quranists are distinct from the broader spectrum of reformist Muslims in that they are asserting a methodology of going back to the Qur'an and demolishing multiple layers of idolatry, including those practiced by Salafists, such as making distinction between Messengers and holding one up above the others as the greatest of all creation.

The wider spectrum of what I call the second Islamic Reformation includes neo-traditionalist Malikis like Mufti Abu Layth, neo-Mutazila modernists like Dr. Javad Hashmi, political Progressives who happen to be Muslim, pious Muslims who happen to lean progressive, traditionally progressive lineages of Islam such as Ismaeli Shia, probably Ahmadis, Neo-Sufis, some older Sufi tariqas from Morocco perhaps like the musical Jalaliya, vanilla modernists, vanilla Mutazilites (there are still sheikhs that inherit that tradition) and probably a lot more. Part of progressive political movements in general is that they present inclusive ideals that are partially negotiable and therefore cast a big tent where lots of disparate groups can coalition for change.

Notably Mufti Abu Layth has said in an interview with an academic who overtly claimed the label "progressive" that he does not claim that label but knows a lot of people have laid it on him (probably for saying psychedelics aren't haram and for questioning the scholarship of Sahih Bukhari). Abu Layth also explicitly says he's not a Quranist but unlike many, is sympathetic to the love for Qur'an that the movement is built on. Like Quranists, Abu Layth is asserting that the supposed progressivism of his position is actually just getting honest with the very old tradition going back to the roots of Islam, and that these positions are therefore what God has always wanted, the Sunnatillah, the customs of God, are unchanging.

Ismaeli Shiism on the other hand has an unbroken tradition with a living lineage of Imams, the current Nizari Ismaeli Shia Imam, Aga Khan, resides in Portugal, an historically Catholic country. Nizari Ismaelism uses the current of living Imams to create a Catholicism-like flexibility in how the Qur'an and Sunnah are interpreted in different eras, there's a dispensationalism built into it. Whereas Jafari fiqh is often more strict than Sunni Madhabs, and dramatically moreso than the school of Jafar Al-Sidiq's student Abu Hanifa, the subsequent Imams in the Ismaeli lineage can abrogate that law to, for example, permit women to dress modestly without head coverings, or to permit Ismaelis to get Hajj credit by going to see the Aga Khan speak, instead of paying revenue to Saudi financiers in the hotels near the big clock tower in Mecca. Aga Khan is currently 88 years old and thus any year now there's probability that his son or perhaps grandson will succeed him as the Imam of the Ismaeli and we could get a proper Pope Francis type situation among the world's ~15 million Nizari Ismaeli Shia. Aga Khan himself was appointed in his grandfather's will, skipping a generation, due to a perceived need to have more youthful leadership in the atomic age. The Aga Khan development network allegedly has over ten billion dollars in assets and does Malala Yousuf type reformist work promoting education for girls in the Muslim world. We'll talk more about Ismaeli theology and how it overlaps with Barelvi Sufism and diverges from Quranist theology in the next chapter.

From a leftist point of view or a traditionalist point of view, the fact that the Nazari Ismaeli Imams are billionaires intermingled with European aristocracy is problematic, but for almost opposite reasons - leftists don't like billionaires in general while trad. Muslims are ok with them, they just prefer them to be particular to the Middle East and not mix with Kuffar. From a general progressive perspective, having a repository of wealth that invests in residential real estate isn't as cool as letting people squat in the apartments. There's a sense of materialistic impatience with any inequality as being unjust, due to a lack of belief in God's justice, but still a belief that justice is a real thing. Also progressives might not like that the ancestors of the Ismaeli Imams were rulers of the Fatimid Caliphate and then of the Imam Hassan's Hashashin Order is worthy of critique, but if you look at what my ancestors were doing 1000 years ago it wasn't much better.

Ever seen the show Vikings? I'm descended from basically all of those people except Floki who was a fictional character. Ever seen the show The Tudors? It's by the same showrunner. My great-grandmother's great-grandmother is the 7th generation descendant of Lord West who married the grand daughter of Henry VIII with Mary Bolelyn, technically their son and daughter were children of zina as Mary was married to Nicolas Carrey at the time. Byzantine emperors had a failson descendant, Issac Komenos, whose daughter ended up with a Scotsman and their daughter Mabel Stapledon married into the Calverly family who is my common link to about half of the US presidents I'm related to (I'm related to all but Andrew Jackson, Nixon and Trump) and founding members of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry which was the more elite version (you could get to the top in just 13 degrees instead of 33). I'm an 8th cousin on Queen Elizabeth, a 6th cousin of Elvis and the way that genealogy works exponentially, most middle class American and European white people are nth degree cousins of these people.

It's a classic staple of progressivism for rich white people to apologize for the sins of their ancestors. So I'll join in. Sorry for the Illuminati folks. I want to say they meant well, and maybe they did sometimes, but the results have been mixed and they hurt a lot of people. Also, I apologize for slavery, that was not very nice, modern employment systems are better, you get retirement benefits and health insurance.

Whereas, there are many traditionalists Muslims who associate slavery with Islam even though the Qur'an says that there is a challenging path of freeing the slave and feeding people during a famine and those who refuse the challenging path can go to hell, the trad. Muslims often defend slavery as being Islamic, they pine for the restoration of a caliphate where they can enslave people who have different religious perspectives than them, particularly when it helps them to have more (than zero) sex partners. Well, sex partners isn't the right term, they're slaves, not partners, that's key to the halalness of the sex in the minds of these worshippers of Shaytan. Pardon my French (it's a colonizer language).

Daniel Haqiqatou debated Dr. Javad Hashmi and concluded his opening statement by saying this is not an intra-religion debate but a debate between a Muslim and a murtad (apostate). I'm inclined to agree with that assessment, but not in the way that its issuer imagined. Mr. Haqiqatou posted a picture of a guy tipping over dominos of progressively larger size, the tiny domino had the text "Child Marriage, Slavery" and the big domino had the text "Belief in God" and the guy tipping the domino had a quote bubble saying "Don't worry, I'm religious!" This is the critique of the insidious modernist Muslim. Whereas a Quranist might say the meme presented demonstrates a shirk, whereby slavery and child marriage are made partners with God, perhaps the truth is somewhere in between.

Later in the debate Daniel points to a verse in the Qur'an that he believe justifies concubinage (as opposed to marriage) with enslaved women, which says:

O Prophet! We have made lawful for you your wives to whom you have paid their 'full' dowries as well as those 'bondwomen' in your possession, whom Allah has granted you.¹ And 'you are allowed to marry' the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and aunts, who have emigrated like you.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, The Clear Quran, 33:50

Here's Sahih International by contrast:

O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their due compensation¹ and those your right hand possesses from what Allāh has returned to you [of captives] and the daughters of your paternal uncles and the daughters of your paternal aunts and the daughters of your maternal uncles and the daughters of your maternal aunts who emigrated with you

In one translation we have punctuation and inserted bracket text doing a lot of lifting by trying to separate the semantic into two: an implied legality for intercourse and a legality of categories for marriage. In the other translation, which seems more faithful to the core Arabic that lacks punctuation, we seem to have one semantic, legality for marriage, with multiple categories conjoined by “wa” or “and”. Thus taking slave women as wives but treating them unjustly is a very grievous practice. The preservation of the Arabic text, even when it goes against the orthodox traditions, is indeed a gift from God, they have to twist the translations, use footnotes and bracket text to assert their interpretations and we can peel that back with simple logic, syntax and etymology.

It's not a custom among Muslims to permit their teenagers to sleep with cousins as a halal recreation, though cousin marriage is perhaps too common. The Mustafa Khattab interpolation of meaning is what the traditionalists tend to believe. However what is great about the Qur'an is you can drill down on the actual Arabic, which lacked punctuation, and see that it's one clause with 3 categories, non-slave wives with dowry compensation, female slaves and female cousins. Hence the Quranist reading about Ma-Malakat Amanikum is that they are entitled to the same marital rights as anyone else, they're an eligible category for marriage, and intercourse with them outside of nikah is zina, illegal fornication. The progressive reading is that even the marriage to them is problematic because their ability to consent to a marriage is questionable given their powerless position.

Notably one of the most famous Sufi saints was a woman, Rabia al-Basri, who was enslaved as a teenager and then freed by her slave master who was inspired by her late-night tahajjud prayers. In the story, it's usually made clear that her enslavement was illegal and a great evil, and her slave master did not sexually molest her, for he was a pious man who was moved by her devotion to Allah - the subtext of if he was pious to forfeit a legal option to force fornication upon her (also known by some, as “rape”) is usually understated. Good for him. Good for her. Bad for the slaver guy, we know where he's going. The intersection between a sense of progress and Sufi tradition will be relevant in the next chapter.

You may then ask, well, what about wives? Do wives enter into marriage with consent, and stay in marriage with consent? There's a reading of the Qur'an that converges between traditionalists and reformists, that yes this is the wisdom of Allah, to assert women having these fundamental rights, and for men to be accountable for how they treat their wives, both in the consequences of their marriages' quality and longevity, as well as on the day of judgment.

A lot of people trying to engage with Islam may be confused, which is it? Is God on the side of slave-rapists or on the side of women's rights to dignity and solvency in their consensual sexual commitments? It's got to be one or another right? God being pragmatic about improving the moral situation of a backwards people (the Jahiliya) is simultaneously a bad look from a modern progressive perspective, and inherently progressive, trying to get people from rampant slavery to a gradual abolition of slavery. Slavery was abolished in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, during my parents' lifetimes, in 1963 is the last year that slaves were sold in Mecca during Hajj, a lovely time for spiritual reflection and profiting off a human being. But this was only about 20 years (not 100) after slavery was abolished in the United States, prior to a public relations push

by FDR during WWII to try and seem morally superior to imperial Japan, there were people keeping slaves in dog houses in their back yards in a technically illegal but tolerated situation.

There's this idea called Christian exceptionalism that Christian values are more loving and tolerant than those of other civilizations, but Christian history is full of abuse of women, brutally killing people over religious differences, and slavery. In the 1800s in the US, a minority of principled Christian abolitionists from New England had to debate a bunch of, also Christians, from the antebellum south, suggesting God did not give them the right to brutally enslave people, rather the opposite.

The Islamic counter-argument is that Islamic slavery as more polite and not so brutal, but all the fetishization for raping harems full of concubines speaks to the contrary.

Conversely the Ismaeli Shia are the most progressive top-down and contiguous historical tradition of Islam today, the Ismaeli Fatimid dynasty was taken down in part because its autocratic mode of hereditary caliphate produced one bad leader who inflamed tensions, and in another part because it was so tolerant of Sunnis that they were able to conspire to flip the leadership after a few generations of succession plots weakened the hold. Then *that* Sunni Caliphate, the Ayyubids, were flipped because they enslaved their own armies, the Mamluks.

Getting lazy and enslaving people to fight for you seems like a bad strategy, why mistreat people and then hand them all the weapons? Not too sharp. The Ottomans had the same problems with Janissary rebellions but they diversified and were able to put down those uprisings. Whereas the Aga Khans of this era would say, yes slavery is bad, we have to keep moving forward towards moral perfection, there are still bright brown streaks of slavery apologetics in Sunni neo-traditionalist discourse.

Ok enough about slavery, let's get back to gender relations. The world has recently gone through the biggest human population boom in the history of our species, which made it easy for riba-based loans to get paid back, for pension systems to stay funded and for 20th century capitalism to stay in growth mode, and now people are generally having fewer children, leading to population stagnation and decline. A lot of this gets blamed on progressive values giving women too much power, or perhaps women are irradiated with trauma from a *his*story of male domination and are too wary of marriage to men, or they're getting comfortable with just having 1 or 2 children spaced out in their marriages.

There's also an Islamic argument that haram interest-based lending has created excessive inflation in the price of housing, which has made it infeasible for young people to get married and have children at a healthy age like 20 or 23, now you have to be 30, 35, even 40, with all kinds of degrees of years of savings, just to afford the down payment on a haram mortgage to buy a one million dollar house in a coastal North American or London environment. Hence western Muslims face a situation where they are expected to pay for a 20-30k wedding,

buy 20-30k in jewelry, pay for a 10k honeymoon vacation, a 50k maher, *and* buy a house before they can legally have sex.

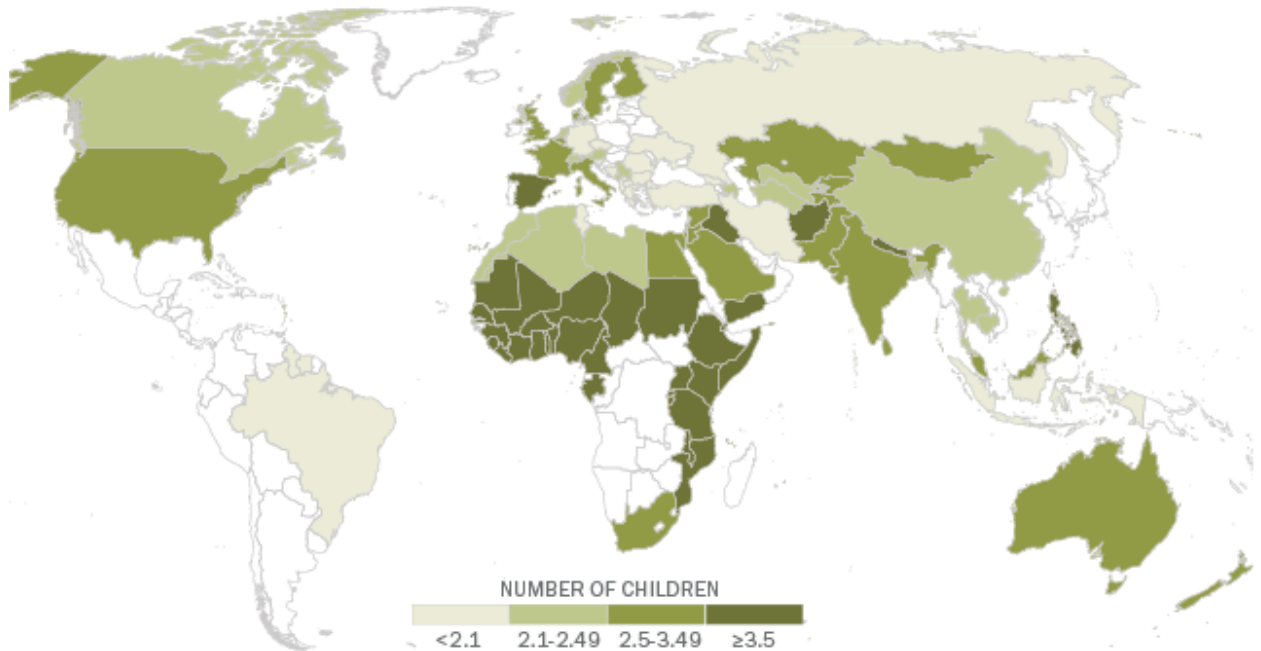
The Sunnah of the Prophet (saws) was to encourage people to marry young, and ulema would advise young men to *marry* a slave and not shoot too high for a first marriage, rather than risk sin or suffer in frustrated sexual limbo.

On the flip side in countries like Morocco or Pakistan, you can get a piece of land for maybe 5-10k USD and build a starter house on it for another 20-40k USD, reasonable, but these countries have low average incomes or (in cases like Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Egypt) highly inflationary and devaluing currencies. Thus the move has been for western Muslim men to save up some dollars or pounds and then buy a place in the old countries to put up for a traditionalist wife, a phenomenon often derided as "Passport Bros." I'm a Passport Bro myself, via the Latin America route, and if Allah had ordained for me to become a Muslim in my 20s, I might be living in Tanger today overcoming a hashish addiction. And if I were living in Morocco, who would I be married to?

Morocco is an interesting country to examine here because a smaller portion of the women tolerate polygamy, not wearing hijab is so common that the King banned the manufacture (not wearing, good luck with the sewing kits ladies) of hijab to fight Islamist terrorists (somehow too many hijabis gives them strength). You can meet Moroccan ladies who are psychologically not so different from Latin American ladies, and you can go to the country and try to impress the fathers of very traditionalist Niqabi ladies, the Sufi-inspired Maliki tradition of Morocco with a US-influenced monarch constrained by a constitution has a full spectrum of no-compulsion-in-the-Din on display. Morocco's reproduction rate? According to Pew Research it's just above replacement-rate:

Total Fertility Rates of Muslims, by Country

Number of children per woman, 2010-2015 estimate



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

Note: Only countries for which there are sufficient data are shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This map has a lot of data in it, but may not be up to date, these numbers may track lower today. It seems that the only countries with very high reproduction rates are also mired in a lot of extreme poverty or war, and the main difference between the allegedly decadent west and the traditionalist/religious east is between gradual population decline and a modest population net-growth. Nonetheless these differentials imply a demand for net-migration from east to west, and then we get the phenomenon where Muslims back east want more “progress” and outspoken Muslims in the west want more “tradition” (put in quotes because the meanings of these words are contextual). Then you get the non-Muslim traditionalists who get radicalized towards more intolerance and violent opposition to both Muslims and immigrants in general, and around we go.

The health of the Ummah, and indeed any society, is going to hinge on how well men and women can get along and keep each other content to do the very difficult labor of raising children, which cannot be easily relegated to machines or AI, unless you want to go full sci-fi. A lot of traditionalists across various religions dislike the Ordo-liberal pattern of national public schooling started by Otto von Bismarck, which carries through to controversies today about transgender and gay issues being taught at a 1st grade level. Often the question of progressive vs. tradition, inside and outside Islam, seems to hinge on these latest debates of which

marginalized groups deserve more rights and does that infringe on the rights of religious families, but I really think these things are secondary to the deeper issue of marital contentment. There's an implication in traditionalist apologetics that the strong patriarchal men were actually pretty genteel to "their" (note the possessive language) women and if they weren't, well, that's too bad and God will hold them accountable. Then the feminist counter-narrative is to question that apologia and swing in the other direction, perhaps assuming that men are categorically or at least statistically incapable of being decent husbands.

Part of the population stagnation crisis today comes from a phenomenon that I call "Japanification" which reflects what happened to Japanese demographics about 30 years ago as an example of post-industrial economic stagnation combined with lots of idle entertainments, porn and urban isolation of the individual from community. The "incel" phenomenon, a bunch of frustrated young guys get so displaced from intimate and loving content with women that they fester in hatred, therefore further removing them from a possible healthy relationship, is a secondary effect of this post-industrial stagnation. Islam, being God's perfect religion anchored on God's final textual message, ought to have a solution for this, and a big reason why I became a Muslim in the first place is that I have faith in that solution. However part of the reason I'm writing this book in the first place is I'm very confident traditional interpretations of Islam don't have the solution, and the reason why I'm writing this chapter with the book's overall thesis is I'm not sure the Quranist remedy of just reading the Qur'an and getting the right parsing of Arabic is enough either.

First, let's look at the conversion to Islam of Andrew Tate and Sneako, two YouTube influencers of varying magnitudes of fame that have had "red pill" ideologies and then sought Islam as a way of reinforcing those ideologies with the power of numbers, tradition and perhaps God also, if there's time. Sneako posted on Twitter, that Islam is great because it gives modern men a refuge from feminist, woke women, and instead they can find a traditional Muslimah who is racist and homophobic. Muslims then replied that racism is categorically haram in Islam, generally skipping the homophobic bit.

Homophobia is a term which contains some rhetoric, that traditionalists who push back against normalizing of rights for gay people are doing so out of fear (perhaps they're so afraid of gay people because they're secretly gay?), it came out of the early 2000s George W Bush politics in the US where gay marriage was an issue used to distract from the problems brought by the illegal invasion of Iraq, and coincided with a lot of actual fear of Muslims killing them or instituting a totalitarian Salafist world order, which became known as Islamophobia, and to this day anyone who criticizes Islam is often called an Islamophobe. This rhetoric is associated with what's called liberalism, but the term liberalism was itself rhetorically charged just a decade earlier in the 1990s by Fox News, it became a slur for people who voted democrat.

What's interesting about sectarianism and language is that, in order to keep creating divisions between people, it's necessary to muddy the meaning of words and divorce them from historical contexts. What we call a "liberal" or a "conservative" in a modern political spectrum are really all philosophically liberals in the tradition of Otto von Bismarck, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Rousseau, or even Cicero in contrast to Julius Caesar. But before we

deep dive the history of “liberal” and how Islam may have contributed to that story, let’s take a bit to talk about Andrew Tate.

Andrew Tate had a version of the Sneako tweet that was along similar lines but more extreme, befitting the nature of his content and rhetoric, and probably correlated to his 10x larger following. Extremeness plays very well in social media. His Tweet was a caricature of a western man who is complicit with the demographic stagnation, he lets his “best friend” wife have just one kid, he uses pornography while she is asleep to fill the void that the tyranny of monogamy imposes on his sexuality, and he basically a useful idiot for the decline of the west. Whereas Andrew Tate calls men to have as many wives as possible and reproduce - should I say: liberally? - with them.

Let’s be honest, toddlers are very challenging and daycare is expensive. In the global south daycare isn’t terribly expensive but in the north, it’s almost like a second mortgage. The economic reality of the global north is very unfriendly to big or even medium-sized families, and the economic reality of the global south is similar in a different way, unless one is in a minority that earns money over the internet and/or owns assets. Whereas Andrew Tate’s money is categorically haram in any interpretation of Islam. There were a generation of Saudis who rode a wave of oil money and would have multiple wives and 2-4 children per wife, all living on a quadra-partite compound together, they may have skipped breakfast most days, like an elementary school cafeteria. But even in Saudi Arabia a modern, urbanized population sees the polygamous batch-breeding operations of their grandpas as alienating to the grandmas, and prefer a cozy monogamy in the apartment with something on Netflix.

Tate also had a tweet to the effect of: if a man enjoys intimacy with women out of pleasure, he’s gay. This is an example of a genre of internet content where someone makes a possibly sensible point and then couches it in an absurdly extreme juxtaposition to draw more outrage, engagement and virality for the content, and a sub-genre of that is saying that heterosexual desire is gay. Again, the sensible point embedded in the post is that birth rates aren’t high enough, ta.

This might be a good place to note that about 3/4ths of the converts to Islam are women, and while many of them have a journey with comfort around wearing hijab, some of them go straight to voluntarily wearing niqab, so as to be freed from the male gaze entirely. What motivates these women, other than simply being guided by God? Perhaps they imagine that they can find quality men in the ummah where they are systematically scarce in the selfish, compartmentalized, secular world. Sometimes they marry Muslim guys with very good religious credentials, prays fajr on time every day, gives ketubah at the masjid, and then turns out to be physically abusive. There’s also a phenomenon of young Muslimah getting married at 18, guy starts quoting hadith about angels cursing wives who refused sex, they go - oook time to get a divorce - now you’re 20, not a virgin, guess it’s time to find a perhaps better husband, hit up the masjid network, 2nd husband turns out to be not much better.

If you check out the r/MuslimMarriage subreddit you’ll see a myriad of stories about people’s problems with marriage in the ummah. Cases range from western Muslims dealing with

western-specific issues, to Pakistanis whose parents are overly controlling (a cultural phenomenon that goes against Islam's principles) and everything in between. Lots of cases of people being sexual frustrated or neglected in marriage, more men but some women. Jealousy and cruelty crop up. One common thread is that the diffusion of "Red Pill" ideology through Muslim social media influencers is having an effect of making Muslim men *worse* husbands and corrupting otherwise healthy marriages.

One such influencer is Madhi Tidjani, who is not a member of the Tidjanniya Sufi order, but rather, is of Algerian descent, where the name is very common due to the popularity of said order. It's interesting to note that the popularity of that order is because its founder gave a contrast to the more conservative, much older Qadiriyyah order, emphasizing solidarity for the poor. Anyways, Madhi has had some times with women in his life, and oddly I can relate. He got married young, at 16, had 4 kids, then married again at 25 to an >10 years older divorcee, this upset his 1st wife but she stuck around. Then he married a slightly older widow at 27 and this is where, as he puts it, "the wheels started to come off".

His first wife had enough and sought divorce, which is her right, she then took it perhaps too far and abused the legal system to keep him from his children for many years whilst bleeding him for legal fees as he sued for visitation. This is an example of gender conflict escalating to a point of collateral damage to innocent children. His second wife quit a couple years after, his third wife describe that as a relief while she felt some lament at the first divorce due to the kids.

He later leveraged the popularity of his YouTube channel to attract unsolicited marriage proposals from numerous younger women of varying degrees of hinged-ness, deciding on one to take as a 2nd wife, for four in total, and his 3rd wife who stayed, still stayed, and God bless them all and grant them many years of health, stability and familial joy. Madhi tends to espouse a mix of Salafist and Red Pill ideology and glamorizes the thrill of sexual access that polygamy entails while under-emphasizing the evident pain, cost, effort, time and jealous friction that inherently goes with it. Why doesn't Madhi marry a 3rd and 4th wife? Maybe he's learned from experience that there is a point of diminishing returns.

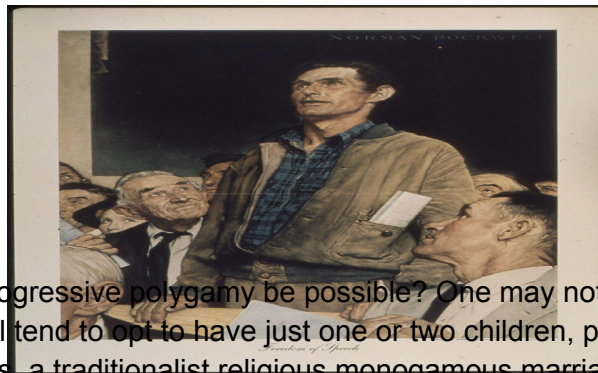
The line between a progressive who is a Muslim and a Muslim who is progressive often comes down to the polygamy question. While the Quranist reading is that men are allowed to marry multiple spouses and have to treat everyone equitably, many women are burned by the shadow of Muslim husbands having this option in the back of their minds and would like to revise polygamy out of Islam, while Quranists have a spectrum of readings qualifying and constraining it. Indeed the verse in Surah Nisa, 3, starts out with an "if" clause about the justice for the orphans, implying that these plural marriages must be done with a structural output rather than merely for pleasure. There's also, contrary to the reproduction-maximalism espoused by Tate or Tidjani, a strong emphasis in Islam of caring for children who are not biologically your own, lauded as one of the highest virtues, whereas focusing on hoarding wealth to maximize the quantity and worldly quality of your own children is a path to hypocrisy and the deepest hell.

Therefore, most Quranists will say that a plural marriage should satisfy one of the following conditions:

- 1) The new spouse is herself an orphan
- 2) The new spouse is a widow with a child
- 3) The new spouse is a divorcee who is facing social stigma about being a divorcee
- 4) The new spouse is a survivor of a dramatic situation such as a war refugee
- 5) An orphan is adopted and raised with the help of the new spouse

Progressives might argue that the verse was revealed in a context where >70% of the men of Medina had died in battle and thus there was a large population of new widows who needed help and companionship in the wake of their mourning period ending, and that these conditions do not exist today. Progressives also tend to argue that the verse about hymar, head coverings, which salafists re-branded as “Hijab” in the last century, is not specifically commanding head coverings so much as using head coverings (which were already used to shelter from desert sun) to create modest dress by covering a woman’s “adornments”. This we see a reading technique that can be used to argue against classical fiqh interpretations; one can either wed a verse to an historical context and deny this is a universal or timeless rule, or they can do the opposite and extrapolate a metaphorical meaning from the historical example. We’ll revisit this question of tafsir in more detail in the 3rd part of the book on usooli principles.

Before we move on, I want to note personally that I think polygamy can be good.



How could progressive polygamy be possible? One may notice in the data that in polygamy women will tend to opt to have just one or two children, people say this is a sign of lower commitment, vs. a traditionalist religious monogamous marriage a full-time mom has a career of 4 or 6 children produced and raised. I would argue that it’s natural for a woman to want

to have just one or two children, there's more to life and raising children is very hard and time consuming while also being tremendously rewarding, and in terms of the interpersonal relationship one has with one's children, you can get a lot of the qualitative breadth of it from just one or two. The traditionalist argument that everyone should be having more children often reeks of a bit of hypocrisy, since it's usually men making the argument, to the effect of economic use of those humans, military numerical edge, or some other society harvest of the mothers' hard labor. A man married to two wives who each have two children may be more convenient for the mothers than a monogamous marriage producing four children, it's not pushing the needle on replacement rate, but ok.

Then there's the question of sexual contentment. Data seems to indicate that men are not as sexually voracious as the culture makes us out to be, but that a greater % minority of men desire daily intimacy and release compared to women, thus there will inevitably be a portion of marriages where a man wants more frequency of contact than the woman. Religions, both Christianity and Islam, have proscribed wives to just have frequent contact that they do not fully have appetite for out of duty and submission to God's plan for stable families - this hamfisted recommendation might work for a while for some people but it's not a comprehensive solution for everyone over their entire lifespans. For one thing, intimacy is dramatically, qualitatively superior when both parties are enthusiastic about it, rather than as a transactional duty. Polygamy allows for the natural rhythm of male appetite to be matched by the natural rhythm of two women (or more, for an exceptionally active man). The trade-off is the women have to live with the periodic gut-wrenching feelings of jealousy that come from the multiplicity, versus the conflict or self-effacement of dealing with or acquiescing to an under-satisfied monogamous husband. In an Islamic context, the idea that life is a test and you're not supposed to be 100% happy all the time makes such trade-offs seem acceptable and endurable.

A lot of polygamy culture in Islam comes with a lot of fantasy, glorification and negligence for the clauses that accompany the permission in Surah Nisa, both the "if you fear injustice for the orphans" and the later verse about never being able to be perfectly just to them so be kind enough to permit divorce for those who are deeply unhappy with the arrangement. Instead we have guys trying to punch above their attractiveness-cohort while also marrying much younger virgins, and being extremely paranoid about their wife being exposed to any strange eyes, lest she stray. Polygamy should be considered primarily as a benefit to children, then to the women - there's a limited supply of good men and polygamy makes them less scarce while also endangering the goodness of those men - and finally it's a benefit to the man because it keeps him much more safe from haram, whether it be pornography or infidelity. Ultimately a man can only be safe from haram if he's willing to subordinate his nafs and showa (his ego and physical desires) to his spirituality, one can have four wives and still be tempted to adultery by sheer over-stimulation and an unmitigated feedback loop of pleasure seeking.

I also think the context for Surah Nisa has a lot of analogue today: there are many wars ramping up or winding down that have rendered literally millions of Muslim women as refugees and many thousands of them as widows. There are also hundreds of millions of women in their 30s globally, in and out of the ummah, that want to be able to have at least one child and experience intimacy in a committed context, and this culture of optimizing for 22-year-old virgins

causes prospective polygamists to neglect that cohort. A married man with some experience and stability marrying a 36 year old , having one child with her and adopting another, seems like an acceptable strategy to apply to polygamy. Additionally many single mothers are widowed by the irresponsibility of living fathers, leaving their child as a practical orphan if not in fact, and they can be included in these hub-and-spoke family structures as reverts to Islam or as people of the book.

Finally, polygamy provides a carrot for men to better themselves through piety and discipline which Islam demands of them, even if most of them do not actually practice polygamy, they may improve as husbands in existing marriages or prospective husbands enough to shift the tides of this demographic crisis. The theory goes, there is a shortage of *qualified* men, the best way to solve the shortage is to get more men to become qualified, and appealing to their basest desires in a highly structured and morally demanding context is a way to motivate them to qualify. The problem is that the influencers talking up that angle are mixing Islam with all sorts of negative associations, you've got Sneako asking Muhammad Hijab about the age of Aisha and Hijab giving him the assortment of refuge-in-relativism justifications that it was a different time.

Which brings us to the bigger question: moral realism vs. moral anti-realism and their overlap with Divine Command Theory.

Moral realism is this idea that what is morally right largely corresponds to human nature, we don't like murder because we don't want to be murdered, we don't like oppression because we wouldn't like to be oppressed, and that we can reason about morality on a natural basis without having to appeal to divine command. Moral anti-realism is this idea that everything that is good comes from God so if something like having a harem of slave women or marrying a 6 year old strikes you as somehow wrong, it's you who has the problem, because God signed off on it so you're going against God and therefore deserve hell. The question of God putting people in hell, either forever or even for up to 50,000 years, raises a lot of fear about God's power, that fear can leave questions of morality fitting human nature aside as we rush to submit to God's commands and avoid that horrible fate. Divine Command Theory doesn't totally overlap with moral anti-realism, Thomas Aquinas posited that what God commands is the morally realistic. The Islamic idea of fitrah, that God built into our natures a sense of conscience, would correspond to Thomist theology.

You could say the proliferation of moral anti-realism in Islam came as a result of the absurdity in some of the hadiths that became ensconced into Sunni Islam by Bukhari and other hadith collectors, that would be a simplification but it's the essence of the Quranist argument to simply reject hadith. Progressive Islam includes a lot more variety of usooli approaches to interpreting Islam but generally will allow for partial rejection or at least contextualization of such ahadith so they can be reconciled with what we tend to assume is just in modern times. Even Dr. Jonathan Brown, an American revert and Hanbali scholar who is famous for his apologia of hadith literalism, will answer the Red Pill-meets-Islam question by saying that the sunnah is of the Prophet (saws) serving his family with chores and things, and not of chauvinistic domination over the women. This man has also defended the Aisha hadiths extensively to the point of

dismissing all the evidence she was actually 16 or 19, and wrote a book about how slavery is just realistic and a part of history, but we'll take what we can get.

When you deeply analyze things, the changes in the modern context are inescapable even for the most traditionalist Muslim. Hamza Yusuf might cite the hadith about image-makers getting punished the worst on the Last Day, but he has no qualms about being video-recorded as a main output of his career, the permissibility of photography became dominant consensus among Ulema only in the last 10 or 20 years. The most ardent traditionalist speakers are living in Dearborn, MI or Birmingham, UK, in Saudi Arabia they are turning down the volume on the electronic adhan loudspeakers and opening up a Dragon Ball theme park. Jonathan Brown believes we should take hadiths as if they were words from God, but he isn't afraid enough of the hadith cursing anyone who contracts Riba to risk Federal penalties for not submitting payroll tax on his salary at Georgetown University, even though the US's Social Security Trust Fund invests in haram US Treasury debentures.

Liberalism seems inescapable, but what is it exactly? Is it an outgrowth of God's plan to improve human conditions so that our goodly nature could be more fully expressed as we come to know him? Or is it a big colonial conspiracy of Shaytan to blight out the truth of Islam with man-made, selfish arbitrary realities? Also why is it that when people defend the Aisha-child-marriage hadith, their arguments are a similar refuge-in-relativism argument that post-modern sophists use to argue for leftist ideals or whatever else, but then when they discuss anything else their argument is that liberalism is based in relativism and not objective morality? I can't really answer this last question, you can ask them, but I will try to answer the first question and tie it to the key question of why Islam is not politically dominant in the world today.

The Quranist argument is that Islam was good and then hadiths ruined it. This is simple enough or people to digest and stay in Islam, but it's a severe over-simplification. Ahmet T. Kuru's book "Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison (Cambridge University Press, 2019)" takes a more nuanced view that it was specifically in the alliance between the ulema and military-governments, which was ratified by Ghazali and then Ibn Tammiyah 200 years later, this is what I would call in my formation-reformation-2nd-reformation thesis in this book the "formation" period of Sunni Islam. There was a lot of vibrant and interesting stuff happening in proto-Sunni Islam with various historical tides of war and tyranny, but the overall wrestling match came to a close in favor of stagnancy in the 1200s. He dismisses the impact of invaders like the crusaders and Mongols, suggesting they were an inevitable side-effect of the brittle weakness of the stagnant, autocratic civilizations.

A Quranist would point to Umayyad hadiths about following leaders even if they are tyrants and say they reified the authoritarianism whereas I would argue that the Qur'an itself makes your typical Muslim - who pays attention - very afraid of being a munafiq an going to super-hell for draft dodging, retreating from battle or other acts of subversion to the military government (arguably, of emergency rather than default constitution) of Medina, and that this context was universalized to every Muslim ruler's command even if the wars were oppressive or

sectarian (therefore, complying might actually lead the warrior to hell). I'd argue that if Muslims had taken the Qur'an's endorsement of earlier scriptures seriously and put the Injil at least on the same level as Sahih hadith if not above hadith but below Qur'an, they'd know that Jesus (saws) warned of the hypocrite who teaches the law but impoverishes the widow, and not allowed such munafiqeen to become the rulers of the Islamicate.

My theory of history is that, irrespective of the extra-Quranic tools to best decipher the Qur'an and the scriptures as a whole, there were good things and bad things in both Islam and Christianity, as well as in human nature, and they all coagulated in waves to challenge each other into transformation. Christianity somewhat improved the Roman Empire standard of morality, then stagnated, Islam seeded ideas, science and math as well as a higher philosophical standard for theology, this then stagnated by influenced Europe and set the stage for the development of the Protestant Reformation, Renaissance and later the Enlightenment. The American Revolution via Free Masons as heirs to the Knights Templar, who were influenced by Islam, was also a part of God's plan. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

There is no compulsion in the Din, this is not just a metaphor or something to be interpreted in a narrow sharia context of tax policy, as if religious flexibility were just a vehicle for government revenue or the Qur'an's endorsement of broad-based salvation based on the merit of deeds were somehow abrogated or a lie. Hardly anyone respected "no compulsion in religion" until the American revolution and then it became the standard, and it was only under the cover of religious freedom that Islam began to expand again, through friendly migration and the good example of these western Muslims, who are not taking Jews and Christians as guardians, but rather living in post-Christian societies that have implemented Quranic commands better than Muslim empires.

And that's, that's progress.

What does Sufism have in common with Quranism?

I would not be a Muslim today if some VC-backed Israelis hadn't flown me out on British Airways, put me up in a 4-star hotel by the beach with an amazing breakfast buffet, and given me the opportunity to take a shuttle to Jerusalem and bump into a Sufi wandering in the Old City via the Damascus Gate. My afternoon with Shaykh Husayn changed my life and introduce me to the ummah in a beautiful way, it would take me another 11 years to become a Muslim because of how much modern, Salafi-influenced Muslims hate Sufis and made it seem like the light I saw

in Husayn was not the true Islam. Thanks Salafis, I got forgiven (according to the ijma about reverts having sins forgiven when turning to Islam) for more decadent secular humanist stuff thanks to your anti-dawah. One thing that stuck with me when I was hanging out with the Sufi tour guide, an old lady came up to him and chewed him out for showing me around the Muslim Quarter. I realized, old women are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in this society, which makes a Sufi like a Hindustani Dalit, Untouchable. The job of the Sufi is primarily to be disrespected by social consensus, and in that non-conformity, serve as an ambassador for Allah's light.

It wasn't always this way. Even 400 years ago, Sufis were highly respected and considered a high rank in the social order of Islam. This came with its own institutionalization, hierarchy and sometimes spiritual abuse, but at least the old ladies would not chew out a Sufi on the street for being hospitable to foreigners.

The first post I laid upon the r/Quraniyoon subreddit asked about Quranic basis for Sufi ideas. A lovely Individualist-style Quranist by the handle WhiteMalcomX castigated me for asking, he said pick up your Qur'an (or I suppose, access a website where the Qur'an is hosted) and read for yourself. Indeed much of the errata that goes with Sufism, the tariqa hierarchies, the extra prayers, the tawassul (prayers for help) with dead Saints praying to God in their graves, the syncretism with Hindu ideas, the belief that God has special friends walking the earth, the idea that Al-Khidr (the guy who murders the kid for being a kafir in Surah Kahf) is still alive, these are not really in the Qur'an. Nafil prayers are in there, and there's a verse that people cite to support calling on God's favored people for help.

During my conversion process I spent a lot of time watching videos from Pir Zia Inayat Khan of the Inayattiya tariqa and from Sheikh Nurjan Miramahi of the Naqshbandiyya tariqa.

Pir Zia's grandfather Inayat Khan came to Europe and then the US from India and met a lot of famous people like Henry Ford, his daughter famously died working a spy for the allies in France during WWII. Their tariqa extends from the Chistiyya which is a very old one, probably the 3rd or 4th most popular tariqa, based predominantly in India/Pakistan/Afghanistan, and despite being one of the 4 "orthodox" tariqas some of them will poke their eyeballs with a dagger and cause it to pop out slightly from the socket during the Urs celebration (death anniversary) of their founding Saint, Chisti. This sort of grotesque spectacle is cited by Salafis as an obvious reason for their anti-Sufi reformism. Meanwhile orthodox Sufi tariqas criticize so-called "neo-Sufis" like Inayattiya for inducing Christians into their order and aligning more with modernist values which are seen as colonial and half-way towards kufr. Basically, a lot of Muslims thinking the other Muslims are kuffar, Sufism isn't exceptional in that way.

Indeed the term "Sufi" is a neologism coined by western orientalist scholars to try to make sense of why some Muslims seem really nice and spiritual while the other Muslims seem really grumpy and angry and neurotic about keeping count of how many times they wiped in the bathroom. There's a meme that Rumi became disassociated from Islam by western translators and then eastern translators re-translated those translations back into Farci or Arabic and made

him sound like a syncretist who disassociated from the Quranic covenant, only recently has there been a revival of Rumi's Muslim identity in popular circulation and his statement that he is a slave of the Qur'an and dust under the feet of his master Muhammad. There's also a biographical note that Rumi may have had homosexual feelings that he channeled into love poetry for God instead of doing faisha, and in that context his ardency to be credited as a devout Muslim makes a lot of sense, his sacrifice is noted.

Indeed Inayat Khan was like a significantly less successful Ram Dass in bringing Islamic mysticism to the west and impressing rich people who liked the vibe and disassociated it from the legalistic concept of Islam. Whereas Ram Dass and others brought Hindu and Buddhist ideas to the popular fold of western youth in the 1960s and basically transformed American culture, best exemplified by Californian culture, into a spiritual-but-not-religious, individuality-lifestyle-marketing, post-Christian melange of sex, drugs and progressive rock with mandala visualizations. Inayat Khan's western-friendly transpose of Sufism couldn't compete with the hard yoga + LSD combo.

Naqshbandi on the other hand markets itself as one of the oldest and most orthodox tariqas with its founding going back to the 1300s, and whereas most tariqas are vaguely-Shia-associated via tracing their spiritual lineage back to Ali (ra), Naqshbandi trace their spiritual lineage to Abu Bakr (ra). It's said that George Lucas visited the Naqshbandi masjid in the Bay Area and got his idea of the Jedi in Star Wars from them. When I learned this, my conversion process accelerated, me wearing a black hoodie all the time is kind of like Luke Skywalker walking into Jabba's palace with a hood on, it's cool, Islam bro.

Shaykh Nurjan lives in Vancouver and had a successful business career building medical imaging centers and applying a bit of real estate acumen before flipping it into expanding the Naqshbandi franchise in western Canada, today he has a successful YouTube channel with about 120k subscribers, which exceeds all of the major Quranist YouTube channels put together, but dwarfs your typical mainstream Sunni dawah channels. Indeed, my understanding of Islam is lit by the candles of social media footprints.

When I say, Naqshbandi franchise, I mean that this tariqa has presence all over the world, even in South America, and therefore owns a lot of real estate and runs a lot of charitable operations. Like any large group, there's a lot of variation within it, there was the Naqshbandi army in Iraq who were presumably more wise about use of force than your typical militia, the son of Llewelyn Lee Vaughn joined Naqshbandi instead of Inayattiya (those are your two main options in California) and this tariqa is the closest thing to a major organized international system among tariqas.

At some level the content of Shaykh Nurjan's lectures would be agreeable to Quranists, he criticizes the bloodless legalism of Wahhabi approach to Islam, emphasizes good attitude, good manners, good deeds, and the primacy of love and mercy in the Din. Then there's a host of mystical accoutrement that Quranists would reject as being extra Quranic, but the main thing they would take issue with is the Barelvi doctrine that the Prophet Muhammad (saws) is truly

distinct and above the Prophets Jesus (saws), Moses (saws), David (saws) and so on, not just for being last or being hailed as the greatest human to ever live (this is generally standard Sunni Islam and Shiism takes it even further by extending that through his daughter and lineage, which Quranists disagree with) but actually this one prophet is also a cosmic intelligence that was awarded this universe to rule, sees and hears everything, can receive your prayers etc. Salafists tend to think that is going too far and is shirk, and Quranists tend to think Salafists are mushrikeen for calling Ibn Tammiyah Sheikh Ul Islam, so you can imagine most Quranists are pretty far from this idea.

In India the once-Quran-centric Hanafi Madhab has evolved amidst many centuries and many hundreds of millions of practitioners, and has bifurcated into the Bareilvi movement and Deobandi movement. Bareilvi's tend to buy into the idea that there's a primal intellect known as the Nur Muhummedi which either *is* personally or had incarnated into the human known as the Seal of the Prophets, whereas Deobandis are basically the Hanafi version of Salafists (whereas Salafists are rooted in Hanbali fiqh). While India and Pakistan are the Muslim demographic center of gravity east of Cairo and West of Jakarta, the ripples of these movements extend into Afghanistan and central Asia. During the rule of the Deobandi Taliban, they would tell Sufis not to do their zikr too loudly or too rhythmically, lest they trip over the anti-music tafsir of a Salaf on the verse about not letting idle hadith deter one from the path of Allah. Hey you Sufis! Keep it down!

I had to unsubscribe from the Muhammadan Way Youtube Channel when the Sheikh said that the Dajjal would try to convince everyone to worship God Alone during the end-times, breaking out link to Muhammad (saws) who is the key and essential bridge between us and God. Whereas Sunni dawah content will often promote the idea of an imminent end times, their warnings of Dajjal consist of him being the expected Jewish Messiah who will rule from Israel and demand worship directly. The Naqshbandi version of this is that, no, the Dajjal would basically be like a Quranist or a Salafist, promoting the idea that Islam is about praying to God Alone, directly, without intermediary, which to my understanding is what makes Islam different from Christianity. I saw a comment before I closed the tab, someone calling Muhammad "our heavenly father" - I was like "adios muchachos!"

The Inayattiya take on Nur Muhummedi is more in line with making no distinction between the messengers. Pir Zia will often invoke "the spirit of guidance" to open his ASMR style meditative lectures, and in a lecture on the matter highlights the idea that the Nur incarnates or instills in various prophets throughout the ages. That particular lecture still made me feel uncomfortable, and I really enjoy the nature meditations, the talks about Hindu storytelling, and most of his other content, but I don't want to go near Shirk. There was a lecture where Pir Zia was reading from a Hindustani thinker who invokes the Lord of Yoga, and as he said this his throat became dry and he had to get up and fetch himself a glass of water, leaving us to linger on the possible shirk. When he comes back he continues and notes that Sufi Muslim thinkers had interpreted the Lord of Yoga to simply be Allah - whew, shirk averted. After seeing how much fighting there is between Muslims I later came back to Pir Zia's lectures with a renewed appreciation that he is a rare, consistently 100% non-sectarian and peaceful teacher.

Morocco has a big tradition of many varied Sufi tariqas ranging from wandering musicians to the orthodox to some that have a history of resistant French colonialism. The African tariqa tradition is more removed from this idea of God having one specific prophet as a diffuse cosmic intelligence and special lieutenant. A big reason why Beatniks, rockers and hippies went to Tangier a lot in the 1960s was because a well-to-do white drug addict expat got the bright idea of becoming a music producer for Moroccan musicians, and this is probably to the credit of the diverse Sufi heritage of Morocco (not to mention the hashish). Since the theology of these various tariqas doesn't get into potentially shirky prime-intellect concepts, mostly focused on purification of the heart and beautification of society, Quranists may find a lot to like in that vein of minerals.

Ghazali and Ibn Tammiyah, and even Al-Wahhab all considered themselves to practice tasawwuf, the Islamic Science of spiritual purification, which is how Sufism was known before orientalists gave it a sticky short-hand that reminds one of the Greek Sophia. Modern neo-traditionalists, who are mostly reverts by the way, such as Tim Winter and Hamza Yusuf identify with that tradition, the moderate Sufism where you try to be a nice guy, moderate your tone and guard your tongue from misguidance, without any esoteric weirdness. Say what you will about their hadith-quoting, they're a lot better than your modern shock-jock style YouTuber dawah bros.

While tasawwuf is said to root in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (saws), it seems like it's super-charged in the Shia tradition before disseminating into the proto-Sunni tradition a couple centuries later with figures like Rabia Al-Basri. A key thing in Shiism is that Ali is qualitatively more spiritual than Abu Bakr and Umar, wearing green and being careful not to step on ants, and this carries on in his kids and the kids. We have various batini traditions in Shiism where there's an exoteric baseline for the lay person and an esoteric hidden set of truths for the initiated, which has a lot in common with Gnostic Christianity and Greco-Roman mystery religions, Hermeticism and even more ancient mystery religions going back to the Old Kingdom of Egypt and the magics of Horus. Once you've carved out a barrier between logically analyzed religious law derived from scripture and intuitive feel-good esoteria, you may be giving yourself an antinomian license to bend or break religious law, and it's not hard to imagine why Christian and Muslim orthodoxy has always thought this sort of thing to be heresy.

Sunni-Sufis have a tension where they want to have just a little bit of esotericism, as a treat, but they need to assert traditional Sunni orthodoxy like saying maybe Muawiya wasn't so bad or that the Ruh Qudus in the Qur'an is just a synonym for Jibreel. When you become marginalized you either get radicalized in fighting those who marginalize you, or you become radicalized in trying to compromise with them by pleading orthodoxy in some respects while reserving your differences in others - in business negotiation we call this giving away nickels to keep the dimes. The identity of the Ruh Qudus is, to "orthodox" Sunni-Sufis, one of those nickels, they don't realize it's a special edition platinum coin. In Shiism the idea that there's a holy spirit, it's just not part of a trinity, and thus there's forms of revelation other than textual transmission via Jibreel (e.g. the Qur'an) or more directly behind a veil (e.g. the Torah) is the

key to the idea of imamate. How are these Imams special if they aren't prophets? They have Inspiration.

Probably the most batini of the Shia traditions is Nizari-Ismaelism. The Nizari thread of the Ismaeli lineage were the ones who, after the Fatimid Caliphate, holed up in fortresses on mountain tops in north-west Iran and Anatolia and had an order of Assassins who bought them a period of stability (prior to the Mongol invasions) by killing *so many* Sunni leaders, the only people they didn't succeed in assassinating were Saladin and Lord Edward (before he became King Edward I of England, as seen in the film Braveheart). They were known as "Hashashins" for their use of hashish to get in the right mindset to go killing again, hence the word "assasination". Today the Nizari Imams do humanitarian work and utilize Portugal's favorable lack of inheritance taxes in conjunction with Swiss Trusts and other civil instruments, but there was a time when the lineage relied on hashish, mountain fortress walls and poisoned daggers as their instruments. Robert Anton Wilson wrote about them a lot, which bread-crumbed me towards Islam four years before I met the Palestinian Sufi. May Allah have mercy on the soul of Robert Anton Wilson, I have a feeling like he might need it.

Hegel's concept of progress hinged on a post-Enlightenment idea of holy spirit, the spirit of the age. You may have seen the conspiracy documentary Zeitgeist in the late 2000s, that's named for this Hegelian idea. His concept of dialectics is basically jihad extrapolated into modern history. Marx was like the evil intellectual heir of Hegel, divorcing the dialectics from the spirituality and turning it into endless class war and tens of millions communist purge victims to come. Oversimplifying, you can go read 20,000 pages across a few dozen good books to learn more about Hegelian philosophy.

When Quranists read Qur'an and they come to different conclusions than traditional orthodoxy, are they simply reading the plain meaning of Arabic without distortion, or are they using other Quranist scholarship, philosophy embedded in their modern upbringing, and a socio-political lens influenced by God's plan via Islam (as discussed in the previous chapter) and also the Enlightenment? I think it's the latter, otherwise I wouldn't even bother to write this book I'd just post online periodically about how everyone reading the Qur'an with extra-Quranic guidance is a mushrik and call it a Din. Also why is it that the more inclusive and justice-oriented readings that Quranists tend to extract from Qur'an largely overlap with the tafsir of the Nizari-Ismaeli Imams? Is it because we're all children of modernity or God's dropping hints to us or some mix of the two?

What's distinct about the Ismaeli approach to tafsir, which agrees more with modernist religious scholarship but seems like kufr to most Muslims including Quranists, is the idea that you can read Qur'an not as the verbatim Words of Allah but as *inspired* by Allah but with the personality of its human interlocutor involved. Thus the Ismaeli Imams ability to recontextualize Quranic law in accordance with the spirit of the age becomes more flexibly in demand. Quranists generally agree with orthodox Sunnia and Twelver Shia (and Ibadi) doctrine that each word in Qur'an was carefully chosen by God, relayed via an arch-angel and mostly copied accurately and preserved (give or take some small qiraat variations).

Sunni-Sufis on the other hand stick to the verbatim dogma about Qur'an's wordings but they go deeper on the question of which verses are literal vs. allegorical and say, some verses are both literal *and* allegorical. Sufi tafsir is often not intended to contradict conventional tafsir but to add a 2nd layer of interpretation. For instance the fall of Iblis from being beloved by God to being the Shaytan, most people read that as simple disobedience and arrogance, but Sufis also note that Iblis was kind of a Wahhabi, too dogmatically monotheistic to dare bow to other than Allah. What's funny about that particular layer 2 tafsir is it's a good argument for traditionalists against a Quranist, who refuses to bow to commands of a dead human prophet instead of obeying God alone through Quranic commandments. Not saying that's a locked argument, it depends on whether "take what the Nabi has given you and leave what he forbids you" is literal to the context of war loot in that verse or can be extrapolated as a metaphor, and whether obeying the Rasul's resolution in all disputes was literal to the potential munafiq of Medina while the Rasul was alive, and whether "Obey Allah and obey the Rasul" means the same thing or two different bodies of law. However the Iblis-was-too-monotheistic analogy raises a prospect that one can bow to Adam or other symbols of Allah's power without being a mushrik.

Is it shirk to believe in a prime intellect? First off, we'd probably prefer, as Muslims, that Christians be unitarian instead of trinitarian since the Qur'an clearly says it's better not to say "three" in Surah Nisa even if the later harsh warnings for Christians in Surah Maidah refer to gnostic heresies that are also considered heretical in orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism (such as Tritheism and Marcionism, Modalism and Adoptionism may be less hated though). The possible order of dislike by God of Christian doctrines may follow:

Most hated to accepted to pleasing:

- Tri-theism, straight up polytheism
- Marcionism, Jesus is not an emissary of another God or - by himself - God over the Yahweh of the Old Testament, straight-up polytheism again
- Orthodox Trinitarianism - it's arguable if this is shirk or not, maybe it's kufr, maybe it's just a significant handicap and still save-able if they are devout to the Injil "as revealed" which might imply Gospel of John and its implied trinity? Orthodox Trinitarianism implies God is One but how also 3 persons or hypostates? It's a mystery.
- Modalism - Qur'an says God didn't incarnate and holy spirit is not just God in diffuse form, and this disbelieves in the words of the Qur'an, but at least it's just getting God's attributes wrong.
- Arianism - Jesus is God's created son, this goes against Qur'an but we're practically at a Unitarian Christianity here (with an upper-case "U")
- Adoptionism - this may be what is implied by the author of the Gospel of Mark, this is also contra-indicated by Qur'an and it's making distinction from other Messengers like Israel (saws) who is also entitled a "son of God" in the traditional

Hebrew colloquial sense, but this seems to be about on par with orthodox Sunnis calling Muhammad (saws) the greatest of all creation.

- Quranic Christianity - Jesus (saws) is your favorite Messenger/Prophet and you make distinction, following his sharia, but your Christology is that the Messiah was a created being who happened to be given extreme favor in terms of provenance, miracles and protection-from-sin.

The idea of the Logos is one that haunted the Mediterranean region since the Hermeticism religion got big and this has had an influence alongside Neo-Platonism in Christianity and Shia Islam, while Judaism and the Sufi-averse thread of Sunni Islam have tried to cauterize it out of religion. Dr. Khalil Andani has done a good job of articulating the logic behind Ismaeli apprehension of a First Intellect, which like the Barelvi Sufis they attribute to being the Nur Muhammadi, based on the Necessitarian theological concept derived from Neo-Platonism. Basically (not doing the idea justice) if God is the first cause and God is one then there has to be a first effect and a single one at that, and this is the Nur Muhammadi in Esoteric Shiism and Barelvi Sufism, or the Christ Logos in Trinitarian and possibly variations of Arian Christianity, or the Ruh over the waters in Genesis in some esoteric takes on Judaism, or the Adam Kadmon in Kabbalah Judaism, or the Barbēlō in Gnostic cosmology which is the first emanation taken from the emanations-based cosmology of Neo-Platonism.

When I was in Catholic school and we were taught Plato, I always kind of balked at it, I preferred the funky philosophy of Epicurus and Nietzsche. Neo-Platonism I am more ok with because I enjoyed Neo in The Matrix, so if there's Platonism with Keanu Reeves, I guess I can dig it. And who was Neo in The Matrix? He was The One, a messianic figure who challenged the Demiurge-like Architect of The Matrix to free people from a Plato's Cave false reality.

The Ismaeli and Barelvi idea of a First Intellect is more Islamic than the Christian idea of Trinity but perhaps on the level with the Arian idea of the Logos as a the Messiah a special First Creation of God's. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe in an even more Quran-compliant version where Christ was an incarnation of the Arch-Angel Michael, we're not even getting creative with the cosmology here, yet Muslims are so brainwashed by exclusivist tafsir that tries to nullify the repeated verses of Qur'an endorsing salvation for non-Muslims, that they will see a video of Shakh Uthman (a former gang member turned orthodox Sunni dawah bro) talking with Jehovah's Witness missionaries and comment "may God guide them to Islam". I mean sure, guide them to Islam, as long as it's not one of the corrupt kinds of Islam that makes converts more evil, but Muslims should be more grateful for unitarian Christians who are basically Qur'an compliant - it shows respect for the Qur'an.

I've met two reverts who came from Jehovah's Witness families to Islam, it seems like the main pipelines for reverts are Unitarian Christian, Catholic, jaded non-religious and spiritual-but-not religious. The Unitarians take to Sunni Islam easily, the Catholics tend to prefer neo-traditional moderate Sufism or Shiism, the non-religious tend to join the dawah bro fraternity without going deeply into theology, and the former psychedelic users tend to be drawn in through the esoteric stuff.

A contrasting but similarly mind-expanding advanced theological angle is the school of Ibn Arabi and Wadhat al-Wujud. This is commonly also tarred as shirk or pantheism by Salafis, but like where Musa met Khidr in Surah Kahf, it is where two seas meet - the orthodox Asharis will tend to humor Ackbarians (students of the Ibn Arabi theology) so long as they are traditionalists. Take for instance, Shaykh Hasan Spiker, who refers to Muhammad (saws) as "Master" and is big on deconstructing western-adjacent thought but has some good ideas for making Islam more appealing for westerners. In an interview with Dr. Elmasry, the anti-perennialist debater vs. Dr. Hashmi, Hasan Spiker explains that the Ackbarian adeeqah is basically the same as the Ashari adeeqah it's just got more vibes, and Ibn Arabi's idea of the fires of hell cooling eventually was him stepping out of orthodoxy but don't worry, God will surely torture every kuffar continuously forever. It's an interesting interview, look it up.

A better way than to say "Unity of Being" is pantheism or panentheism bridged over to Islamic theism, is to say that it's an even deeper appreciation of God's transcendence within theistic piety, not that the world is God, but that God is the only existence. You might say God's attributes laid upon our hearts and in the creation are like a cryptographic signature or a hologram. Ibn Arabi had to be careful not to get killed too soon back then so some Neo-Sufis like Mushtak Ali of The Nine Sided Circle say he was b.s'ing so people wouldn't figure out the dangerous stuff he was saying. Apologists like Hasan Spiker insist that the complex couching of language around the Unity of Being idea was instead due to Ibn Arabi's robust avoidance of shirk in appreciating God's mind-blowing transcendence.

Ackbarian theology (the short-name for Wahdat Al Wujud) gets around the Necessitarianism that leads Neo-Platonic theology to a necessary First Intellect in that it's a radically apophatic theology (where God is not defined explicitly but by contrast to what God isn't, God isn't dead, unjust, evil etc.) - God is so beyond anything you can imagine that God isn't even understandable in apophatic theology! It's like, meta-apophatic theology. Is there any evidence for this in the Qur'an? The Qur'an says you're facing God no matter what direction you turn, there you go, that's the Qur'anic evidence for all this. I know, but the Qur'an's deep, people can take a verse and run with it. The Barelvis justify the primal Nur Muhammadi based on the verse that we were created from One Soul, even though that seems to be about Adam (saws).

Moses Maimonides is considered the top Jewish scholar of the last millennium and put it more simply: everything is God's creation and a result of God's thoughts. With that twist, we avert the shirk while simply appreciating the idea of Unity of Being. But Hasan Spiker cannot simply bring that argument to an interview with an orthodox Ashari, because for one, it's not Ibn Arabi's words, and two, it goes against the Uncreated Qur'an dogma that became adopted into Sunni Islam because Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was enough of an old spitfire to take a whipping everyday for years and this led to a political repudiation of Mutazilite theology not based on argument or merit but as a political-historical accident. Or perhaps it was Qadr!

If Maimonides is right, yeah everything is created but God, everything is a bi-product of God's thoughts, including the revelations, which are therefore also created. It's too simple to be

acceptable! Salafists will say about, e.g. the Torah that they make not distinction between messengers and thus believe the Torah is also from God's uncreated thoughts. So the rules about not sowing two different crops in the same farm plot or marrying your brother's widow is not circumstantial to the Jewish people and their context but an eternal inevitability, just like the Qur'an's laws and verses, and presumably also the human actions or complaints that triggered some of those revelations, we already covered this in the Ibadi and Mutazilite chapters. The problem with this argument is that Jesus (saws) was *not* given a textual scripture, the Injil *is* prophetic hadith and according to Qur'an, Jesus was kalimatillah, *a* word *from* God. Not *the* Word of *God*, we're not making partners or even a prime intellect here, but Qur'an says it. A lot of Muslims including Quranists will say, well yeah he was created from a word "be, and it was!" just like Adam. But Adam is not called kalimullah.

I have the unorthodox theory that Jesus (saws) was himself a walking scripture, and my evidence for this is in the dead sea scrolls, the Q Gospels and the tracing of overlaps between the Gospels. The idea that the Quran endorses the Gospel of John by popular momentum might save my orthodox Catholic family members from hell and give them credit for their prayer and charity, would love to see it, but it seems extremely discordant with the Qur'an's anti-Trinitarian message. The opposite idea - that God gave Jesus (saws) the Injil scripture but - whoops! - we'll never get to read it because it wasn't written down and the Gospels people have are 100% corrupted, is equally unsatisfying.

The idea I had before investigating Q was that John was 80% corrupted (there may be a few authentic sayings in it) and Luke was 60% corrupted (the nativity is corroborated by Qur'an and it has overlaps with the earlier ones) and Mathew was 40% corrupted and Mark is 20% corrupted (mostly in the narrative wrapping) was decent but left a lot to the imagination. Having read the Gospel of Thomas and Q, I can say that gThomas contains Wahdat Al Wujud type ideas which are explicitly kept batini, inner circle only, between Jesus and Thomas. It's possible that the Wahdat Al Wujud stuff in Thomas as inserted by trippy gnostics over a century later, but it has a lot of overlap with 1st Q, the stuff about kingdom of God is within you and without you, or about finding me in between the splinters, or claiming to have a light going back to primordial times, is not as explicitly in 1st Q as in Thomas. So you can sink your teeth into Q as the Quranic Injil, the hadith kept by the Ebionites and followers of James before Paul turned everything into a Mithraic greco-Roman mystery religion, and only associate Jesus (saws) with Sufi ideas if you want to.

The 2nd Q Gospel seems like it's basically Qur'an without all the threats. Jesus (saws) does at one point condemn some towns where he was badly received as being slated for punishment on judgment, but it's not the explicit and repetitive torture-fest description we get in Qur'an. There's a line in there that the mercy you extend to others will determine the scale of rigor that you are judged by on the Last Day. I got all this from Macks' The Lost Gospel; The Book of Q & Christian Origins (1993), you can search for a .pdf online. The Q gospels notably lack the Christian theology of trinity, a unique son relationship to God, the crucifixion, forgiveness through blood atonement, though they do highlight somewhat the role of Messiah, all of which corresponds to the Qur'an's criterion.

Since the Q Gospels are almost fully sayings Gospels - hadith collections in other words - it backs up my reading of Jesus (saws) being a word from God as meaning, he himself was the example, the word from God, what he said and did is the Gospel, and the good news embodied therein is a combination of the possibility of becoming fractionally as purified as he, plus all the positive stuff in Qur'an. One of the problems with people reading Qur'an, whether they're looking into Islam or practicing for years, is the Qur'an is dominated by volume with threats of hell, explicit descriptions of fire torture, and political tensions with kafireen and munafiqeen, that it's easy to get lost in all that and forget the beautiful wisdom in it. Hence, we have Muslims paranoid about who among them is a kuffar or a munafiq, paranoid about failing a formal detail of the religion and being tortured forever by a just God due to their prayer being accidentally invalidated. The Q Gospels are a nice companion to Qur'an for those who want just the light stuff.

What's notable about Sufism is, here's a bunch of people who are in a religion filled with paranoid legalists who want to execute anyone whose speech they deem unacceptable, based on a text that is replete with harsh language and fear-inspiring threats, and they zoom in on Ar Rahman, Ar Raheem repeated throughout and take that very seriously, as seriously and with more focus than the scary parts. Quranists are largely the same way, they tend to see the beauty in Qur'an in spite of politically-militarized traditions of scholarship that want to keep the Qur'an as a weapon of social control, occasionally referenced in reserved when the hadith ammunition runs low. On the other hand there is a strong Salafi-esque textual legalism running in Quranist circles, it just happens to be an anti-establishment version, and while it's satisfying to believe you're in the minority of true believers who are loyal to God's word and avoid all shirk, even the less obvious forms, Quranists could use more spiritual supplementation to just reading Qur'an.

Sufis getting marifat after doing lots of tahajjud, gnostics receiving gnosis, Shia Imams guided by Ruh Qudus back to a primordial Nur, or even the wahy that Sunnis allege is saturating the prophetic hadiths they have collected, all of these relate to an alternative mode of revelation that the Qur'an lists: inspiration. Quranists might be so focused on textual purity they overlook that the text does endorse some degree of inspiration, but it's highly contested across Islam how much this impacts us in reality.

One thing Sufis do, is they breath. Just, breath. Take a deep breath. Maybe say a "la ilaHa illAllah" in that breathing cycle. That's Sufi Zikr. It's like regular zikr endorsed in Qur'an after you finish salah, and practiced in various orthodox traditions, but it's got more breath to it. You know who else was really into breath control as spiritual tool? Yogis and Buddhists. Does this mean that Sufism is Islam mixed with Buddhism? Is Sufism a slippery slope to shirk? You start out with some breathy zikr and you end up popping off sujud to some Indian saints' grave? Maybe, use your discretion, pray to God for guidance. But how much of a bidah can breathing be?

The other thing is that being more like Jesus (saws) and Muhummad (saws) and various other prophets, purifying the heart, moderating your speech, gaining more control over your

anger and other emotions, getting yourself high with lots of breathy zikr and nafl prayer, these are nice things that can be found in Qur'an.

Since I've been listening to a lot of lectures since reverting to Islam, I strongly notice voice modulation in speakers. Pir Zia sounds like an ASMR channel. Sheikh Nurjan has a smooth, calm voice but sometimes gets fired up. Old Mufti Abu Layth would be very pitchy and funny and bombastic but Sufi-inspired Abu Layth is blending that down into a smooth lecture cadence, like the soft lapping of waves against the shore on a not-too-windy day. Khaled from Quranic Islam has a very soft tone with an English accent, and points are repeated after a clean down-beat so you can contemplate the words.

Omar Ramahi has a very nice lilting cadence as well, as he lectures passionately but in even pace about deconstructions of Ulema hierarchy. I asked him if he has any Sufi background and he says none at all, and he's not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing. It makes me think that all the basics of good character that are associated with tasawwuf can be found in Qur'an.

Then I'll hear a more orthodox speaker going on about how Muhammad (saws) is going to get the praise of the whole world on judgment day to elicit his intercession or how you're worse than a rapist if you miss one salah, and these speakers have an extremely discordant cadence and voice modulation, like they're literally ear-beating you. Even Quranist speakers when they get fired up about the evil hadithiyoons will start deviating from the chill-valley into the mountains of ardor and rancor. Listening to myself speak when I come on a show, I was at first slightly grated by my own frenzied pace of speech and decided to start practicing patience and modulation in my vocal communication.

Zen Buddhism is interesting because it developed about 700 years after the start of the Buddhism movement when lots of shirky traditions had grown on top of the basic philosophy and technique-set like fungus and moss gross on trees. Zen was geographically removed from those traditions and tried to get back to the basics: stare at a wall, eyes open. That's Zen. It's not bloody complicated. You can get into puzzles and koans and riddles and word play, but it's telling that Zen managed to keep the traditions that grew out of it in a very rustic and minimal aesthetic. Theravada Buddhists are encouraged to make prayers, like tawassul, to Bodhisattvas who are imagined, like Sufi and Shia saints, to be living spirit entities that can help. Zen says: go stare at a wall.

If Quranism is going to apprehend the best of Sufi tradition while throwing away all the shirky stuff, Zen is a good example. The three things I learned from Sufism that are concordant with the Qur'an are: No Mind, Heart Meditation, and Breath. And that to me, is Zen Islam. You go beyond fiqh into a tasawwuf practice, you don't need to lose yourself in a hierarchy of a shaykh. They say, if you don't have a shaykh, then shaytan is your shaykh. The basis for that is a hadith that shaytan lives in our bloodstream (not to be confused with our naval cavity, that's a different hadith, or peeing in your ear if you sleep through Fajr).

But Quranists are used to “them” saying things, they say all *sorts* of crazy stuff. Maybe the shaykh dependence is a bit of a shirk. It’s not necessarily shirk, but it could be if you make them a lord alongside Allah. Personally I don’t feel comfortable believing in a Prime Intellect intermediating my duas or even necessarily existing, if it does then as a good monotheist it wouldn’t mind my looking past it to the unimaginable expanse of Allah, Al-Waahid. Unlike in Christianity, no Muslim put this on me as a requirement for salvation.

Perhaps Quranic tasawwuf can start with just staring at a wall and making zikr. The main difference from Buddhism is that there’s a monotheistic focus and an interest in attaining more taqwa and shukr. You’re not just meditating to get your brain to feel good, you’re doing it to train for your life of ibadat, service to Allah, which includes expanding your empathy for other human beings, modulating your desires, and gaining patience.

Patience can mean

accepting suffering

increasing your diligence

and having compassion

for those you think

are upon batil.

Shukr can mean

having the compassion to be less wrong

and not announce your credit for it.

Time to go

pray Asr

Are Quranists Sectarians and what can they learn from the Murjites?

Throughout this book I have used the term “Quranist” to refer to a position within Islam where the Qur’an is either the only source of guidance and law, or where the Qur’an can be interpreted as over-ruling the consensus about what is Sunnah and Fiqh by qiyas, based on an ostensibly better interpretation (Qur’an-centric vs. Qur’an-Alone). However it’s very important to note that most so-called Quranists typically refuse the label, because, they take the Qur’an very

seriously and the Qur'an is clear that sects are bad and people who get too into sectarianism basically become mushriks, and will be either denied paradise or disadvantaged on the Last Day based on what they used to do. And already we're seeking nuance on what the Qur'an says about God's justice in this regard, and seeking nuance in understanding God's justice is the theme of this chapter, if not this whole 2nd section of the book.

As it happens, I can think of very few people in the Quranic movement who are comfortable owning the title "Quranist". Possibly the only ones would be the members of the Tuscon masjid community founded by Rashad Khalifa, but there are debates where they argue against "salah isn't ritual prayer" Quranists and call them unbelievers. The rhetorical title of this book "Who are the Quranists?" might follow "here are the Quranists" but maybe it turns out, almost nobody is a self-identified Quranist. There are a lot of people on Reddit who will adopt the user-flair of "Quranist" in their avatar, but I find they are a minority of the users in the r/Quraniyoon subreddit, and the name of that sub was itself an historical anecdote by early moderates that has been lamented and debated subsequently. Usually when someone in this movement takes a usool position that the Qur'an Alone should be taken for guidance and law, they call themselves Qur'an Alone, as it is more descriptive. If they are merely of the opinion that Qur'an has been wrongly abrogated by extra-Qur'anic sources, and that extra-Quranic sources can be useful with the Qur'an as a criterion filter, they call themselves Qur'an-centric. And all among them tend to take the anti-sectarian verses in Qur'an very seriously and contemplate them to be applied in different ways.

When traditionalists try to confront this growing movement by asserting it is kufr, haram, dangerous and so forth, they tend to use the term "Hadith Rejectors" because that's focusing on the negative, Quranist almost sounds like a good thing, after all, all Muslims revere the Qur'an. Imagine arguments between Christians and Gospelists (who perhaps reject the Pauline letters and analysis in the other letters in the New Testament) and argue that the Gospelists are not Christian and therefore not-saved.

It's easy to imagine such debate happening 300 years ago and being coupled with unhealthy doses of violence, persecution and fiery executions, but when such debates happen today they tend to be civil and haven't made a lot of noise to the effect of galvanizing a movement, they'd just be another minority denomination of Protestant Christianity. Indeed there is something of a Gospelist movement, they use a red-letter Gospel where the sayings of Jesus (saws) are highlighted in red and the rest of the NT is omitted or neglected. Perhaps "Christian" countries are so primarily post-Christian in ethos that people don't enough to debate it the way that traditionalists engage with the Quraniyoon minority.

Some like Baba Shuaib take to calling the traditionalists mushriks, or more descriptively, sectarians, since they are indeed members of Sunni or Shia sects (or even the Prima Qur'an guy as a revert turned Ibadi saying Quranists are in a separate religion). I have had to tell young men on the r/quraniyoon sub that the Qur'an is not really telling them to go make war on traditionalist Muslims. Instead, some Quranists take to calling everyone else mushrik, which is a nice change of pace from traditionalist Muslims of varying sects calling each other kafir. A

mushrik is still effectively a kafir though, so in terms of eternal pain and confinement, it's a distinction without a difference.

What if we did the opposite? Like, we didn't call traditionalist Muslims mushriks? Parsing the sectarian verses in Qur'an as condemning with nuance, that someone being merely affiliated with a sect doesn't make them a mushrik, rather their sectarian insults or worse are what will be considered sins of shirk, is a first step.

Notably Muhammad from the "Muhumam From God" YouTube channel had a video giving Daniel Haqiqatjou credit for standing up for the Gazans and getting targeted by the ADL and the NSA. Muhammad made the point that even though Mr. Haqiqatjou would consider them all kafirs for not following traditional Sunni Islam, we're still bound by the book of God not to divide our religion and give respect where it's due. The Quranic equivalent of "game is game". Another way to look at it is, Muhammad standing up for a Quran Only approach to Islam is de facto a reformationist, a conservative one, and Haqiqatjou is a counter-reformationist, author of "The Modernist Threat to Islam" but, they're both enemies to Zionists and the enemy of my enemy is my brother in Din.

Brother Khaled of the Quranic Islam channel takes a Quran-centric position as well as a nuanced theory of shirk. If someone is so sectarian that they spend their whole life insulting other Muslims on the internet or going out and doing violence in a sectarian-fueled civil war, they would need mountains of hassanat to outweigh these unforgiven sins on the Last Day. Thus he carves out a moral event horizon where sectarianism becomes fully shaytanic, whereas most Muslims are affiliated with sects and are merely caught in the orbit of these sectarian black holes.

Khaled's tafsir of Qur'an also has a pretty broad theory of kufr and makes room for righteous agnostics, even Atheists, to be saved. This is a bit broader than I'm comfortable going, agnostics who are slightly tilted towards God, perhaps, but I have trouble with the idea that dedication to e.g. Liberalism as an ideal of being good for its own sake, while denying God exists, is going to fly with the author of the Qur'an. It would be nice though, if God's justice were very deeds oriented, I just can't find a reading of the Qur'an that goes that far.

The debate on perennialism, are the groups mentioned in Qur'an as being saved actually saved or do they have to believe in Muhammad (saw), hinges on the verse in Surah Nisa that condemns those who disbelieve in some Messengers but not others. In my interpretation this means Christians would accept the Qur'an's criticisms addressing them and become unitarian, but the theory that the anti-Trinity verses are mistranslated and really against gnostic heresies, with Trinity belief being makruh but not haram, is possible, it'd save my pious family members so I'd welcome it. Then for Jews, they're in tawhid already, maybe too much service paid to rabbinical/Talmudic laws, and they tend to be ok with Muhammad (saw) because they see Qur'an as reinforcing their position relative to Christians, however they also have to accept Jesus (saws) as messiah. Usually when there are Jews for Jesus they fling all the way to the other side and buy into trinitarianism.

Khaled takes the reading a bit more loosely and says that one is a kafir for rejecting a Messenger of God *only* after it is *clear* that this is a true prophet. This leaves the door open to the majority of Jews who reject Jesus (saws) and the majority of Christians who reject Muhammad (saws) being eligible for salvation *based on their deeds* according to Qur'an. His reading is concordant with other verses about covering the truth and somewhat resonates with Ibn Arabi's theory that Jews and Christians in foreign lands who just hear of Muslim barbarity can be saved since there's no clear representation of Islam to them.

Khaled's tafsir is largely Mutazilite in its theology, which I tend to resonate with: God cannot help but be Just, God is Justice, One with His attributes which merely describe who God is, and that the Qur'an's promise of crediting every good deed is a solid promise. What about the verses that talk about kafirs' deeds being scattered like ashes and the various verses about deeds being *habitat* (worthless)? *Habitat* in Arabic translates to "she was disappointed" which reminds us that the Qur'an is in a colloquial Arabic that, similar to the pre-Quranic poetry of the region, was nested in a sexist and sex-obsessed culture, "she was disappointed" means their life's work, performed outside of God's guidance, was impotent, it didn't really accomplish goodness in the eyes of God. Traditionalists take this to mean, there are things you can do: apostating (*kufr*), being a *munafiq*, rejecting the Qur'an or Sunnah, or committing *shirk*, that wipe out the credit for all your good deeds, you could have mountains of *hasanat* but you believe the wrong thing or do *shirk* and it's all for nothing. However the traditionalist translations are doing some work with the text to try and put that interpretation forward, maybe it's not the true meaning.

It seems pretty clear that apostasy from Islam is condemned with hell and nullifying the credit for all your good deeds, prayers and so on, in Qur'an. What about the young woman who converts to Islam, meets a guy, seems nice, and then he turns out to be a literal terrorist who kidnaps his kids with ex-wives and takes them to Syria (I saw such a woman on Reddit). Did she ever really come to the faith or did she just dip her toes in? Because it seems just for God not to deep her a true apostate in that situation.

Ok, what about a woman who grew up in Islam, is abused by her mother and step-father who become ardent Salafists, is coerced into marrying a literal Al-Qaeda terrorist who beats her, her mother blames her for the beating, and then becomes a big ex-Muslim activist? I saw this on YouTube. She is arguably an apostate who the Qur'an condemns due to having been a Muslim so long and leaving entirely instead of just rejecting that interpretation for some of the nicer interpretations explored in this book. An argument could also be made that she is fighting for justice by speaking out against these partisans of Shaytan and guide might reward her with guidance back to a better interpretation of religion or otherwise have mercy on her and credit her deeds. Maybe the Salafism presented her with a satanic false Islam and she never got to have faith in the real Islam.

Ok what about the younger ex-Muslim woman who was very into the religion, she was raised in a decently moderate Sunni interpretation of Islam, schooled in UAE, and then in her

early 20s read the Aisha-child-marriage hadith and started on a path out of the din? Is that what Qur'an is talking about with apostasy? Or is she a victim of a lie against God and His Messenger? The same would go to all the Christians or secular people who hear "Islam" and their immediate response is "pedophile nonsense" and the traditionalist guys go: "Correction Sir! Pedophile *sense!*" - clearly this is not effective dawah.

What about the guy who posited himself as an agnostic Muslim, still practicing but not strongly committed to tenets of aqeeqah, and then he's blogging about how he basically burned out on Islam after decades of ardent worship due to things like discrepancies with the Dhul Qarnayn story and other details, and he thinks reformers of Islam are deluded to try and interpret something holy and true out of Qur'an. I'm afraid we will become kafireen if we try and stretch God's mercy so far that it can cover everyone, and this sort of fellow is where the silly putty stretch filly ruptures and leaves an uncovered void. The chap should pray for guidance, open his mind to the reform ideas, and come back to the Din in a deeper and more beautiful way than before, and die on emaan. Funnily enough Khaled from Quranic Islam happened on the same blog and commented with his pacific apologetics to try and invite the guy back, and Dr. Javad Hashmi I *think* referenced him very indirectly as an example of people leaving Islam due to too much anti-scientific literalism.

Last night I had a tab open googling about Naqshbandiyya for the previous chapter and I saw a guy on the ShiaChat forum expressing the position that Jews and Christians are from revealed religions but spiritual-not-religious people don't get the same benefit of the doubt. The discussion was about a Shia convert from Sunnism looking for a new tariqa since he didn't like the Naqshbandi claim of descent from Abu Bakr. The Shia responder in question was careful to put (ra) after Abu Bakr and Ali, and noted he is unlike a lot of Shia in that he's not comfortable cursing Abu Bakr, he thinks cursing is unislamic.

Then I noticed, his profile said he was [Banned] and his religion tag said: agnostic. I was like: huh, interesting. I looked at his profile and at the last posts he made before being banned, where he expressed that he wasn't an atheist, but he believed that beliefs were futile due to all human knowledge being imperfect and goodness being linked to self-evident biological imperatives, which is the axiomatic alternative for secular morality to Divine Command Theory.

The first post and the last post were 6 years apart, this young man had taken a journey to the edge of apostasy, changing his profile tag from Shia to Agnostic and being banned from the forum after politely expressing his new worldview to a Shia author who was trying to talk him back, and being deemed a time-waster. I was haunted by the idea that his journey from moderate exclusivist understanding of Qur'an but a tinge of non-sectarian appreciation of Abu Bakr (even though Shia) had something to do with his journey to agnosticism. I can't help but wonder if in the last few years since those posts, he has progressed from agnostic Muslim to full atheist like the blogger mentioned 3 paragraphs ago.

May Allah keep us steadfast in our emaan, ameen.

The sort of slippery-slope from tolerance of variety in belief, to disrespecting belief to the point of losing one's religion, is part of the crux of the critique of the Murjites from the 1st century hijra. The Murjites thought that we shouldn't judge, so they got named with a slur "The Delayers". They called themselves the *ahl al-wa'd* - The People of The Promise - like how the Mutazila 150 years later called themselves The People of Monotheism and Justice but are known to history by the slur "The Refusers".

While the Murjites thought even people who committed major sins could still maybe go to paradise, they did stop the buck at faith, you had to have some faith to get to heaven. They figured, sins don't ruin your faith and good deeds don't give you faith. Whereas Khaled's interpretation of *emaan* is a broader concept of having faith in some kind of moral reality, rather than pro-forma belief in God and the Last Day, de facto trust in **some ultimate truth** and **some moral reckoning** even if it's just a secular apprehension of "history will judge, the truth will out". On the other hand, Khaled's even-losser interpretation of *emaan* is coupled with a Mutazilite-esque appreciation of justice and a confidence that God will punish sinners, that evil Muslims won't get bailed out by intercession. The Khwarij took the opposite position to the Murjites, that a major sin kicked someone out of Islam and made them eligible for being hunted, the Mu'tazila took then the "middle position" that the sin **did** damage one's faith, but on the inside, and the *fasiq* Muslim was not fully a *kafir*, and they should still enjoy legal rights in the community and have their time to repent, which Mu'tazila believed was fully up to the sinner and not an aspect of pre-determined Qadr, that one's Qadr is chosen (the Qadari position prior to Mu'tazilite ascendancy in the later Abbasid period).

There's a hadith in Sunan Ibn Majah: "There are two types of people among this Ummah who have no share of Islam: The Murji'ah and the Qadariyyah."

It's kind of like if someone was narrating a hadith saying Hillary Clinton is bad. You'd have to believe in very specific future-prophecy powers being attributed to Muhammad (saws) to believe it's legit. The hadith is not in Sahih Bukhari or Sahih Muslim. For people skeptical of hadith it could be an example of hadith being fabricated to slam dunk opponents in specific sectarian debates happening in later decades or centuries.

What's interesting is that while the Mu'tazila and Khwarij took a hard line on sin, and everyone believed faith was a minimum requirement to salvation, the Murjite ideas lived on in a trickle in the beliefs of Imam Abu Hanifa who was criticized for his alleged Murjite tendencies. What happened is the Maturidi theology developed with a very specific set of beliefs and interpretation of Qur'an that one must have to not be auto-disqualified on the Last Day, such as grave punishment which they claim is in Qur'an even though one is more inclined to read it in between the lines in Qur'an if you heard the hadiths that describe it in detail. But what is unique to Maturidi theology is the idea that even major sinners will be taken out of hell by the intercession of the Seal of the Prophets, eventually. So instead of Murjites saying, hey maybe God will forgive those major sinners as long as it wasn't shirk, Maturidis say, no no, they'll burn in hell but just for a while.

The downside of the Murjite perspective that both traditionalists and modern reformers can agree on is that they were too politically apathetic, which the Umayyad caliphs loved because it abetted their tyranny. A modern example would be the Salafis who say it's haram to protest Arab leaders normalizing diplomacy with Israel, just do your salah and buy a frappuccino.

One lesson we can take from the Murjites is that, the first century hijra was a crazy time with lots of civil war, vehement sectarian debate and violence between Muslims, and there have always been sensible people who seek refuge in the good promises of the Qur'an and focus on being nice people who aren't too judgmental. The converse lesson we can take from the Murjites is that if your tolerance extends to nifaq, you will be ruled by munafiqeen, and that isn't good, it may even make you responsible in God's eyes for rolling over to mass nifaq. Sunni orthodoxy, when addressing the Murjite ideology on their QA websites, will indicate that to really have faith you *must* act on the faith. So now we're back to deeds being important.

Indeed Khaled's modern mix of Quran-centric tafsir that has swirls of Mu'tazilite theology and chocolate sprinkles of Murjite-esque tolerance across belief systems, is that he strongly believes God will punish the wicked, no matter what their ideology. And this is something that most Muslims agree on. The debate is then how easy will God go on do-gooders that are not Muslim, or are not Unitarian Christian/Jesus-accepting Jews, or who are only very loosely hanifs in whatever sense that word can be applied. There's a spectrum of opinions here.

Surah Al Araf is one of my favorite long Surahs in Qur'an, it describes a middle place between heaven and hell where people who were kinda good, not so bad will have to hang out before entering paradise. It's kind of like a UN refugee camp in the Akhirah, you're a lot better off than if you didn't have the refuge, but you'd prefer to be in Denmark eating pastries. Whereas pious Muslims who are arrogant about their piety might spend some time there to shake off the grains of arrogance, and people who had a mixed weight of good and bad deeds may also be there, there's also a question of if say a Trinitarian Christian or an Agnostic Leftist with loads of good deeds might indeed have their good deeds nullified but God, in His Justice, sees the good deeds as meriting forgiveness for the other stuff, so they had an extremely polarized scale of deeds but end up in the Al Araf waiting room due to flaws in their belief. Abu Talib, Ali's dad, who helped a lot but never formally converted from Meccan monoltheism to pure tawhid before dying, might be another candidate, though traditional narrations put him in just the most shallow part of hell, with presumably some of your favorite celebrities who partied a lot, did a lot of charity but were too much atheists.

How God sorts all the edge cases of deeds vs. belief will be an interesting thing to study once you make it into Jannah, insha'Allah, but if you *dont* escape hellfire you probably won't care.

I think there's a reason why Surah Al-Araf has precious little detail on the Al-Araf middle place, why it doesn't come up anywhere else in Qur'an, why it's probably a Meccan Surah: God's objective with Qur'an was to correct for the excesses of over-familiar or legalism in

previous ummahs by giving us a final text that thundered with authority, fear-inspiration and legal weight. Hell in the Tanakh is described even more briefly than Al-Araf is described in Qur'an leaving the door open to debate between Greek-reading early Christians and Jewish scholars reading "alma" in Hebrew about the duration of the fire-punishment. Qur'an is telling you over and over: forever, illa mashAllah, brutal, unrelenting, no escape, unless a soul is taken up to be destroyed. There are a few release valves scattered among the numerous and explicit, detailed threats of hellfire in Qur'an, like how Hawking radiation can escape a black hole and eventually diffuse it down to an annihilating pop, even good old hardliner Ibn Tammiyah had a reading about that, but most Muslims are enraptured with the fear.

At some level, Muslims fearing God and being paranoid about totalistic, formal legal compliance to manage their fear is good, because God clearly intended it to an extent. The laid back trust in God's promise of the Murjites seems almost like a liberal Christian attitude. Yet the Qur'an including in Surah Araf, is careful to delineate that too much legalism can also get you into injustice. It warns us to not dictate haram and halal (as many ulema do), to not separate into sects (as most Muslims do) and to not do a shameful thing and say that our forefathers did it and God commands it, when God only commands decency, justice, non-oppression, non-obscenity, a few clean principles. Muslims have certainly overcomplicated Islam to their own detriment and to the effect of making it difficult for humanity at large to enter Islam voluntarily and enthusiastically, as I have, mashAllah.

The Murjites were early responders to this problem and they then went too far in the direction of letting Machiavellian power plotters get the best of everyone. But what should they have done, started doing terrorism like the Khawarij? Maybe it's too easy to take shots at a "sect" that was pro-forma labeled by outsiders, that didn't persist in any institutional form other than a thread of Abu Hanifa's theology, and blame them for the tyranny of the Ummayyads. Here's a radical idea: maybe Muawiya's rise to power can be blamed on the puritanically proto-Quranist but also ultra-sectarian Khawarij. What could the Khawarij have done different? I don't know MAYBE DON'T MURDER ALI??! Might have helped. When everyone is a kafir, the odds that you will kill the wrong guy approach 100%.

If Quranists and the reform movement at large wishes to be serious about avoiding sectarianism, but also avoiding the pitfalls of making non-sectarianism into its own sect, then we need to think critically and perhaps develop new fiqh and aqeedah about modern edge cases and how to treat Muslims of professed sectarian allegiance.

Step 1: are they mushriks?

I would say, if they're blowing themselves up or firing off rifles for the sect, yes, fatal shirk.

If they are being rude for a sect, minor shirk, unforgivable but not a one-way-ticket.

Step 2: they all make distinction between the Messengers and take Ulema as Lords instead of Allah, are they even Muslims?

I would say, yes, but if you won't accept them as Muslims (and many of them won't accept a Quran Only follower as a Muslim) you should consider them as People of the Book (the Book in this case being Qur'an) and perhaps they will soften to consider Quranists as likewise, Kitabis not Kafirien.

One might interpret the verses about not making distinction in two ways. In one, the people not making the distinctions say "we are Muslims!". I think taking statements quoted rhetorically in Qur'an as being the direct positions of Allah is problematic, for instance Shaytan says "surely you will find the majority ungrateful", but Shaytan doesn't have to be right about >50% of humanity going to hell, it's not up to him, it's up to us and Allah. So just because Sunnis, Shias and even Ibadis a little bit hold out one prophet above the others, and hardly any of them seriously follow the teachings of Jesus (saws) or Yusuf (saws) or consider themselves on the milla of Ibrahim (saws), they can still be Muslims. Another verse, not quoting, says that belief is equal to not making distinction. Therefore I think we can say that following the deeper message and not idolizing any one prophet is the mark of a Mu'min, a true believer, which is a rank above Muslim. Other marks of a Mu'min would be taking the whole Qur'an even if you don't understand it all, not following extra-Qur'anic sources where they contradict Qur'an, avoiding sin, doing supererogatory prayers, charity and fasting, and also, social activism, dawah, scholarship and discussion.

Another issue that divides Quranists from the rest of Islam is the idea of tawassul, praying to other than Allah in order to have more effective du'a than if one prayed to Allah alone. Orthodox Sunnis think Shia are mushrik for this, Salafists think Sunni-Sufis are mushriks for this, but Quranists think *even Salafists* are mushriks since they will send salawat on Muhammad (saws) *with* the hope that it carries them favor for his intercession.

What to make of this?

Also consider that Ismaelis and Sufis are some of the nicest people you will meet in the Ummah, or that Christian Protestants can be more textually focused like Salafis and be more anti-idolatry, yet the Catholics with their Mary status are also some of the nicer Christians you can meet. These people are all potential allies for justice and reformation, not in the political sense the Qur'an is condemning but in terms of ecumenicism and Islamicizing the West along Quranic lines (as opposed to along the lines of a man-made sharia with neurotic and evil fiqh interpretations). But if we start saying, well they're nice people, they can pray to saints, maybe Allah won't burn them in hell as mushrikeen, we risk compromising our own purity of devotion to what the Qur'an clearly condemns. Qur'an says: they say they pray to other than Allah because these idols are in a closer position. Qur'an also has a verse used to justify tawassul as halal. So which is it? Qur'an has a lot of textual dilemmas like this.

I would not say to the lovely Ismaeli Shia, you are guaranteed to go to hell for that, or, you are guaranteed not to be sinning for that, I would say, I've only ever made du'a to Allah alone and my track record of du'a being answered is amazingly good. Perhaps one could try going on a tawassul fast for a year and see if the results are much worse. In the theology behind this, which stems from Neo-Platonism, God is unchanging and therefore not interactive with believers at the level of manipulating causality to answer du'as, so you need to relay your supplications to spirit entities that, being finite and temporal entities, can really get things done for you in the celestial bureaucracy. I say, if that's true, I'll take the hit, Allah is enough for me.

Khaled says that Shirk ad Dua, making dua to other than Allah is illustrated in the Qur'an as being forgive-able, unlike Shirk al Akbar (which killing in the name of sectarianism would include). His understanding of mushrikeen being denied paradise is that, you're a mushrik if you're so habitual in your unforgiveable sins that it dominates your account. So I think a good policy with religious people who are in sects that have the shirky esoteria but produce generally just and lovely people, is to have a chill dawah on the wager one is making putting so much hope on tawassul when, hey, maybe Allah alone can answer your du'a, what with the infinite power.

Now, on the other hand, you have Salafis who basically endorse the ISIS form of governance in theory, then when it happens they say, actually we endorse the Gulf State leaders normalizing ties with Israel. They're the minority madhab representing all of Sunni Orthodoxy on the QA website, they're Khwarij in the streets of Raqqa and then they're Murjites when ISIS gets bombed to death and Saudi foreign policy pivots from incubating proxy wars to building a Dragon Ball theme park. They takfir you at the drop of a hat and have a very dim view of God's justice in their hadith-heavy interpretation of Qur'an. They also do tawassul through sending intercessionary salawat, but this is at most their 3rd worst sin. They also promote lies against the Prophet and actively push people away from the din, while being hypocritical about their own relationship to the "West". Some of them are indeed career mushrikeen and even munafiqeen. We must be harsh with them, *but* be very judicious, wise and patient about sifting out the bona-fide mushriks among them. Salafists actually have much in common with Quranists when it comes to an overt hatred of shirk, skepticism of the scholar-class and a love of the din, once we start mass-takfiring whole groups we do indeed become the sectarian monster we wanted to fight.

A big problem with opening up dawah for more people to come into Islam is that converts tend to be in non-Muslim-majority countries and be the only Muslim in their families, so they have extra difficulty with medieval interpretations that it's haram to live as a minority or that one's family members are all going to hell no matter how nice they are. Living with an outlook that everyone you see will be tortured forever by the God you love and fear, that's a crazy way to go through life. Of course some people can migrate to Malaysia or something, but truly Muslim-majority countries already have very high population density pushing the carrying capacity of those countries' natural resources and civic infrastructure, it's not practical for even 100 million people in the West to convert to Islam and make hijira to those countries. Therefore

we need fiqh for what it means to live in the West as a Muslim and a more nuanced reading of the Qur'an's promise of salvation to those who believe and do good deeds.

Instead of trying to convert everyone to the Quranic covenant, we can inspire *some* to step up and take on the extra-challenge of the covenant, and we can try to inspire Christians to be unitarian, even if by sowing seeds of doubt in them about their doctrinal inheritance. Just like Quranists often attend Sunni Masjids because that's what is available, a growing swell of Christian-crypto-unitarians might attend Catholic or Methodist church for a while as quiet heretics. Inspiring Christians, even those still doctrinally Trinitarian, to pray more frequently (Paul referring to David (saw) suggests 3x daily), fast more seriously (crabcakes instead of steak on Friday is not impressive) and donate more liberally (even do 501(c)3 orgs, depriving the Federal government of revenue, win-win).

There are a lot of Jews who are anti-Zionist because of an innate moral compunction to resist genocidal governments, yet they're often apathetic about getting up every morning for Shema before the sunrise. We can inspire them to get serious about their faith in service to their sense of justice, inspired by the example of the pious Jews of Mae Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem who get billy clubbed by Israeli cops all the time for their support of Palestine.

There are a lot, and I mean *a lot* of secular people of varying stripes of agnosticism, atheism and spiritual-but-not-religious, perhaps vaguely Buddhist orientations, we can inspire them to more monotheism and a regular "monotheistic meditation" routine without being slaves to Sunni prayer fiqh. We could also posit the Nizari Shia Imam or Sufi Sheikhs as being more monotheistic alternatives to the Dalai Lama and other pop-religion celebrities. The biggest thing that holds them back from Abrahamic monotheism is, first off, the hell thing; the fear and Quranic rhetoric mostly inspires revulsion and incredulity in modern people, and second off, the apparent hypocrisy of religious people evidenced by needlessly technical debates between them.

One thing I hope to achieve with this section on Sects is to convince Quranists to get out of the treadmill of Quran vs. Sunnah arguments. "Hadiths are all dumb", "if you reject Sunnah you're a kafir"; "My people have abandoned this Qur'an", "you are not true believers until you come to the Messenger to resolve all your disputes and submit to his judgement. If you spend some time on YouTube on these Quranist vs. Sunni debates, listen to Muhammad Hijab talk about Hadith Rejectors or Peter from QuranTalk decry the shirk of idolatrous Sunnis, you can collect the same dozen talking points and it gets super old.

Sunni Islam is itself a project of taqlid, or making nice with people who believe somewhat differently from you. The Athari take the verses about God's hands, face and throne literally and some even say the Atharis and Maturidis are disbelievers for not just accepting the verses. The Atharis and Maturidis believe that the main point of Islam was to elevate people to a more refined, transcendental idea of God, away from idolatrous god-men and other primitive ideas, they take the same verses metaphorically. Most of the accusations of kufr are based on people having different ideas of what the Qur'an means.

For example, in classical Sunni fiqh, if you smoke pot, you're a fasiq, but if you believe that it is halal to smoke pot because of your interpretation of khamr being narrow to just alcohol, you're a kafir. They'd then point you to a hadith transmitted by Ibn Umar that anything that intoxicates in large dosages is haram in small dosages. But then, this would make a lot of painkillers and anesthesia haram for use in medicine, so the usooli specialists say, well medicine is of a good objective so we can carve-out exceptions here.

The alternative might be, smoking pot probably is a sin but if you sincerely believe smoking a little bit to make zikr in an elevated state isn't a sin, maybe God will judge that less harshly than someone who thinks it's a sin and gets super loaded all the time. Likewise, it may be a sin no matter what, but someone having an incorrect interpretation of the Qur'an's scope for the word "khamr" shouldn't wipe out all of that person's decades of prayer and charity and being a righteous, albeit stoned, individual. For the record, I believe khamr has to do with mind-covering, and I don't mess with micro-dosing because I just want to use my brain and my time left on earth for maximal utility, I do vape a little CBD sometimes to ease frustration, anger and maybe to relax, because CBD has no khamr effect even at a large dose.

The Athari anthropomorphism believers and the other Sunni schools of theology tolerate each other but this was not always the case. In the middle ages there was talk among the Hanafi emirs of Central Asia that Shafites (you can always smell the sectarianism when an "ite" is added) should have to pay jizya tax, like they weren't fully Muslim just people of the book. Sunni Islam is really an umbrella that was forged out of political and theological compromise, in the process the Maliki and Hanafi schools ceded a lot of fiqh to the assertive hadith-maximalism of the Shafi and Hanbali schools. In the process, to avoid being too washy like the old Murjites, the Sunni Orthodoxy had to define sharp boundary beliefs that would put one outside of Sunni Islam. For example, thinking it's shirk or binitarianism to say the Sunnah Rules over the Qur'an would not be acceptable, a Maliki must respect the Shafi and Hanbali usool even if not doing taqlid with them. Another big one, a Sunni has to think Muawiya was cool.

This is why they couldn't really make "kafir" stick to Mufti Abu Layth, the label "deviant" was the most sticky, and more moderate, he even stumped for Muawiya, demonstrating his Sunni credentials and loyalty.

I recommend that the Quranic movement's policy towards Shia Islam be one of tactful alliance-building, the Shia have been persecuted by Sunnis for 1400 years and they can relate. We don't have to argue about Aisha's age, but then there's still the same circular argument about debating the role of Sunnah as endorsed by Qur'an. If you play the game of saying, well, do you follow the Sunnah of Jesus (saws) in Injil, a Shia will actually say yes we kind of do, and they'll have you there. This is actually an opportunity. The right way to deal with Shia is to make an invitation to contemplate the verses about not making distinction between Messengers, is that wording absolute or limited?

Shiism hinges on one prophet and his descendents being extra-special, and has exclusivist and inclusive variations. The Zaydi are considered borderline Sunni because they

believe Imams are good to follow but not necessarily infallible and not a litmus test for salvation. Twelver Shia might even say the salvation of Zaydi Shia is in question because, surprise surprise, there's a hadith about that, if you even doubt the infallibility of the Imams you go to hell automatically. Lovely stuff. Ismaelis have an actual living Imam who does epic work and he's very chill and does not preach that he is the only gate to heaven - rather - he is here to help.

Now, Quranists believe in all the prophets being ontologically equal even if they differ in rank and favor, they may also accept that there are many millions of living descendants of all the prophets, and perhaps half the world's population are descended from Abraham by now. Therefore, if Shia are willing to take a position that the Imams are here to help, and not the exclusive gateway to heaven, Quranists and Shia can be allies. The Sunni, especially the Sufis, have already acceded that Ali (ra) is pretty cool and the Ahul Bayt are to be loved, let's take that even further! Let's not make distinction between Messengers and love the Ahul Bayt from all the Messengers. Such as your friendly free e-book author, Aleph Funk, coming at you live with anti-sectarian contemplation, alhamdulillah.

Twelver Shiism is the most populous form and the most difficult to work with because their 12th Imam is not someone you can email (tawassul prayer notwithstanding) and the dark shadow of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard is a paperweight for taqlid. But the actual scholarly hierarchy of Iran may be easier to have discussions with than your average Salafist.

If a Quran Only or Quran-centric Muslim wants to build bridges with anyone from any sect in Islam, the similarities and differences outlined in the previous chapters provides a guide.

The Ismaelis had to do taqiyah for 500 years, pretending to be Twelvers or Sufis, to the point that the particular of Nizari-Ismaeli theology was largely forgotten in many families. Quranists could do just a little bit of taqiyah, as a treat, by adopting a loose Maliki posture towards hadith so they can move past debating Sunnis and Shia about the fundamentals of Sunnah and get on to a useful discussion of justice, political reform and piestic revival, or perhaps focus on transcending messenger idolization. I'm Quran-centric so the Maliki posture on hadith is not taqiyah for me.

I saw a guy on Twitter who was in the UK army, in Iraq, and then converted to Islam later to repent of the war, but he's still fighting Muslims! He puts the curse of Allah on every Sunni who asserts the Aisha-child-marriage hadiths. Some of them give him the benefit of the doubt because he is a revert and it's good manners to be nice to reverts, they encourage him to get schooled on hadith science and presumably, moral anti-realism. I posited to him that maybe it's better to focus on bigger picture stuff - the reputation damage to Islam by the Aisha thing is already done and done, done to death. He said, someone has to fight these guys. Well maybe I'm half a murjite.

Notably, every major scholar in Islam's history has been persecuted by the authorities. The ones who had cushy jobs justifying the tyrants and died peacefully in retirement probably are going to hell for nifaq (not all of them). Al-Ghazali is one exception, he was loved by Sufi

and establishment alike. But Zainab Al-Ghazali and Muhammad Al-Ghazali of the last century both went to jail. Maybe that's jihad. Admittedly, there's a reason I'm writing under a pseudonym.

Maybe the Quran movement needs fiqh and some vestiges of madhab. There's too much chaos in the discourse. Omar Ramahi's lectures and book (Choosing between Islam and Tradition: A Muslim's Greatest Challenge) focus on deconstructing the apparatus of the ulema's Ijma and Qiyas factories. Khaled's tafsir, inspired by Hassan bin Maliki, is something of a reconstruction, yet his ultra-friendly interpretations are beloved by a *minority* of Quranists, who are often more Ibadi-esque in their hatred of shirk that they see everywhere. We need a *re*construction of usool. And now, without further adieu, let's reconstruct usool.

Section 3

Revised Usooli Principles

What's the deal with Code 19?

A major argument against Quranists is that they lack appreciation for the usooli principles, the fundamentals of Islamic knowledge, that ensconced themselves in the scholarship of Orthodox Sunni Islam. However, as we explored in the section on Sects, this is a red herring because once you attain all the requirements of knowledge to perform ijtiḥād professionally in the Sunni system, you become discredited or even excommunicated once you offer dissent on more than a few issues. Nonetheless, a major credible argument against Quranism is that, like the Salafist Reformation before it, it spawns generations of young people who shoot from the hip with amateur ijtiḥād and go all sorts of places, from the sinful to the takfiri, potentially repeating mistakes of past Islamic movements such as the Mutazilites or the Twelver Shia of the Safavid Empire and resurgent Iranian Republic, without self-awareness or indeed, hikmah. So, let's do better shall we?

Kurt Godel (you didn't think I'd jump here) was a philosopher of religion in addition to being a hypochondriac who starved himself to death out of paranoia, a virginal nerd who married an exotic dancer who loved him dearly, a major contributor to mathematics and a creator of a physics model for a five-dimensional timespace in a rotating universe where light eventually comes back around to hit you again, inspired by his friendship with Einstein. This is the kind of thinker who, if he had lived in a time when Islam was more accessible on the internet, would have loved Rasha Khalifa's Code 19. Godel also made an ontological proof for the existence of God based on modal logic, which while not being a satisfying proof to most people, including theists, is an example of theological reasoning from first principles. And indeed, reasoning about religion from first principles is a part of the history of most religions, for better or worse, including Christianity and Islam.

Godel's most famous achievement was his incompleteness theorem, which proved that math systems are all limited, in a much more resounding way than his ontological proof of God (which as a theist you would accept without even reading it, because *of course* God exists, that's why you're a theist). The way he did it was to set up a math system encompassing the space of possible math systems and then making the program crash, basically. Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid by Douglas Hofstadter does a better job of going into whimsical detail about it and the implications for reality, cognition, music and poetry, and also touches on Zen a lot.

When we look at Usool al Fiqh and Usool al Adeeqah, the methodology by which scholars construct an idea of a) what God wants from us and b) who-and/or-what God is, we should bear in mind that these are human systems that are inherently fallible, but the hope is always that the effort involved in them, the ijtiḥād, will be accepted by God as sincere and show that we are good boys and girls. And then, if sometimes these systems lead to systemic injustices that mire societies into centuries of stagnation and corruption, well hey, we're only human. The system was bound to be incomplete.

Before we get into the what (tafsir), how (fiqh) and why (adeeqah) of Islamic usooli fundamentals, we need to think first about the epistemics of how people believe in the first

place. (Side note: maybe if you're a gnostic or inspirationist instead of a textualist you'd say tafsir is the why, adeeqah is the what, but how is still the fiqh rule-making that governs religious society so we have the same socio-political problems). Why would anyone believe in Qur'an, tafsir of Qur'an that extrapolates rules, or addenda materials like hadith?

In a lecture against the diabolical kafir "Hadith Rejectors", mostly genteel, Californian neo-traditionalist post-Ghazali Sufi Shaykh Hamza Yusuf says that it's ok to not believe every single ahad hadith that is presented to you (the idea that you must is more of a Hanbali usooli principle), but if you reject mutawatir hadith "then you're a kafir". Not, you know, *you* personally, but the theoretical "you" who might dare to reject mutawatir (mass-transmitted) hadith. It's kind of like how God refers to Himself (Emself?) in the Qur'an as "We" while transmitted a text that is thematically extremely, harshly against any idea of polytheism or that God has distinct constituent partners, seems confusing right? It's the Royal We. What could that mean that is more satisfying? It could be that the "We" refers to God's extended agency via the angels and messengers operating in tandem with Him, the word "Myself" is also used in Qur'an sometimes, such as in reference to causing Jesus to die and raising him up.

Moving along: Hamza Yusuf's statement has profound epistemological implications that are more crudely stated when Sunnis debate Quranists and say "if you don't believe in hadith how can you believe in Qur'an? They're transmitted by the same people." So the Sunni epistemics starts with a leap of faith that you submit to the Prophet Muhammad (saws) just like the people of Medina did, politically almost, and then likewise respect the contingent authority of the subsequent Caliphs and scholars that flowed therefrom. This is why Sunni Orthodoxy hinges on the *near*-infallibility of *practically all* the companions. And the implication is that they only believe in Qur'an because of who brought it and not because of what the Qur'an itself contains.

Personally, and this may be true of a lot of reverts from a Christians or Jewish background, I never felt connected to the socio-political leap of faith, my epistemics for believing in the Qur'an as word of God comes from its resonance with the Bible and the limited-perennialism contained therein. I realized this when I sent Edip Yuksel the question of why would he believe in Qur'an if it wasn't for the Code 19. Omar Ramahi has a similar Quranist position as Edip Yukself but doesn't *particularly* believe or at least show enthusiasm for Code 19, and he says he believes it's the word of God because of the precision used in the language, that it demonstrates extreme intelligence and wisdom, this is an easier pill to swallow.

Nonetheless the Code 19 is basically a hyper-extension of that same idea, being impressed by unparalleled intelligence that can only be evidenced using computer analysis made possible in the early 1970s. The significance is a part of Qur'an where there are said to be 19 angels guarding hell and that their number is meant to be a proof for people of the book that Qur'an is from God, and to increase the faith of believers.

Rashad Khalifa even made the discovery precisely in the year 1974, what is the significance of that year? From Dr. Edip Yuksel's blog:
"The first two verses of Chapter 74 is about the revealing of the secret:

1. O you hidden one,
2. Come out and warn!

It is interesting that if we consider one version of spelling the first word, which contains three Alifs instead of two, (3) the number of letters in these two verses are 19. More interestingly, when we add the numerical values of each letter in these two verses the sum is a very familiar number.

Here is the value of each letter:

Y = 10

A = 1

A = 1

Y = 10

H = 5

A = 1

A = 1

L = 30

M = 40

D = 4

TH = 500

R = 200

Q = 100

M = 40

F = 80

A = 1

N = 50

Z = 700

R = 200

Total: 1974

1974, exactly the year when the hidden secret was discovered!"

When I first heard this I was actually moved by the Qadr, the divine destiny of such an improbable coincidence. My enthusiasm for Code 19 is higher than the average sympathetic ear but perhaps lower than the totality of belief espoused by the devotees of the Tuscon Masjid. A big reason for why that is, is that I already believed in the Qur'an without Code 19 based on the deeper theological implications of its nuanced limited-perennialism, that God is Just and God has been working with us in history along various paths. The other big dampener to my enthusiasm is that Dr. Rashad Khalifa ultimately did not espouse that reading of Qur'an even if Dr. Yusksel later did.

In an interview in the early 1980s on Egyptian television Dr. Khalifa lays out his critique of Sunni Islam as deviating from the Qur'an, and makes a lot of good points. One of the best

points was that the Zakat pillar is often neglected because the Qur'an says we should donate every time we "harvest" which he reasons, whenever we get paid, (or perhaps monthly to simplify the cashflow management implied therein for those of us with unpredictable incomes). I'm enthusiastically in agreement there, the Sunni fiqh that you pay before Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan once a year, based on your assets above ~6k USD, excluding your house and car, seems to excuse the vast majority of Sunnis from ever participating in charity except voluntarily. Charity is to me the #1 most important pillar of Islam which resonates with God's message in Torah and Injil (the tithe to the poor prescribed in Leviticus is also 10% every three years or about 3.33%, a bit higher than the traditional 2.5%).

Then as the interview goes on it shifts towards Rashad's claim to be a Messenger (capital "M") of God's. The interviewer charitably says, you mean you're like Al-Ghazali? So, you get invited to compare yourself to Moses Maimonides for Judaism or Thomas Aquinas for Catholicism and you go, no I'm literally a successor of Messengership to the guy who brought the Qur'an. Not, mind you, that he's a Prophet bringing a new law, but that's he's reifying the existing law in the Qur'an with a new lens of epistemics and a demand that we return to form-fit compliance with it. He said that his name is literally in Qur'an.

Let's use modern technology to cross-check that with a quick Google turning up a result on a Qur'an cross-referencing database (www.searchtruth.com):

The word(s) "rashad" appears 7 time(s) in 7 verse(s) in Quran.

(1) Ith awa alfityatu ila alkahfi faqaloo rabbana atina min ladunka rahmatan wahayyi lana min amrina **rashadan**

(سورة الكهف, Al-Kahf, Chapter [#18](#), Verse [#10](#))

(2) Illa an yashaa Allahu waothkur rabbaka itha naseeta waqul AAasa an yahdiyani rabbee liaqraba min hatha **rashadan**

(سورة الكهف, Al-Kahf, Chapter [#18](#), Verse [#24](#))

(3) Ya qawmi lakumu almulku alyawma thahireena fee alardi faman yansuruna min basi Allahi in jaana qala firAAawnu ma oreekum illa ma ara wama ahdeekum illa sabeela alrrashadi

(سورة غافر, Ghafir, Chapter [#40](#), Verse [#29](#))

(4) Waqala allathee amana ya qawmi ittabiAAooni ahdikum sabeela alrrashadi

(سورة غافر, Ghafir, Chapter [#40](#), Verse [#38](#))

(5) Waanna la nadree asharrun oreeda biman fee alardi am arada bihim rabbuhum **rashadan**

(سورة الجن, Al-Jinn, Chapter [#72](#), Verse [#10](#))

(6) Waanna minna almuslimoona waminna alqasitoona faman aslama faolaika taharraw **rashadan**

(سورة الجن, Al-Jinn, Chapter [#72](#), Verse [#14](#))

(7) Qul innee la amliku lakum darran wala **rashadan**

(سورة الجن, Al-Jinn, Chapter [#72](#), Verse [#21](#))”

So yeah, Rashad is in the Qur'an, but isn't this a little bit like a guy named Sam or Jeremiah claiming he's in the Bible? Or for that matter, Kareem Abdul Jabbar the famous basketball player saying his name is in the Qur'an?

This is how he ultimately got murdered. Whereas Hassan bin Maliki irritated orthodox Saudis on tv for years and ultimately got jailed (they did want the death penalty) nobody actually went out to kill him and he didn't get a fatwa of apostacy put on his head by the Saudi *and* Iranian clergy. But Rashad got fatwa'd at the same time as Salman Rushdie, whose last name has the same root, adopted by Salman's father out of piety, but Salman Rushdie was more of a western post-modernist who wanted to critique the state of Muslims in the west. Rashad Khalifa was similar, but from an opposite angle, wanting to get Muslims to return to piety instead of mocking a prophet.

In January 1989 Rashad was stabbed 29 times by a Salafist terrorist who had been connected to other attempted terrorist acts and was ultimately given life imprisonment. Have you ever been nearly murdered? I was robbed at gunpoint once. There's a moment where you're like, ok this might be it, and if I had been shot once I guess I'd have been in a state of like, ok this is very probably the end, and then maybe the headshot to follow, but they had mercy on me, just took my backpack with money and electronics. It's a very terrible thing, to be murdered. It's not as bad as going to hell though.

There's a sharp divide in thought about Islam that Rashad's death exemplifies. Bilal Phillips, the guy I see on YouTube ads asking for charitable donations, said that it was good Rashad got killed and that Allah should grant paradise to the killer. Muslim orthodoxy opens analogy that, if the governments you trust in Islamic authority declare someone an apostate, it's basically good to murder them. There's a lot of people who don't share the belief in Rashad being a messenger, the Code 19 or even that Sunnism is too lax about charity, monotheistic purity of prayer and other critiques, but they still intuitively think murder is bad even if there's a fatwa out declaring someone murtad. And then of course there are the devotees of Dr. Khalifa's masjid, who generally think all Sunnis as mushriks doomed to hell and softer Quranic Muslims should not flirt with shirk by accepting any hadith or praying in a Sunni masjid.

In his last lecture before his assassination. Dr. Khalifa spends time in his lecture lauding his love from his best friend Dr. Yuksel, which is very sweet, but then the second half turns into him lecturing his congregation on how dangerous it is to not Obey the Messenger, the Messenger being him. He critiques a few specific women, who speak up and plead: "Rashad! I never said that you weren't a Messenger! I just said, that you speaking about it so much is dangerous". He uses Surah Hadid, which is by far my *least* favorite Surah in that Qur'an that made my experience in Islam extremely paranoid until I cleaned up haram completely, and says these women are basically going to the lowest pit of hell for not respecting his authority, when in retrospect, their concerns were clearly well-founded.

The would-be-munafiq-but-actually-legitimately-concerned women at the Tuscon masjid were correct for two reasons:

- 1) The idea of breaking the Seal of the Prophets specifically is what tipped Rashad's controversial message of reform into a fatwa opening the door for fanatics to come murder him, and he got murdered very shortly thereafter.
- 2) The idea that people are going to be punished by a just God in spite of their faith, prayers, charity, allegiance and other good deeds, simply because they wouldn't submit properly to a human goes against the whole ethos of Quranism!

Let's explore #2 a bit more. What drew me to the movement in the first place is the idea that Islam is truly a monotheistic religion that liberates us from the tyranny of idolatry, that shirk is not just about formally worshiping idols but obeying mixed sources of law, that a shirk-free life is about obedience to God Alone who is Just. Sunni Orthodoxy gets so mixed up with hadith that it comes back and changes the way Qur'an is translated, and makes Islam seem like a Religion of Evil, a Religion where God is not about justice, but merely Power, that's why they

tend to refer to Him as Allah azzawajal instead of subhana wa ta'ala. The clergy have forgotten what justice is over a thousand years ago and power is all the understand.

When the guy giving me this good news then turns around and demands that I can only access this pure justice of no-intermediaries by going through him as an intermediary, it makes me a bit confused and disappointed. Notably Dr. Yuksel's successive tafsir of Qur'an is free of that sort of human-doorway and focuses on Muslim meaning "peace maker", on justice and political governance by mutual consent, the American Dream perhaps.

The younger successors of Dr. Khalifas Masjid call themselves Submitters and have a Discord. On the Submitters Discord server they host debates with Sunni guys about hadith, abrogation, the merit or shirk of sending salawats in hope for intercession, and other fun topics that are germane to the usool revision we're engaging in here. What's funny about these debates is that Americans and Arabs are the two most yelling-oriented cultures in the history of the Bani Adam, you get a Sunni going "hey man why you don't let me speak?!" and the Americans are like "We Don't Believe In That Hadith Bro!" One Submitter guy says: "Peace! ...be upon you." At some level, I guess this is what American-style Islam has to be like at some point in time, but I'm not sure if this is what American-style Islam must always be.

Peter is the erstwhile Imam of the Masjid as far as the internet presence goes, he runs the QuranTalk YouTube channel where he gives a lot of good khutbahs with AI generated thumbnails, because he isn't afraid of damnation for image-making per the daeef hadiths. To be fair I've noticed that most Muslim YouTubers except for Salafists will use AI images to decorate their content. In one talk Peter analyzes a verse from Surah 9 (Tawbah) forbidding "you" to pray in a masjid of hypocrisy. In the classical tafsir the "you" is addressed to the prophet in that case (it can be hard to delineate whether it's a second-person address to him specifically or the royal "You" addressed to all of us in different verses).

The masjid of hypocrisy is where a group that had conspired to assassinate Muhammad (saws) would pray. In the video the translation of "masjid of sectarianism" used is "idolatry" because they're (somewhat correctly) emphasizing that sectarianism is asserted as either equal-to or verging-upon idolatry in Surah 6. The message of the video is if you dare to go pray in a Sunni masjid with the Muhammad calligraphy decorating it, especially on the level next to the Allah calligraphy, you're committing shirk, violating a direct commandment and all your good deeds are voided, you will go to hell unless you repent.

The dilemma here is that in classical Islamic understanding, attendance to a masjid is obligatory on men. There's a (possibly Hasan-grade) hadith that if you don't go but once every 3 weeks at least, God will seal your heart, you will stop caring about going to the masjid for the rest of your life, and maybe this non-compliance does you in. Omar Ramahi did a research project on this as his first scholarly foray and found a daeef hadith that asserted all your hajj, salah, zakat etc. is void if you stop going to the masjid. Omar Zaid who hosts a lot of Quranists and has a moderately strong Quranist position also stopped going to the masjid in Malaysia because he didn't want to pray behind major sinners, considering the preponderance of rape

crimes in the country. So there you have it. Conversely, maybe the Tuscon masjid is the masjid of sectarianism, who is to say?

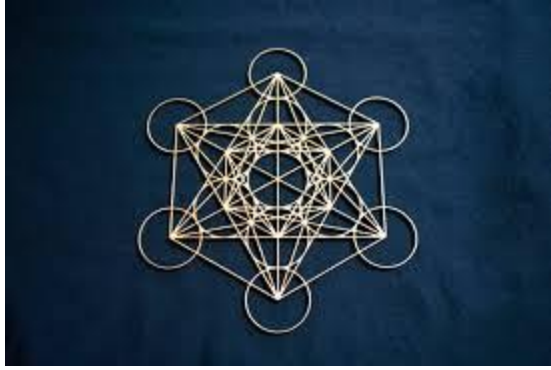
Personally, I greatly dislike the juxtaposition of the prophetic calligraphy with calligraphy representing Allah. Like Quranists and Salafists I consider it a reprehensible innovation. It makes sense if you believe in a Nur Muhammadi as a neo-Platonic First Intellect, but even then clearly belongs below and not lateral-to the calligraphy denoting God. There are simply no masjids in my country that do not feature such decoration. That's Sunni Islam for you. What should do? Fly to Oman every three weeks. I spend a fair bit on gas as it is. Checking IslamQA.info it seems praying behind Ibadis is not permissible according to the minority Salafist scholars claiming to represent The People of the Prophetic Way *and* Group.

So whereas the Salafists claim to be of the Group but the Group generally considers them outside of it, the hardcore Code 19 Quranists know they are outside the Group but they assume God will torture the Group forever to even the score. Even the nice Syrian refugee women, except perhaps, their make-shift tent masjids in the Zaatari refugee camp cannot afford a big prophetic calligraphy gong with which to commit shirk. And thus their deeds are saved.

Anyways enough of this sectarian nonsense, let's get back to Code 19. Code 19 is legit *even* if imperfect. It's only a hoax if you consider it would have to be perfect to be legitimate at all, but it abounds throughout enough of the Qur'an at multiple levels to still be real. It doesn't matter that it isn't perfectly replete in the Qur'an, and that Rashad was reaching for qiraat that we don't have transmitted evidence for to make some of the number counts work. I also like Ibn Masud for demonstrating historically with his "islam" ~= hanifiyya qiraat that the anti-perennialists are wrong about Surah Imran... what was that verse number? Whaaat!? It's 19!!!

Ibn Masud is judged by some as having died in defiant disobedience because he didn't think the last two surahs of Qur'an should have gone into the Uthmanic compilation. Rashad really tripped people up by asserting that the last two verses of Surah Tawbah. It's an interesting comparison. While some judge them both as being defiant, I think they both did a lot of good and God may well love them net of their mistakes.

A caller on Mufti Abu Layth's show pointed out a very trippy thought sequence: 19 is the mathematical prime number basis for constructing most numbers and the basic forms of sacred geometry, including Metatron's cube.



Metatrons' cube contains all the platonic solids, all the fundamental shapes, and therefore is said to be a prototype for the universe at large. In the same way that an infinitely large set of numbers are constructed from 19, and this is a larger infinite set than the smaller prime number factors, the number 19 forms out our religious law and eschatological destiny within the Qur'an. All the emanations from the big bang onward, crystallization patterns, and the way we structure society are either in accordance or dissonance with the 19 pattern. Pharaoh had a different pyramidal geometry defining his hierarchical society where he, as taghut, asserted himself as a false God, failed to see God's message from Moses due to arrogance, and ultimately doomed himself and his followers for the true shirk which is about the injustice of deviating from God's law alone.

The difference between Ackbarian Wadhat Al-Wujud and Advaita Vedanta is that, while they both assert the creation is not substantially existence, the Indian philosophy leans more on the side of it being an illusion while the Andalusian idea has the monotheistic difference: the insubstantial creation is still real in the sense of having God's attributes signed on it. Like Dr. Khalifa took modern cybernetic methodology to discover the 19-pattern signed into the Qur'an at the level of words, verses and surahs, I'll apply my understanding of cryptography to interlink the Ackbarian theology/philosophy and the more trippy implications of Code 19 for mathematics and cosmology: the Qur'an and creation at large is a *hash* of God's kitab. You can checksum a hash back to the original data-blob that produced the hash, if you know that data, even if the data is like, quintillions of yottabytes large and the hash is a relatively petit 20 kilobyte long string. Thus is it with God's signs.

There's a counter-point to Code 19 that bears mentioning, the new age people who are intentionally not Muslims for some... strange reason, I can't fully imagine why, but one reason they don't jump on the Sufi train is they say that the cube (e.g. the Kabba, the cube Jews wear on their heads when they read Torah, and Metatron's cube above) is actually an evil control mechanism used by corrupt angels to trap us in a demi-urgic false reality and feed off our energy through worship. The cube-like hexagon that emerges on top of Saturn at 19 degrees feeds into the archetype of Saturn as this false deity, like a demiurge, also Saturn in Roman mythology was the father of Jupiter who tried to eat his son. When I try to eat my son he just laughs and thinks it tickles - I guess it's a question of technique.

On that note, the new age people think we are approaching a Yoml Qiyamah type event where the world where diverge between the really chill people and the uptight squares man. So in their worldview you're actually saved by not being a Muslim or by being maybe a mystical Muslim. Where this converges is that if you're being sectarian you're not being very mystical and are indeed a mushrik serving Shaytan by sowing division amidst the ummah. When clergy in the middle east try to issue statements to reduce sectarianism they appeal to a common denominator by saying we are all people of the Qibla. We all bow to the Cube that emerges from the number 19.

The Ismaelis believe that the qiyamah is not a literal event where the Sun and Moon merge, the oceans boil, the stars go out, the mountains are all leveled, but it's more like a total re-evaluation of our understanding of reality, and it takes place over a whole age and also involves the chill people and the harsh people diverging. Thus the Ismaelis reconcile the new age critique of Metatron's Cube with Islam, in a predictably unpredictable esoteric interpretation.

Since Rashad's untimely martyrdom (warts and all) a lot of people in the dawah scene of varying persuasions, most of them hadith acceptors to some extent, have used the Code 19 idea to reify the authority of Qur'an as coming from God. In modernity the appeal to an elite set of historical people as having transmitted a thing, they're trustworthy so trust this is from God, just doesn't appeal to people the same way it did in the middle ages.

On the Gnostic Qur'an channel the host interviewed an esoteric scholar, Samuel Zimmer who talks about how the Torah also has this kind of numbering scheme at the level of each Hebrew letter having an associated number. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters and there are 22 gene combinations in the human genome. Perhaps INRI encoded over Jesus (saw) at the (alleged) crucifixion has something to it... in gematria count it's 1189, well that's not divisible by 19, the prime number factors are 29 and 41. Ah well. $29+41$ is 70 which is a popular number in Qur'an for a large quantity, hey, numerology.

Code 19 is real, why isn't it perfect? Why did Rashad end up getting tripped up by a few verses and letters? For instance, Waahid, the word for God's Oneness, if you add the Alif letter then it counts to 19 but without it (Arabic, like Hebrew, has interpolated vowels) then the count fails. The Alif funkyed up the count. My cunya is Aleph Funk, I picked this name many years ago because of the Aleph concept purported by George Cantor, it's a transcendental number describing an uncountably infinite set. I had *no* idea that I would become a Muslim or that Alif was such a key term in the Qur'an, indeed you can't spell "Allah" without it. The calligraphy for Allah looks like Cantor's Omega symbol (which is the infinity of all the Aleph numbers) in an integral (invented by Leibniz) with $1/\Omega$, so God is from the macro-infinite to the infinitesimal in a continuum. Godel's other major work was proving the continuum hypothesis. So yeah.

I think God left the Code 19 incomplete to disabuse us of a mono-mania about his ayati and to keep us epistemically humble. It's like complaining that you've been given money to manage but it's only 998 million dollars. Why not a round billion, huh?! Just, get to work with it.

In a movement as hyper-textual as Quranism tends to be, it's important to have a bridge between the textual mode of revelation and the inspiration-based mode of revelation. Often times Quranists overlook these aspects because they see how extra-Quranic sources have led to shirk and injustice in religion, and they want to stay pure, like Godel with his fasting-unto-death. Code 19 opens a door not just to reifying that we need to obey Quranic law, or even that Qur'an itself is an artifact of God, like an SCP anomaly unto itself, but *also* that 19 is a building block for sacred geometry and physics in a fractal unfolding that we are but one small part of. Code 19 allows us to see, other than the verse where God says he communicates to humans behind a veil (e.g. Moses saws) via angels (e.g. Mary as) via messengers (e.g. Muhammad saws) and through inspiration, but that the message can also contain the inspiration, for people of contemplation.

Will they not then reason?

Marshall McLuhan said "the medium is the message" and in the case of the Qur'an's code 19, this is strongly exemplified. Modernist scholars talk about the repetitiveness in Qur'an, or how it retells the same prophetic stories in slight detail, but guess what, that's just fleshing out data to add up to this cryptographic signature of code 19. It's like a videogame with randomized world generation, of course there is going to be some fractal repetition in the generation algorithm.

We're talking about a book authored by the same God who made billions of galaxies but only a few (possibly just one) that have life in them.

Islamic art, with the algorithmic geometry patterns, is motivated by fear of God via the image-maker hadiths but inadvertently is getting closer to God than European frescos of a big bearded guy reaching out to a lazy Adam lounging in his nudity, awrah exposed. Nay, Islamic art presaged videogames over 1000 years early. It's all there in the Qur'an.

What is Kufr?

I remember fondly going to the Whartscape festival in Baltimore in 2008 where a bunch of eccentric musical acts were performing, and a kid told me that Lupe Fiasco was going to perform - sadly this was not the case. Later in life after becoming a Muslim, I saw Lupe go on with Mufti Abu Layth, I didn't know Lupe was raised Muslim, and during the interview Lupe confessed that he didn't really believe in Jinn, and related that this doubt made him briefly question his Muslim identity. The Salafi Dawah sphere of YouTube seized on that detail and proceeded to takfir Lupe, though fortunately he continues to practice Islam without their approval. I can write a whole book on esoteric history and ethnographic ritual magicians of various stripes to argue for why Jinn are not a folk metaphor God is condescending to in Qur'an, but the point of this chapter is to dissect this idea of kufr being a fatal and easily achievable state.

One thing that's tough about being a Muslim if not knowing if you're safe or not. Usually this give you a sense of humility to avoid sin, but there's also the definition whereby it doesn't matter if you sin or do a mountain of good deeds, you believe or expressed the wrong thing and the buzzer goes off and you're toast. Here's a list of things that have been associated with automatic eternal damnation via kufr in Islam:

Sunnis say:

- Disputing the infallibility of any Companions who ever met the Prophet (or is it just cursing them?)
- Fabricating a lie against the Prophet
- Believing things that have been agreed by scholars not to be lies against the prophet are actually lies (some schools give room here if you have scholarly credentials)
- Having the wrong interpretation of anything in the Qur'an according to consensus, except for some of the things where it's ok to have differing interpretations because it was politically expedient to tolerate the differences
- Thinking that other schools are seriously wrong
- Declaring someone to be a kafir and being wrong
- Doubting the validity of the consensus of scholars
- Believing that one of your sins is not actually a sin according to your interpretation (assuming that the interpretation is wrong)
- Being a Shia, well maybe Twelvers who don't do weird Twelver stuff are ok? Being an Ismaeli Shia
- Disbelieving in the Nur Muhammad as a First Intellect (Barelvi)
- Believing in the Nur Muhammad as a First Intellect (Deobandi)
- Doing whatever your wife tells you (according to one hadith)
- Missing a spot during Wudu (or maybe you just get a little burned)
- Drinking alcohol four times (hadiths again)

- Many many hadiths use a one-shot binary threat of damnation as the stick to make the point of the hadith
- Oh yeah, not believing in the Oneness of God, the Last Day, the Messengers and Books, and angels
- Not believing in the Second Coming of Jesus (saws)
- Interpreting the Qur'an on your own
- Rejecting a Mutawatir hadith
- Believing the Qur'an is created
- Believing in absolute Free Will
- Not visiting the Prophet's tomb on Hajj

Probably there are more.

Shia say:

- Most of the above except for the Sunni-specific parts
- Doubting the infallibility of the Imams (presumably Twelver Imams since Ismaelitis don't teach this), mostly this means obeying Jaffari fiqh
- Cursing Ali or the Ahul Bayt or otherwise being someone Ali (ra) would not permit to go to heaven
- Being a hypocrite who thinks people in Idlib have as much rights as people in Gaza (probably)

Ibadi say:

- Committing a major sin and not repenting before you die
- Being a non-Ibadi (this has been repealed)
- Believing the Qur'an is Uncreated (this has been relaxed)
- Believing God has literal hands and such and you could see Him in Jannah
- Believing in the 2nd coming of Jesus (saws)
- Believing in absolute Free Will
- Obeying a hadith that contradicts the Qur'an in a serious sin capacity

Maybe part of how Ahlus Sunna got to be such a big, successful umbrella sect is they glommed on to a lot of variations in belief that they tolerated, but along the way they got a lot more creed requirements. Let's see how some Quranists are doing with this:

- The 5 things listed in the Qur'an
- The predestination thing is a hadith so that's fine, don't worry about it
- Oh don't do shirk. What's shirk?

- Drinking ZamZam water on Hajj
- Praying in a Sunni or Shia Masjid
- Obeying a hadith that contradicts the Qur'an at all
- Visiting the Prophet's tomb on Hajj
- Sending Salawat on the Prophet (maybe you can do it all the prophets?)
- Making Lords of Scholars
- Saying the Shahadatain (with "Muhummadur Rasulullah")
- Basically anything that contradicts the Qur'an that's a part of traditions
- Liking your children too much
- Liking your money too much

For some Quranists the list of things that constitute shirk is even more extensive.

For some Quran-centric people like Khaled from Quranic Islam, the list would be, just the 5 things in the Qur'an, and making lords of scholars by *habitually* obeying a hadith or some other sectarian thing that contradicts the Qur'an. So doing weird stuff to get into a fraternity wouldn't be shirk but being rude to your mom to get into the fraternity *would* be shirk, because it goes against the Qur'an's commandments to honor parents. Khaled thinks acts done under auspices of shirk are not forgiven but only wipes out your chances at paradise if it's a dedicated habit.

When we look at the long list of mortal thought-crimes that have become of Islamic jurisprudence, it is dizzying. At least the Protestant Christians give you a single clean tenet to latch onto and you're guaranteed, in their prospective covenant, to get in to paradise with that. You might argue that a faith-alone religious creed then leads to a lot of bad behavior because you're too complacent, the Ibadis certainly think so, but in Islam there's even the Maturidi school where eventual intercession is guaranteed to the faithful.

When you try to pitch religious faith to a secular person who wants to do "good", and you even present a very sensible and just concept of God's laws and values that aligns with their intuitive sense of goodness, the catch-22 of losing it all due to a wrong belief does make it difficult. The churn-rate on reverts to Islam is an average drop-out after three years. I think it is not the prayer routine and the ardor of Ramadan fasting that causes that; if you can make the time flexibly then the prayers are really very nice (if not plagued with obsessive compulsive disorder) and the fasts are tough but you get breaks for illness and it's fun to feast at night. I think people get to the point where they can't accept the 1000 extra particles of faith that get attached to the Din, you've got to think slave-rape and child marriage are good with God or you're a hypocrite hiding disbelief. Then logic then follows: might as well be an honest kafir, have a beer, get laid, and stop spending my precious time with these evil religious people. Why bother if you can't even manage to conform to the jungle gym of belief requirements.

This Christian guy, Pascal, he had a wager. He said, hey why not just believe in Jesus (saws) being in a trinity, ok, because if you do you might go to heaven or just cease to exist after death, but if you don't you might cease to exist after death, or you might go to hell forever. It's

like buying a call option, asymmetric upside, for a cheap price, just say the magic words. That's Protestant Christianity for you.

In Sect-infested Islam, it's more like Pascals Mexican Standoff. Why not have faith, you could get into Paradise. Ok great, I have faith, alhamdulillah. Ahh, but is it the *right* kind of faith? Don't be like those kafir Shia. And then the Shia are like, no *you*! And then the Ibadi (pre-Sultan Qaboos) are holding a grenade above the room like - you're all gonna die fools! And then Quranists are outside with flame thrower ready to burn down the building like "they're all a bunch of mushriks!" And then the Sunni guy holding two guns at the Shiite and the Ibadi turns one gun to himself like "Am I a Bareilvi or a Deobandi? Should I shoot myself?" And then the Shia guy gets confused and is like "are you even still fighting me bro?" And in the bathroom is an Ismaeli making wudu, but according to how recent Imams say to do it, not according to Ijma!

Part of the reason why Protestant Christianity did so well with the Dutch, English and Americans, is you could make taqlid with each other, have a lot of variation in fiqh, and the adeeqah was pretty form compatible in a modularity that is more seamless than how Sunni Islam did it. Sure it all ended up degrading into a post-Christian morass of Marxists, Liberals, Conservatives-not-educated-enough-to-know-they're-Liberals, and all the rest of secular western society, and Christianity isn't very relevant anymore. But it did the trick.

I definitely think the *right* Overton window for Islam has a lot more faith, meat and rigor to help western civilization clean up and focus on the family, otherwise I wouldn't be in it. I don't mean the *one* right form of Islam, that doesn't exist, we are Bani Adam, fallible to a fault. I mean the right range of parameters.

In Mecca the scholars just recently released a statement as part of their Charter for Bulding Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects:

A Muslim is anyone who testifies to the oneness of Allah Almighty—there is no god but Him—in divinity, and to His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the messenger and the seal of prophecy, adheres to the firm rope of Allah, believes in the Sharia's rulings and the religion's constants, acts according to them, and does not knowingly and intentionally commit or believe in what Muslims unanimously declare as disbelief.

The idea of Ijma leaves this attempt at a broad, conciliatory definition very vague, because whose Ijma? And if there are a few million Quranists and other small groups at the fringes who disagree about what is disbelief, you've already excluded them from Islam so their dissent does not break the unanimous definition. This might be taken to include Twelver Shia, because Iran has bombs, and they agree on a lot of fiqh with Sunnis, and then exclude Ismaelis for using a different prayer form and thinking that a Pope-visit like speech from the Aga Khan counts as Hajj for them.

It's good though! This is an example of where the Middle East is trying to go with the 2nd Islamic Reformation and how Muhammad Bin Salman is providing leadership.

A more robust definition would need to perhaps loosen up about prayer form, concede that if you can interpret from the Qur'an that e.g. you have this line of Imams that can abrogate, that's about the same as a Shafi Sunni following hadith-abrogates-Qur'an usool. I don't think they would ever say that you can reject 100% of hadith and still be a Muslim but I can see the Hamza Yusuf idea of just accepting mutawatir hadith, so a lot of "Quranists" can soft-qualify as Quran-centric and get back into Islam under that definition. Not like God cares, as far as his judgment is concerned, what some .pdf says, but I do think God cares that the .pdf publishers are trying to help unite the Ummah, as this .pdf insha'Allah will help to do.

I'd humbly suggest that we loosen up on what is kufr and say, hey, maybe they are wrong about the Qur'an and Sunnah, maybe they're fasiqs, doing habitual sins they do not think are sins, and if their beliefs were more correct they'd be at least trying to live a more sin-free life. Maybe their idea of what is a good deed is misguided, and they're not achieving so much with Allah as they'd like to think.

The problem with declaring things kufr, is you're assuming what God will do. And speaking on behalf of God is... I don't want to say shirk because then I'm doing it, but it's not good. Calling people mushriks is also the same as takfir, a mushrik is also a kafir. You might mean mushrik in the sense that, this person is a true believer, but their beliefs are mixed with wrong influences from sources other than God. I think saying that people are "upon batil" is a much softer term. Batil is used in Qur'an in conjunction with going against Allah's will and being condemned, but it's a secondary component to the sins.

What does kafir mean anyway? The etymological root of the term has to do with covering the truth. It's also linked to the term for ungrateful. The Qur'an says, who is more unjust than one who invents lies against Allah? Why would that be the worst thing? Because you can set people on the wrong path for many centuries to come. The Qur'an says, do not speak about what you do not... know? Omar Ramahi interprets the word in Arabic to be, do not speak of what you do not *understand*. What's the difference? In the Jewish Kabbala system, Understanding is Binah and Knowledge is Chokmah. Knowledge is on a somewhat more advanced tiering of the universe, right below the Keter, where Metatron hangs out (hey! It's Metatron again!). So I can understand how markets work or what is going on with a company as a stock analyst, but I cannot *know* what the stock price is going to do tomorrow or next week, not exactly. Knowledge is epistemically almost-unattainable, just ask Socrates, whereas Understanding is easier to imagine developing. This frees one up to do scholarship without fearing damnation for making a mistake, while requiring that we retain a sense of epistemic humility.

Speaking of which: Ya Allah please forgive me if I have made any errors in this book. Please forgive me if the humor has verged into mocking the truthful things about your Din, like those mentioned in Surah Tawbah, my intention was only to mock the hypocrisy and the inanity,

and in the process make Islam's promise and problems intelligible to more people. Ya Allah please forgive me if I have misrepresented your Haqq or told any lies about you and please guide me to the truth as correction. Alhamdulillah al Rabbi Alaameen.

So, we've looked at two root meanings of kufr, covering the truth and being ungrateful. The rich guy with the two gardens in Surah Kahf is not committing shirk by *thinking* (not knowing) that his wealth will persevere, what Salafis call a shirk of attributes, rather he's being a kafir for taking everything for granted and assuming God likes him and will (if he exists, whatever) grant paradise, probably, something even better. Whereas the friend is humble only has a small garden and house and family, but he's got faith, which means *trust* in Allah, and he does not mix in his service to Allah, *anyone*. One of the last lines in Surah Maidah says on the judgment day, the faithful will attain paradise, that's the trad. translation, but the actual Arabic word is *truthful*, the truthful will attain paradise. Faith isn't about having the truth in your hands, it's about having a truthful attitude when you *definitely don't know*. You can have certainty of the Last Day, Yachim, but you certainly don't know everything about God and it's de facto impossible to have such infinite and perfect knowledge.

Covering the truth and ingratitude are connected with a lack of epistemic humility. Being a kafir can also mean, you just sin, you reject the good by rejecting the truth vis a vis God's laws, *after* they are clear to you. Just like you shouldn't speak of what you don't understand, God only punishes a people after a warner has come, so if popping off prostrations to an elephant statue makes you feel good, you're only a kafir if you keep it up after having understanding that it's offensive to the true God. Truth is the big theme here.

Shaytan became a kafir when he refused to bow to Adam, so that's funny, it's like the opposite of the elephant statue example. Context is important. Shaytan is not disbelieving in God, he's being ungrateful and covering the truth that God has this plan or Adam and is demanding service to God via prostrating to Adam. It's kind of like, oh I'm the VP of Sales, and then the CEO calls a meeting and you're like, I saw the slides, I don't think it's a good strategy, I'm against it, so I'm not going to the meeting. Then the CEO is like, hey where were you, you're like, protesting your bad strategy, the CEO goes, ok you're fired. You say, can you not fire me until the end of the year when my stock options vest. The CEO is like, haha no. You say, ok how about the end of the month. The CEO is like, sure, that's fair. Then you say, haha now I will turn all the employees against you. The CEO is like, whatever I'll fire anyone who wants to get fired.

None of that has to do with *belief* it has to do with *attitude*.

What if a sin being fatal and outweighing all good deeds doesn't have to do with an arrogant attitude like Iblis had, and just transgresses a very extreme threat in the hadith? Consider the case of image-making fiqh.

The anti-iconism in Islam stems from ahad hadith mostly, there's a rooting of it in the Torah, the 2nd commandment. The hadith makes it seem like making an image of any kind is

equal to nifaq and a one-way ticket to super hell, the Torah commandment is a bit confusing because depending on how you punctuate the sentence (punctuation doesn't exist in Hebrew or Arabic) it's either a strict prohibition against all image-making or a prohibition on images made for idolatry. In Leviticus the idol-maker is cursed, this seems to circumscribe the 2nd commandment to be about religious imagery only, the temple of Solomon (saws) did include statues, that's in the Qur'an. The Jewish tradition did embrace non-religious art but also tradition of conceptual art to honor the stricter interpretation of the 2nd commandment.

This would be a good example of both how Quranists might get themselves into serious trouble with ignoring hadith, but also, how hadith is not absolute even within Sunni Islam. Three of the four Sunni Madhabs agree image-making is haram, except for the Malikis. There's nothing about terrifyingly extreme punishment for image-making in the Muwatta of Imam Malik, so the School of Medina generally prohibits sculpture but not painting, frescos and other 2d art, considering them instead makruh. The Hanafi school arrived at the image prohibition by taqlid with Shafi and Hanbali schools that embraced a much wider collection of hadith, and permit images when they are in a non-venerated context, such as on a dinner plate, a pillow or a door mat, fitting in that idolatrous condition from Leviticus, but mostly based on a more extensive hadith where Muhammad (saws) and Aisha (ra) made fabric decorated with animal images into pillows.

The idea that making an image unrepentantly is a one-way ticket to super hell was revived and re-emphasized by the Salafis in recent centuries and adopted by Deobandi Hanafis such as the Taliban, and this was relaxed by general Sunni consensus in recently decades because Dawah guys (daes) wanted to evangelize Islam on YouTube and other video media, and so took to image making, under auspices that the light captured by the camera is God's reality and it's not infringing on God's right to creation. Zakir Naik has a video discussing the moment where they feared Allah on the matter but, motivated by marketing, debated the issue and settled on permitting photography for this good intent. I often see Sunni videos with a thumbnail from the recording but Qurani, Sufi and modernist videos will go ahead and make an AI image to decorate the video thumbnail more evocatively.

Then we look at the category of sins that are less than major or super-major (such as how image making was feared to be) but that, if embraced, lead one to attain kafir status. This is the fisq->kafir pipeline that Ibadism construes strictly and Sunnism construes incrementally. Consider the fiqh on eating meat: the Qur'an says in Surah 6 that whoever eats meat not dedicated to Allah is one of the transgressors, then later in Surah 3 (later in the revelation sequence) it says not to eat meat dedicated to other, false gods. This is where set theory comes in, the set of food dedicated to false gods is smaller than the set of meat not slaughtered with a "Bismillah!" and what about eating vegetarian food at a Hare Krishna temple? Better not to be safe. Surah Maidah comes in and says, the food of Jews and Christians is acceptable for you.

The Hanafi school takes a broad interpretation that the last word is the Jews+Christians one, so if there are Jews and Christians at large slaughtering meat, just go for it. But then this can be circumscribed by prohibitions on stunned/strangled meat, meaning modern

slaughterhouse USDA-regulated type meat you'd get at McDonalds *or* the free range beef store, are both problematic, but chicken could be ok. The other Sunni schools say the Christian has to say "Bismillah!" or some translated equivalent, which is pretty rare, though Jewish halal slaughter is ok because they are ritualistic about it. Then we get to the Jafari fiqh that Shia follow, they say, no, it's *got* to be a Muslim doing the slaughter, the Jews+Christians thing is more about if you're married to a Christian or Jew and she serves you food, it's ok.

Now, this is where something small gets teased out logically into a more interesting and broad conclusion about kufr and fisq. Abu Hanifa was a student of Imam Jafar. Imam Jafar is the 6th Imam of the Shia lineage, great-great-grandson of Ali (ra) and great-x3 grandson of Muhammad (saws). If I were Shia I'd use (as) after Ali, though since meeting a Mirza from Iran and learning about their stricter dietary fiqh I am strictly pescatarian out of paranoia, so there's that. Abu Hanifa's view on meat is totally the opposite of his teacher, though they both ended up poisoned to death by the second Abbasid caliph, as Jafar's forefathers were similarly poisoned or killed in battle by Sunni caliphs. From a Shia point of view, Abu Hanifa was a fasiq for not following the correct fiqh, but the Shia have been a minority of all the history of Muhammadian Islam so there's a tendency to understate that. Abu Hanifa allegedly said, in chorus with Sunni Imams to come, that whoever curses a Sahaba (such as Muawiya) is a kafir. You can see how the Pascal's Mexican Stand-off of Muslims calling each other kafir escalated.

Now a Quranist might say, all these guys were mushriks because they were engaging in sectarianism, if not for other reasons, and mushriks are a subset of kafirs. But a Quran-centric person who adopts the incremental view of shirk, major and minor, weighing the scales unforgivably, but perhaps minor shirk of sectarian opinions is not a one-off, they might say well, maybe they're both good. But the guys who murdered them, they're definitely not good. Murder is bad, it's in the Cain and Abel story.

Zooming in a bit, there's debate within Shiism if Ismailis are Muslims or not. Ismaelis say that their modern Imams have abrogated the hajj obligation, replacing it with a more accessible visit to a speech by an Imam, who is like a walking kaaba. This is like how the Catholic Pope tours around the world and people crowd in the streets to see him in the Pope-mobile. There's something to be said for the efficiency of it, instead of millions of people flying in from everywhere, paying up during the first 10 days of Dhul Hijjah to stay in the clocktower hotel by the Masjid Al-Haram (comes to 7-10k USD per person), the Ismaelis get one guy and his crew to fly around and they can have a hajj experience. But on this basis the Ismaelis are often considered non-Muslim because they do not submit to the verses about hajj in Surah Baqarah.

Ahh, but, most Sunni Muslims never do a hajj because they never have 7-10k on their person in their whole lives, and they can't borrow to do it (which is both haram and not financially advisable). The Saudis making it so expensive by emphasizing a hadith-based 10 day window, a special travel agency system combined with a special hajj visa, and the peak rates involved in the 10 day window, are doing a mercy to the low-income Sunni majority because they have an excuse not to go. Thus is the throughput managed in a nearly 2 billion

person group of hajj obligates. So by that logic many Ismaelis who are also semi-poor get out of the kufr charge.

But then we have the Ismaeli prayer form, instead of saying Surah Fatihah then other Qur'an, then bowing, then returning to a standing position and prostrating, they simply recite Fatihah and specific Qur'an passages in a sitting position! Therefore, the logic goes, they are kuffar because their prayer isn't accepted without the standing and bowing positions. Quranists generally would say, the story of the cow in Surah Baqarah is a parable of not demanding too much formalism to serve God, and the Ismaelis are fine for that prayer form, it's got Qur'an and sujud, that's enough. Ismaelis even do 18 rakats a day as fard instead of 17.

The top Marjas of Twelver Shiism, Khomenei and Sistani, have said that Ismaelis are still Muslims, however they aren't endorsing the idea that it doesn't matter exactly how you pray, rather their subtext view of Ismaelis is similar to the Mutazilite idea of major sinners - don't liquidate their assets and execute or assassinate them, but don't assume God will forgive them for their unrepentant deviance from the law. That sounds harsh and bigoted, but look, if you're very into a religious position and convinced it's God's favorite or even the only one acceptable to God, then legally extending rights but reserving private assumption of damnation for an out-group is pretty-pretty good compared to the verbal slandering and violence that has marred the ummah for 1400 years.

Zooming out now, the reason why many Sunnis consider Shia in general to be kafirs, even if they abstain from some of the more shirky practices like bowing to pictures of Ali (ra), is that the premise of Shiism in Qur'an is 5:50, that today the religion has been perfected. Sunnis interpret that plainly - it's all set - the Sunni hadith corpus then, one must imagine, were all statements prior to that day. Yet the Sunni hadith corpus seems to include some statements that can be dated later, and there's also the idea of the Sunnah of Abu Bakr (ra), Umar (ra) and Uthman. Ali was up for caliph after Umar's murder by a slave who - the conspiracy theory goes - was put up to it by Muawiya and suicided shortly after, much like Lee Harvey Oswald was quickly killed and Jack Ruby (who killed Oswald) quickly "committed suicide". Anyways, when Ali was up, he refused to be bound by the customs of Umar and Uthman agreed to that condition, and so was elected by the limited shura of the Meccan and Medinan oligarchs. Shia like to debate this idea of Sunnah extending to the early caliphs as evidence of an idea of Imamate held by proto-Sunnis but then abandoned as Muawiya's take-over, mass executions and subsequent monarchical-hereditary appointment of Yazid spoiled the Rashidun continuity of guided rulership. The Shia interpretation of 5:50 is that, that was the day that Muhammad (saws) had designated Ali (ra) as his successor.

Speaking of all this, why do Muslims say "peace be upon him" about prophets but "may Allah be pleased with him" about companions? The peace designation may have to do with the Sunni creed that all prophets are basically infallible, in at least a soft sense, protected from major sin, hence the idea that all the bible stories about David (saws) and Bathsheeba/Uriah or Noah (saws) getting drunk were Jewish lies. Hence, these people are at peace because their slate is clean. The (ra) designation then implies, we're not sure if they were totally clean, but we

like to think so, and we wish for Allah to be pleased with them. It's like Moe in The Simpsons saying "I'm a well-wisher, in that, I don't wish you any particular harm".

In Sunnism if you believe prophets sinned or companions were fatally sinners, you're a kafir. But maybe if the Qur'anic reformation movement becomes really big, like a few hundred million people across sects, they'll band together with the Shia and lighten up on those tenets to emphasize more the recognition of a concept of Sunnah as the litmus test for being a Muslim.

As we covered in the early chapters, the main difference between Sunni and Quranist interpretations of Islam and the right methodology via Qur'an, is taking some verses literally or metaphorically. Quranists take all the verses about Allah and the Messenger as synonymous to obeying Qur'an, and the verse about the Messenger not speaking from desire meaning, he doesn't throw around lawgiving and religious fatwas outside the Qur'an. Sunni and Shia take that very same verse to mean, he **never** speaks from desire, he's got wahy in all statements - Sunni interpret that as a special thing and Shia interpret that as the guidance of the Ruh Qudus (which Sunnis assert is just a synonym for the Arch-angel Gabriel/Jibreel, peace be upon Em). Ibadis take a middle position that, not literally **every single thing** ever stated by the Messenger is divinely inspired, but, some of it is, and the contingent commands of Qur'an to obey the commands of the Messenger do extend to hadith, hence their limited adoption of it.

Why aren't Ibadis then inside the big tent of Sunni Islam? Is it over their hadith filtration methodology? But the Malikis and Hanafis permit someone trained in their schools to take an "early" position and not taqlid every fiqh ruling based off the larger hadith collections, it's not popular but you're only a kafir if you throw out the mutawatir hadiths. People in those madhabs are also not paranoid about praying with Ibadis, like having to repeat the prayer later, Ibadis are in semi-communication with the more moderate Sunni viewpoints. Usually it's Hanbalis and Salafis who will say Ibadis are all doomed based on the 73 sects hadith and needing to be in the group with the majority of Muslims, and also the created Qur'an matter, yet... Hanbalis and Salafis are the minority within Sunni Islam? We'll tease this out further in the chapter on Ijma.

Why don't Ashari Malikis and Shafis and Maturidi Hanafis consider Athari Hanbalis or Salafis to be kuffar? The Atharis interpret the verses in Qur'an about God's hand and face and such as literal but stop short of saying one is a kafir for interpreting them metaphorically as the other theology schools do. The internet beef of Atharis getting feisty with Asharis is a modern phenomenon that comes with the Salafist reformation's tendency to try and taqlid the rest of Sunnism under its minority banner. The difference between a Hanbali-Athari and a Salafi-Athari then has to do with the prior respecting the truce and the usool of experts to interpret the myriad hadiths and apparent contradictions encountered within Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Yasir Qadhi's personal journey over his career is a great example of burning out on Salafism and defaulting to an academic Hanbali Madhab position - superficially, he used to have a huge beard and now he has a medium-beard.

The truce on what is kufr and the tolerance of theological interpretation between Athari and Ashari/Maturidi is a fault line in the big tent of Sunni Islam. It seems to me, and God forgive

me if I'm wrong, that the compilation of what is not accepted or accepted in Sunnism is based on a series of political uproars that needed to be permanently mollified through compromises, and that when there was a minoritarian position that didn't have enough political torque (Shia, Ibadi) these didn't make the cut. In other words, if it wasn't for the Minha persecution of Hanbalis, the idea of created/uncreated Qur'an would hardly be discussed much less mandated as sending someone on the wrong side of the issue to hellfire. If it wasn't for Muawiya executing people for refusing to curse Ali, maybe Shia wouldn't have cursed Abu Bakr, Umar and Aisha so much and then people wouldn't have gotten into cursing Ahul Bayt. Then maybe the Sahaba-infallibility idea wouldn't have rooted into formal Sunnism. Stop cursing guys!

Then we have the Ahmadis, they interpret the Seal of the Prophets verse differently, basically they say their messiah is a prophet but not breaking the seal because he's preaching Qur'an. Thus Adhmadis are broadly persecuted and denied visas to attend hajj. Bahai are considered out of Islam by Twelvers for a similar reason. Rashad Khalifa was irking people when he told them that they're fasiqs for not paying zakat on every payday, but he only got the fatwa put out declaring him an apostate when he insisted he was a Messenger, in an intra-Quranic capacity similar to the Adhmadi messiah and not in a broad sense of being a dawah guy. If Rashad had more time maybe he would takfir people for not accepting/obeying him as a Messenger the same way that Sunnis takfir Quranists for not sufficiently obeying the Messenger.

The Alevis of Turkey/Albania are in a grey zone, mostly they're considered mushriks for having a sort of non-filioque trinity between Haqq (Allah), Muhummad and Ali, with a strong monarchicalism (Haqq is on top). One must wonder, if the Alevis were on the other side of the mountains in the Iranian area, would Safavids/Twelvers be kinder to them than the Ottomans/Sunnis?

How about another ~20M person religious minority another 1000 to 2000 kilometers to the east of Iran, the Sikhs? The Sikh practices are clearly inspired by Guru Nanak having read the Qur'an. They pray 3 times a day in combined form, prescribed over 2 hours of nitnem meditation, they're monotheistic in creed and emphasize the good character and halal earning framed by the Qur'an, as well as similar dietary requirements. Yet Muslims will say they are kafirs for either not following Sunnah, or for not believing in an eventic Last Day (Sikhs might say that every day is judgment day, or that when you die you are judged, and emphasize similar lack of intercessors for you as the Qur'an does, thus do good deeds every day). Muslims might also accuse Sikhs of shirk because they want to graduate from the cycle of reincarnation by merging with Allah/Waheguru, and this is shirk and thus kufr? Or is it?

WELL, the Naqshbandi/Barelevi/Chisti/Ibn Arabi ideas are where we find the cusp of Sunni orthodoxy. People who are into those belief systems believe in the Nur Muhummedi hadith being literally true and there's a First Intellect who is finite-yet-perfect that intermediates between us and God and we're in its ocean amidst Allah's more expansive infinity. Thus you can have a pantheistic/panentheistic feeling of spirituality but it's sterilized by the barrier this created entity has between you and Allah. Salafis and Deobandis completely hate that worldview

because they still see it as shirk. Whereas Ibn Arabi would say that trinitarians idea of a shared Essence between God and Holy Spirit+Logos is shirk, and that pure Advaita Vedanta is still shirk despite ditching the idolatry of mainstream Hinduism because you're associating your own soul as *being* God rather than belonging to God. Ibn Arabi had his cake and also enjoyed eating it by saying, yes only God exists, but our existence is not substantially an illusion, God makes it real, but like, you know, we're not mushriks because we're not God, there's this prophylactic of the Nur Muhammadi. Deobandis in India hear Barlevis talk about Muhammad's lordship over the universe and its intermediation in our prayers and think that's shirk, because they're conflating it with the historical person of Muhammad.

Ismaelis also believe in the God->First Intellect->Universal Soul cosmology and how that insulates us from shirk by having a strict createdness hierarchy instead of a shared Essence trinity, and if the Fatimid Caliphate had dominated the Muslim world for 1000 years I could imagine a world where reverence to the Ismaeli Imam is the line between kufr and Islam at a level level, but in our timeline the Aga Khan is a nice guy and if you want to get into the reverence you're welcome to convert. Likewise Ackbarian Sufis (Ibn Arabi students), Naqshbandis, Ismaelis and so on don't tell people that it's kufr to not believe in a First Intellect intermediary, *even though* most Sunnis *do accept* the hadiths indicating such but they see it as a metaphor, like, it's just the wahy.

You might think, ok maybe in that stripped down acceptance of the Nur Muhammadi hadiths you interpret it as the Ruh that descends on Layt-al Qadr? Well no, that's just a sub-set of the angels, Arch-angel Jibreel, this is Sunnism bruv, if Sunnis say it's Ruh Qudus they open the door to losing debates with Christians about trinity or with Shia about divinely guided Imamate. Sunnis much prefer to lose debates on trinity by insisting the Qur'an is uncreated yet an attribute yet there's Athari full-predestination or Ashari Occasionalism preventing a casual chain to delineate, and they like to preclude debate with Shia by calling them kuffar or attacking weaknesses in Twelver Shiism's occluded messiah story.

Gee Islam is super complicated and it seems like there are all these murder-holes where all your prayers and fasts and charity and smiles and life-devotion to God gets thrown in the dumpster fire for just having thought the wrong thing, and nobody can agree on what's ok to think except the Sunni majority, but their list is stitched together with arrow heads and penned with blood. Maybe just go become a Protestant Christian who thinks faith alone in one mysterious thing is enough - at least it's concise!

What does, and I know this sounds like a crazy question but bear with me - what does the Qur'an say?

Surah Baqarah, 2:177, the righteous in the sight of Allah are those who believe in 5 things and so good deeds. The 5 things:

- One God
- Last Day

- The Revealed Scriptures
- The Messengers who brought those scriptures
- Angels

Hey that's reasonably concise!

Imagine believing in 4 out of 5, like you accept the supernatural God and divinely revealed texts but not so sure about angels - hell! Might as well just believe in angels my guy, don't be arrogant.

What if you believed in Last Day, even if in a loose sense like reincarnation posits, and the scriptures and messengers, and angels, and One God, but you're basically a Druze? Druze aren't considered Muslims. Can Druze get their deeds counted on an even scale?

What about Christians, they profess to believe in One God but they're not accepting the messenger who brought the text that prohibits them to say... what they often like to say, per Maidah 5:72.

Dr. Shadee Elmasry says that Quranists and Perennialists are bound for hell no matter how much worship, service and good deeds they do, because they don't follow the dual Shehada. So in this formulation a Quranist must be e.g. finishing prayers with Muhammadan Abduhu Rasulu, must be at least respecting the important of stepping out of the bathroom with the left foot first, and other Sunnah rules like not wearing gold. We'll cover these particular more in the chapter on Hadith Harams.

Quranists are allergic to the idea of singling out one Messenger and putting that Messenger first as an intermediary between us and God the way Christians do that with Jesus (saws), one might argue that being a Muslim *is* being Muhammadian, whereas Quranists often cite Abraham (saws) and the la ilaha illAllah, and the root meaning of "submission" and perhaps the peace etymology (I-slam, salam, Jerusalem, etc.). I liked it when Hamza Yusuf just said rejecting mutawatir hadith is kufr, that at least wore its epistemology on its sleeve and was relatively diplomatic - many Quranists love mutawatir hadith especially the one forbidding the writing of hadith, the one where Umar says "Quran is sufficient for us" and the contested funeral hadith with 3 versions. The funeral hadith has the Prophet Muhammad (saws) saying to his people, hold fast to this and you'll not go astray - one version says Qur'an, one version says Qur'an and my Sunnah, one version says Qur'an and my family.

Well, that's sectarianism for ya.

How about this perennialism claim? And am I perennialist? I have a huge sunk cost bias for all these prayers I've been doing, so if a cool dude from New Jersey with a cloak and a good beard groom says it's kufr, I don't want to be! I want paradise, insha'Allah. Likewise people in the Quranic reformation movement often shy away from the "Quranist" term and the extreme Quranist position for the same reasons, accepting mutawatir hadith, identifying as merely

“Muslim”, praying close to Sunni fiqh, and justifying rejection of problematic hadiths (kill apostates, invade non-Muslims, 73 sects, best generations, Aisha-child-marriage etc.) with scholarship. And likewise I am going to attenuate the perennialism thing.

What does perennial mean? There are perennial plants, they survive the winters, they're not eternal. So in some sense perennialism in religion is embracing that non-eternal but persistently surviving weeds in human thought, perhaps from Shaytan, like Hermetic hippie stuff. Christians call things Gnostic in their version of this, or New Age, and will lump Islam into it since there is a portion of the ummah that truly does incorporate gnostic beliefs. Nevermind that Christianity based on Gospel of John, especially Protestant Christianity, is based on an appeal to holy spirit guidance, which is the modality of gnosis vs. textual basis (Protestantism is based on a mix). We'll talk about possibly conspiracies to make a One World Religion and the role of the Quranic reformation in fighting that or (God forbid) aiding that in another chapter. This amalgamation of feel-good, possibly shirky, possibly sinful religious practices under an umbrella of ancient wisdom is what we can call Open Perennialism.

Ismaelis and some Sufis teach an intermediate degree of perennialism that can make it easier to do dawah to Hindus, Buddhists and (in the west) spiritual-but-not-religious people, and it's rooted in the Qur'an's mention of earlier prophets getting their own scriptures.

The Cycles of Universal Prophecy and Imamah				
Cycle	Prophets	Imams	Scriptures	Communities
Cycle of Cycles (Origin of Humanity)	Universal Adam (<i>al-Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Adam (<i>Adam al-kull</i>)	Universal Gnosis	Humanity (One Community)
Pre-Adamic (Pre 4,050 BC)	Rishi Vashisht Rishi Viyas Gur Sohodeva	Shri Rama Shri Krishna Shri Budh	Laws of Manu Vedas	Humanity (One Community)
Adamic (4,050 BC)	Prophet Adam	Mawlana Shith (Seth)	Scrolls of Adam	Brahmans
Semitic (3,000 BC)	Prophet Nuh (Noah)	Mawlana Sam (Shem)	Noahide Laws	Sabians
Abrahamic (2,000 BC)	Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)	Mawlana Isma'il (Ishmael) Mawlana Ishaq (Isaac)	Scrolls of Abraham	Mazdeans
Mosaic (1,400 BC)	Prophet Musa (Moses)	Mawlana 'Adnan Mawlana Harun (Aaron)	Torah	Jews
Christic (33 AD)	Prophet 'Isa (Jesus)	Mawlana Khuzaymah Mawlana Yaqub (James)	Gospels	Christians
Muhammadan (610 AD)	Prophet Muhammad (Last Prophet)	Mawlana 'Ali	Qur'an	Muslims
Resurrection	<i>Hadrat Qa'im al-Qiyamah</i> (Lord of Resurrection)	<i>Hujjatu'l-Qa'im</i> (Proof of <i>Qa'im</i>)	Universal <i>Ta'wil</i> of all Scriptures	Humanity (One Community)

What this table is missing is Zoroastrianism which in the book of Isaiah is suggested to have been part of God's plan as well. Cyrus the Great of Persia (Iran) had just conquered Babylon (Iraq) and freed the Isrealites to go back and do this big compilation project, so Isaiah's inclusion of a nod to Zoroastrianism as being part of the plan may be politically biased, or it might be inspired. Since the Qur'an mentions an Idris and it's not clear if this is Enoch or Isaiah,

this is open to a Muslim's interpretation. In modern Iran, Zorostrians are treated as People of the Book and considered to be monotheists, even though they're often derided as "fire-worshippers" by Sunnis. Quranists might similarly decry Sunnis as Muhammad and Sahaba worshippers for decorating their masjids with calligraphy thereof, and Sunnis would defend these as symbols of God's guidance.

One major theme of the Qur'an is certainly *some degree* of perennialism.

Qul: Huwa, Allahu Ahad (He is Allah, The One)

Allahu As-samad (Allah, The Eternal)

Lam Yulin, wa Lam Yulad (He does not beget nor is he begotten)

Wa Lam Yakun, lahu kufuwan Ahad (and there is none comparable to The One)

First off, God's eternal character implies that the historical context of religion goes back to the dawn of the universe, and the Qur'an's prophetic stories and *partial* endorsement of Judaism and Christianity reflects God's relationship to humanity. Secondly, there's a straight up trinity denial on verse 3, so this limits Open Perennialism from anything shirky, but verse 3 does more than just deny the trinity doctrine, it also emphasizes the profoundness of Eternity *and* Oneness in describing God. Verse 4 also truncates pantheism (where God is identical to creation) or arguably even panentheism (where God is beyond but also present in creation).

In various chapters, there are promises that various groups who are not of the Muhammadian Ummah can attain salvation if they believe and do good deeds. Believe in what exactly? It seems like the maximum are the 5 tenets of creed listed above and in various parts of the Qur'an. It seems like the minimum, per other wordings, is "God and the Last Day". One might, as Brother Khaled does interpret Last Day and God very loosely to mean, some kind of moral judgment on one's actions in life and some kind of single divinity underlying reality, this gets in the nice agnostics, some of the cleaner leftists, atheist philanthropists and so on. But if we go by the other 3 tenets, now you've got to believe in every messenger and every jot of every revealed scripture.

Dr. Elmasry said that "God and the Last Day" is a summary, as if when issuing a promise about eternal pain or joy, that God would economize for word count. Elmasry uses the analogy of a husband coming home from work, the wife asks how his day was, he says - good, and I got the promotion - but that all the details of the day's story leading up to that promotion are still essential. I think it may be a problematic analogy, a more apt analogy would have the husband saying - yeah it was chill, I sent everyone to hell eternally except for a few good Asharis and the HR lady who is a Maturidi. You know, a concise summary.

Two funny things about that, one is that in the debate, the beliefs of the Christian academic moderator were requested to be stated as evidence of, basically, that the moderator was a mushrik condemned to hell with no intercession possible by the Qur'an, and also that Dr. Elmasry thinks his debate opponent Dr. Hashmi is also doomed to hell for the kufr of sympathizing to the point of wrong-interpretation with all these mushriks. The other funny thing

is he said that Atharis who believe in God having a literal hand *physically* were kuffar, unleashing a storm of “Allah is above the throne!” on his social media. In Athari theology they stop short of saying “physically”, they’re supposed to quit before coming to conclusions about “howness”. But your average Athari probably didn’t appreciate that delineation.

The imprecision by which Muslims do mass-takfir is a worrying aspect of it.

Let’s do a scattered, holistic reading of this in regards to people of Judaic faith. They are strictly monotheistic, the biggest problem among the population of Jewish people with God is irreligiousness, not idolatry. Mainly there’s the rejection of Jesus (saws) as the Messiah due to some incongruities in the Tanakh prophecies according to the rabbinical tradition, but also that anti-semitism got terrible after the Gospel of John called them the father of lies, and the Talmud doubles down on this beef by insulting the Messiah and his mother, which the Qur’an calls out. Zionism is the backlash to 1900 years of persecution of Jews in the diaspora and the spiking of anti-semitism among Muslims is inflamed by Zionist persecution of Palestinian Muslims (and Christians, to be fair). If we take Ibn Arabi’s reading of God not charging a soul with more than it can bear, maybe God would have mercy on Jews rejecting Jesus (saws) because of how much tinitarianism is lumped in to recognizing Jesus and how much Christians have made it inaccessible for them. Maybe. But that’s basically it. Accepting Muhammad (saws) and the Qur’an means Jews get more Tanakh-esque criticism of historical Jews, and it reinforces their creed while exempting them from Quranic sharia because Torah sharia is still in effect for them. Easy!

What about the verse in Surah Nisa that whoever says “we believe in some but not in others” goes to hell? Well, there’s another verse in Nisa about God forgiving anything other than shirk as God pleases, and also, like the Christian verses we’re about to come to, it says “those who *say*”, so there’s an action involved, not just entertaining a belief. It has to do with promulgating incorrect opinions.

For instance I really like Tovia Singer even though we’d not see eye to eye about Zionism, but he does a great job of using the Tanakh to critique Christian reading of the Bible, but he’s so much a career anti-dawah guy for cutting off Christian conversion of Jews that he tends to throw Jesus under the bus. The repeated slamming of Jesus could get him in big trouble on Judgement Day per that line in Nisa, for speaking kufr, covering up the truth. But also, to Tovia, Jesus not being a prophet seems to be the truth, he has rigorous readings to back up that opinion. He also once said, well, maybe Jesus was part of God’s plan to spread a diluted form of monotheism to the gentile world - bingo! That’s an interesting theory of what the Qur’an means by Messiah, which I adopted in a debate with a Christian as part of the Messiah’s function. Maybe God has mercy on him for that admonition? I wouldn’t bank on it (no pun intended) but it’s possible? Allah is merciful and wise, after all.

Now the last broadly inclusive salvation verse is in Surah Maidah, 5:69, and this one includes “anyone who believes in God and the Last Day and does works of righteousness” - so now we’ve got a miscellaneous category, not just grandfather clause older covenants. What do

the following verses say? It's kufr to *say* God is a 3rd of three, it's kufr to *say* God is the Messiah, and a few other ones, capped off with an amnesty of forgiveness for those who pivot. The Qur'an has clear theological corrections for the groups it addresses.

Now, you listen to Christians talk, they may well drop some of these lines in your ears. Does that mean they're toast unless you immediately confront them with dawah and try to turn them unitarian? I've tried and let me tell you, their reading of the bible is thick like vines on an old stone wall, nestled into the cracks, you're going to have a tough time converting a committed trinitarian preacher, deacon, or hardcore layman to unitarian Christianity, much less Sunni or Quranic Islam. Can they be saved if they do enough charity and so on? I would love to see it, I'm not sure if I can preach it in confidence.

Dr. Hasmi says that 5:72 has a non-commutative logic, because trinitarians say that the Messiah is a person within the trinity but that God is God, they aren't guilty of phrasing it the other way around. Dr. Elmasry immediately compared this to math but didn't know the commutative property off the top of his head. It seems very far fetched, as a revert whose family is on the line this is not merely academic to me, but then again the solution to proving Reimann's hypothesis does rely on non-commutative logic to prove something about an infinite series, and maybe this is like that about a righteous trinitarian's infinite series. Esoteric Shia also will say things like $Ali = god$ but $God \neq Ali$, another example of non-commutative logic. How's that? A table is blue (that's a quality of a light wavelength) but blue is not the table (so now we're slicing up set theory). I doubt esoteric Shia ideas are going to convince Sunnis that 5:72 is just condemning Marcionites, Monophysites and a few other extinct heretical Christian groups, because they also condemn esoteric Shia even if they like Sunni-esque Zaydis or shirk-refraining Twelvers.

What about the idea that rejecting one verse of Qur'an is kufr? Funnily enough, this is a big reason for people to burn-out on Islam entirely, other than religious trauma which merits its own chapter. Surah Kahf's Zhul Qarnain story is often cited, for its depiction of a sunset in a muddy puddle and the known mythos of either Cyrus the Great or Alexander the Great as a horned man who was not a prophet, but was favored by God, and traveled as far as Tajikistan. Then we get Juj and Majuj getting sealed up behind an iron barrier, ostensibly until judgement day, and end story. Then in the outro of Surah Kahf (18) we get what seems to be a mechanical description of how kufr wipes out all your other good deeds. God rhetorically asks, do you want to know who are the biggest losers? It is those who reject my signs, messengers and books and think they are doing good? On the Last Day their deeds will be habitat. Habitat translates from Arabic to "she was disappointed" and it's a word that comes up multiple times in the Qur'an to describe munafiq and kafir deeds.

Imagine a Muslim man meets a Muslim woman, proposes to meet their wali, go pass the interview with the wali, have another meeting, there's attraction, it looks like it's going to happen. He saves up for the mahr, he pays for the wedding, all kinds of preparations, the wedding is nice, the families have premium fruit juice, baklava and raspberry ceregli. Then on the wedding night... she was disappointed. Does this mean that the marriage is over? *It might*. According

to the Qur'an if the marriage is not consummated then the bride can keep the mahr and walk away. *It depends on the bride* what happens next, after all those deeds are rendered habitat. Will she forgive him and let him appoint her another night? Will they end up cohabitating anyway? It's not outside the realm of imagination, I guess it depends on if she senses he has a good heart and really wants the marriage to work, or if it was just for glamour and money that they got married. This metaphor ties in with the idea of riyas (which is explicated in hadith but has grounding in Qur'an parable of charity for publicity being like planting a seed in thin soil). Riyas is the shirk version of this kufr-worthless-deeds idea, perhaps. You don't go to hell for riyas, but it does void the reward of the deed.

Walking back to the Zhul Qarnain story - the story is arguably God telling Muhammad to tell the Jews of Mecca a specific story that they already knew to mollify their criticisms, rather than a historical recounting, because, if it was a historical recounting those Meccans didn't know of, it wouldn't have had the rhetorical effect. It's a story within a story, like how Kill Bill is supposed to be a movie set in the reality of the Pulp Fiction universe, it's an additional layer of fabula. Thus it's not kufr to not literally believe in the sun setting in a muddy pond or that this is a historical recounting, on the contrary many apostates from Islam report that literal belief in such burned them out on belief generally, like driving on the highway in second gear.

Another example is Adamic exceptionalism, an idea coined by an Egyptian known as the father of Islamic Modernism, where the angels saying "will this be a cut throat while we sing your praises" is taken as a reference to pre-existing violent hominids, and Adam (saws) is the first spiritual human, a divinely engineered emissary of a consciousness revolution, rather than the exclusive ancestor. By now, after 6000 years or perhaps 14000 years (taking the flood as the occurring regionally in the younger drays period of ~11000s b.c.) we all share Adam as a common ancestor and this was probably also true by the time of Qur'an, hence we're Bani Adam. Probably >70% of humanity are Bani Ibrahim and >40% are Bani Israel by now also, genetics propagates exponentially through generation (we have 2^g ancestors g generations ago, give or take some cousin marriage).

One can believe in Adamic exceptionalism and have emaan, trust in the creator of the universe and belief in the Qur'an's divine authorship, yet there are scholars who would say its impermissible, a softer wording of the kufr->hellfire threat, to believe such. There was a similar thing about 20 years ago with flat earth belief, strict Hanbali's considered it kufr to believe the earth is round and would state such on television. But the Qur'an says that the truth washes away falsehood.

Since we're on the topic of Surah Kahf, I always find it funny when people drop out of Islam for the maghreb shamzi verse being too weird, but they were ok with the story of Musa (saws) and "Khidr" where Khidr kills the kid and justifies it by saying he was a kafir, it's a mercy for the parents. This is where two seas meet indeed, the sea of moral realism we (and Musa) can relate too (killing kids is bad) and the sea of moral surrealism where unseen knowledge can construct exceptional mercies (perhaps the kid would have committed sins, in the kufr=actions

theory, and goes to paradise for dying beforehand, or a fideistic reading would just say it spared the parents getting sucked into the kid's vortex of future evil).

If it's not kufr to interpret the Qur'an differently in terms of meanings or theology, what about fiqh? It's said that if you smoke pot, you're a fasiq, but if you believe pot is not khamr then you're a kafir. What is the basis for that? The hadith from Ibn Umar. But what is the meta-basis for saying insistence on an incorrect interpretation is kufr? That is more a principle adopted by Ijma and not in the Sunnah (though I'm open to someone citing a sahih ahadith to the contrary).

If we relaxed this principle in our usool, then whoever is on an incorrect interpretation that is sincerely wrong, in the eyes of Allah, is going to repeat mistakes and be a fasiq, not a kafir. If that person is epistemically humble enough to keep asking forgiveness for things they aren't sure about, maybe Allah will even forgive that person of their fisq. This posture retains the seriousness of interpretation and living an upright life in according with scripture, but keeps us from takfiring each other or giving the kids OCD about an ambiguous super-broad concept of kufr.

What about epistemics? Sunnis say it is kufr to modify the Qur'an or to deny it's preservation that is promised therein. So Rashad Khalifa gets flak for trying to remove two verses to fit Code 19 and Ibn Mas'ud gets flak (less unanimously) for protesting the last two surahs being included (113 and 114, not 9 and 110 which are the last two in the purported revelation sequence). Quranists generally hold fast to this assertion because it is indeed in the Qur'an. What about modernist contextualization of interpretation? That is still respecting the Arabic textual content's remarkable preservation across time and not modifying it. What about Ismaeli mystically modulated interpretation (e.g. that Prophetic nafs, Jibreel and Ruh Qudus are interpolated into the text)? That seems to me to also be within the epistemic bounds put down by Qur'an and Sunni Ijma, just interpreting it quite distinctly.

What happened in Christianity was people used to read the Bible fideistically, it's all 100% literally true and the word of God, and then they adopted a modernist frame, it's the inspired word of God there's room for historical context and doubting about where the fallible human authors fluff it up. This arguably lead to a path where Christianity became subordinated to post-Christian ideologies of The Enlightenment - leftism, nationalism, secularism etc. Muslims often point to this as Christian weakness and contrast the stalwart principles of Islamic religiosity, yet take a similar modernist approach to the bible based on interpretation of the Qur'an's statement that "they distorted it with their hands". We end up having cases of special pleading regarding the historical critical method being applied to the bible but not the Qur'an.

Exploring the Bible and the Qur'an is an excellent YouTube channel where we get a lot of top Quranic Studies scholars of varying faiths discussing their analysis of texts and/or archeological finds. The anthropology questions some of the scholarly interpretations about context and Quranists would generally find this interesting since they are in a strong sense replacing the interpretative framework from hadith and classical tafsir. Qiraat studies is another example, which Christian polemicists like to seize on to attack the preservation claim and apologists try to hand-wave as being mostly synonymous variations in vowel intonation without substantive differences in meaning. The only example I know of in substantive difference in

meaning is the Ibn Mas'ud islam == hanifiyya 3:19 verse, which reinforces the somewhat broader inclusivism that Quranists and modernists like to read into Qur'an, which dovetails with the Fred Donner "Believers Movement" thesis.

Speaking of Christianity, the history of Christianity is replete with similar problems, they just used different vocabulary. Takfir = excommunicate, kufr = heresy, taqlid = ecumenics, ijma = ecumenical councils. Thomas Aquinas used verses from the Gospel of Luke to defend executing apostates, naughty naughty. Because the Free Masons and the US Constitution have filed down the fangs on Christian sectarian threat, the debates had in late antiquity about the couple dozen christological and trinitarian "heresies" have become something of an internet meme - look at this Nestorian heretic! It sounds so obscure it cannot help but come off as absurd. This is what religion has come to look like to the youth, the point - believe and do good deeds - being buried in debate of the first word in that phrase. Wait until we get to debating what the word "and" means!

Notably Christianity developed a compatibility protocol of varying stripes. We were talking about 5:69-74 and how that is both "perennialist" and exclusivist in the sense of laying down severe threats relating to theological limits, 5:71 is sometimes attributed to not being about the prevailing trinity doctrine but just tri-theism. Where Muslims and Christians would agree is that Mormons are tritheist and there's no helping them. Back in college I sat next to a Mormon girl who looked like Jessica Biel but somehow better. I don't want her to go to hell for saying what 5:71 forbids.

There's a certain dispiriting psychosis that comes from walking around thinking everyone you see is doomed to eternal fire torture for not being an orthodox Muslim despite their good deeds. When you're a revert, this extends to your family and probably spouse, perhaps children. When you're a Muslim in the west, this extends to the wider community. Imagine then going to hell because you could not stomach the disheartening thought of total empathy-effacement, even from your own family, so you wanted to interpret the Qur'an a bit more loosely than the Ijma says. Perhaps God wants us all to not empathize with people and perhaps fight them? Or... God wants us to be loving and a source of guidance for all we meet and not fight people who have not fought us?

If we're going to make Islam gain any substantial ground in the west, as we'll delve into in the Dawah chapter, we need a fiqh that until recently has not had much market demand: how to reason about the salvation of non-Muslims. If you say, just don't, it's kufr, maybe that itself is kufr or willfully covering the truth, because the Qur'an has a nuanced series of verses about that, and they might not be abrogated, as we'll cover in *that* chapter. Otherwise, there's got to be a line to walk. Also if, like Ibn Arabi says, people are insulated from liability, if I go around doing dawah and it doesn't work (most dawah has a <2% conversion rate, like online freemium videogames) then am I cursing, getting kufr kooties, on everyone I meet who isn't inspired by my good Insan vibes to become a unitarian monotheist? Finally, if Islam goes further than the Sunni big tent to a tent that can include Twelver Shia and Ibadis, do they lose or gain? Does the pan-church-communion principles in Protestant Christianity give us something to emulate? Can

the bigger tent go beyond Twelvers and Ibadis to Ismaelites, Quranists and modernists? Is that going to cost Islam its essential truths or is that better?

It's notable that the 2005 Amman statement defined a Muslim as anyone who follows 5 Sunni Madhabs, 2 Shia ones or the Ibadite School, the more recent language with the circular consensus language is badly defined but much broader, where one's affiliation isn't dependent on a school but perhaps just lacking any particularly heretical beliefs. Nobody said this religious ecumenical definitions task was supposed to be easy.

As the Qur'an often does, these are incredibly difficult, open-ended questions I will leave as an exercise to the reader.

I guess the problem of kufr is best summarized by a proverb:

It ain't' what you don't know that gets you.

It's what you know that just ain't so.

What are Ayats and how does that relate to Abrogation?

Ok let's get more concise chapters moving forward.

Classical tafsir and associated Sunni nomenclature refers to verse of the Qur'an as ayahs, which reinforces the strict fideist or a looser fideist requirement for reading Qur'an. The Qur'an talks about the Jews evicting people from their homes and fiercely remands them, have you believed part of the book while making kufr on another part? This verse is used to say: if you doubt the *correct* interpretation of any ayat of Qur'an, or disbelieve in it, you're damned. The context of that verse is probably, in my biblical estimation, related to the line of the Torah to be kind of the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt. A liberal Jewish brother who is anti-Zionist quoted that when the genocidal assault on Gazan civilians broke out in late 2023 and there could not have been a more concise Torah-based rebuke to Israeli policy. Therefore the context of making kufr on part of the book is that the kufr is sniping out teenagers on the steps of the hospital, collapsing residential buildings with missile strikes, burying entire families, starving out millions of people, herding them into evacuation corridors and bombing them, systematically targeting children to try and ethnically cleanse the predicted next-generation of Hamas soldiers, and so on. If all that isn't the epitome of being a kafir, I don't know what is.

Additionally there's the line in Surah Kahf about the biggest losers being those who reject the ayats, books, messengers... if one takes this as an all-or-nothing set or that God is being very merciful with a numerous quantity of guidances and one rejects *all* of them, is relevant to the previous chapter but not so much in this one. What's relevant is that the ayat there is classically interpreted to mean, all the verses in Qur'an, therefore rejecting/doubting any of them is going to flush all your prayers, charity etc. down the fiery toilet. This makes reading the Qur'an a very careful exercise, like handling nuclear fuel rods with safety gear, hence the - Bismillah, I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Shaytan - prior to reading. And I'm not saying reading the Qur'an reverentially instead of referentially - the way a non-believing Orientalist scholar would - is bad, I'm saying it's good. Protect yourself from waswas and doubts, by all means.

Omar Rahmahi puts forward the idea that ayats are contained in some but not all verses of Qur'an but that not every verse is itself an ayat. It's an ayat in the sense of being angelically transmitted, but not necessarily in semantic payload. What this liberates is that the set of ayats, signs from God, exceeds the Qur'an or even the other scriptures, and can include miraculous seeming coincidences, even a discussion that pops up in your social media feed. God's guidance can be replete in the creation. Scientific truths and their analogy to theological mysteries could also be ayats. Indeed the Qur'an makes numerous references to the architecture of nature and narrative happenstance in its prophetic protagonists as being ayati.

This is very cool. It means you get to think and you get to have a relationship with God via appreciation of the sublime in your life. It means that God, to some extent, is interactive with your finite consciousness in the finite path you take through the dunya.

Traditionalist Muslims would probably not refute all of the above, after all they make Du'a and teach a theology of Qadr that is semi-predeterministic. Where the rubber really hits the road in terms of usool al tafsir and usool al fiqh, and people getting stoned to death or whatnot, is in the verse in Surah Baqarah about not causing a sign to be forgotten unless a better one is revealed. This is interpreted to sign off on a theory called abrogation where verses of the Qur'an can nullify earlier verses (presumably in a chronological revelation sequence) and also a concept of covenant theology where the Quranic law is more robust than the Injil or Torah sharia, even if those sharia are still valid covenants for Christians and Jews per the admonition in Surah Hajj.

The major premise of usool al fiqh via hadith *at all* is that the #1 most mutawatir hadith prohibiting the writing of hadith was abrogated by the Sunnah of later Rashidun Caliphs (in Sunnism) or the Alid Imams (in Shiism). Then the idea that Sunnah viz hadith collections being the dominant usool al tafsir, the necessary reading partner to Qur'an, comes from Imam Shafi and the abrogation of Qur'an by hadith comes from Imam Hanbal. Many Quranists such as Dr. Rahamahi who might stop short of calling all Sunni extra-Quranic ritualism shirk, would call this abrogation of Qur'an shirk, and maybe argue that the Shafi partnership of hadith as the correct lens of tafsir is shirk by abrogating verses of Qur'an bequeathing contemplation by the reader.

There's another mutawatir hadith where the ailing Prophet (saws) wants to write something down and Umar (ra) forbids it "the Qur'an is sufficient for us", Quranists like to cite this as evidence of Umar being a Quranist, but Shia think the statement was disingenuous and a cover for Umar's fear of the writing being a will for Ali's Caliphate. Umar is very interesting in this regard as he also is reported to have asserted that there were stoning verses in Qur'an abrogating the hadd punishment of 100 lashes for a married woman's adultery, this leaves Umar in the benefit of doubt about being a "Quranist" in some sense, but pro-abrogation.

The Muwata of Imam Malik, on stoning, suggests it first occurred in Medina because the Prophet (saws) insisted that the Jews keep *Torah* law specifically, and then a second story it somehow transmitted into the practices of the Muhummadean Muslims by osmosis. In the second story the guilty party insists on confessing despite Muhammad's (saws) repeated insistence that he not publicly do so, so the fairness of the stoning is intonated. In a third story, Umar enforces it, giving the adultress time to carry her pregnancy to term and breastfeed for two years per the Quranic sharia, it still comes off as super cold, maybe forgive the woman for her tawbah and not orphan the child, could be my bias from Christianity.

I'm willing to believe these hadith from the Muwatta are historically accurate if not verbatim true. The first stoning incident gives strong evidence for covenant theology in a Quranic multi-Ummah concept, the Qur'an's hadd of 100 lashes does not abrogate the Torah's hadd of fatal stoning. The second story suggests that Muhammad (saws) believed in hadd

abrogation viz Quranic verses prescribing it, hence the stoning, maybe the 1st and 3rd narrations are true and the 2nd isn't, could be. Maybe the story about the goat eating the verses are true. The story of the satanic verses suggests an abrogation of corruption, perhaps the goat was real *and* a sign of divine intercession to sift the falsehood from the true, and the stoning verse is abrogated that way. When Quranists dismiss the goat story as poppycock (more like billychud to be accurate) there's a weird dissonance between supernaturalism and naturalism in causation.

Umar then therefore, could have been a Quranist trying to be faithful to the written intent, not accepting the goat-eating as an ayat that Allah didn't intend for those verses to go into the mushaf to follow Umar's assassination, compiled during the reign of Uthman. This underlies another epistemic issue with the Quranist Umar theory, which is that the Qur'an-qua-Qur'an was not explicitly defined by compilation during his rule. The deeper question is, to what degree were they *not* Quranists, or Quranists in a syncretic sense of not considering prior revelations abrogated but rather confirmed, because why else adopt the stoning penalty? Or the billy-goat-eaten verses carve out an exception. Why not respect the abrogation of that penalty by Jesus (saws) in the Gospel of John? Well, it's easy to reject 100% of gJohn as daef hadith due to its theological lynchpinning of Paulean Christian dogma, but maybe that one hadith was true. There's no indication per the Qur'an that fatal stoning is the hadd for adultery in the alluded-to Christian sharia.

Throwing out gJohn mostly but keeping parts that appeal to our soft-heartedness like the stoning abrogation is kind of like how the Shia see Abu Huayra as a politically compromised actor, but don't reject 100% of his hadith transmission, because there's a lot of stuff in it, generally they'd prefer to see additional transmitters of the same hadith to cross-corroborate. Sadly there's nothing in the Q Gospel to cross-thatch the forgiven adultress. Pardon me for white knight simping the Jewish adultress woman from gJohn, it's a current of chivalry from my crusader ancestors.

Death by stoning hasn't been a huge part of Muslim history, statistically speaking, it's not a top priority for revision in a realpolitik sense, just a particularly thorny subject for analyzing pan-scriptural abrogation and covenant theology. What *is* a top priority for revision in a realpolitik sense is the ahad hadith from Ikrima, the freed-slave-turned-Khawarij, attributing the death penalty to apostates. Combined with Khawarij and Ibadi tafsir that major fisq=kufir, this abrogation of the Qur'an's more limited death penalty offenses - murder, brigandry and corruption - meant the Khawarij could administer the death penalty in a vigilante style to anyone they deemed a sinner. Non-Khawarij rulers were happy to taqlid with Ikrima's hadith even if they turned it to slaughter the Khawarij insurrectionists. This ability to tafkir and make war upon other groups of Muslims, abrogating the Qur'an's narrower death penalty criteria, may be the most damaging abrogation in the history of Islam.

One could make the argument that without that hadith and the doctrine of abrogation, there still would have been lots of rulers executing whomever they wanted, by torturing (pun intended?) the meaning of "corruption" as the third executable category to mean speech,

scholarship or political dislocation that displeased the ruler. Indeed, this is how they got Socrates over 1000 years earlier without any religious frame. Haters gonna hate, as the aging millennials say.

Notably the death penalty for apostasy is in the Torah and was construed by Christian theologians, tortuously perhaps, from gLuke. There's an argument Quranists make about a lot of Abu Huayra hadith that they're basically usool-al-fiqh-al-Talmud. Umar could be argued to have made tafsir-al-Torah. It's also possible to make tafsir-al-Injil of the Qur'an based on filtering canonical and extra-canonical materials using the historical critical method and other approaches to hadith science, instead of just throwing it all out because the Qur'an says people distorted the revelations, clearly the Ummah didn't see the Torah as utterly distorted or the stonings would not have happened. It's also possible that Ikrima's ahad hadith was broadly accepted despite him being murderously anti-establishment, because of tafsir-al-Torah, that "spreading corruption in the land" in Qur'an includes apostasy as an inherently anti-community activity, which is the general apologetic argument for it by traditionalists and clearly the basis for it in the Torah, when polytheist neighbors are a source of perennial strife (pun intended!).

It's also notable that the Ibadis taqlid on stoning, but don't talk about it, and my evidence for this is a post by PrimaQuran which has a beautiful storytelling about non-sectarianism, and we can all pray behind Shia, Ibadi, Sunni, we're all brothers in Tawhid. Someone in the comments asked his opinion on stoning and he says he won't answer because it's not relevant until a caliphate is established, and we live in a time of extreme cancel culture. Imagine you're in an interview discussing Islam with someone, discussing 4:34, and said "well uh, have you ever hit your wife?" If the answer isn't a swift "no, absolutely not, never" and you get some waffling "I don't feel comfortable answering that", that answer is yes. It's the progressive-anachronism dialectics version of saying "are you mad that you're gay?"

Since the Ibadis clearly made taqlid with traditional hadith chestnuts from the first century hijri, it makes you wonder how Quranist they really were? Maybe they're the historical evolution of the hardline Quranist perspective that thinks Umar was a prime Quranist, they liked his rule (otherwise would have rebelled sooner) and saw his "sunnah" of enforcing stoning as in line with the pre-compiled Qur'an, but given the Ibadi position on earlier scriptures of being too corrupted to use for fiqh, a tafsir-al-Torah doesn't make as much sense.

Omar Ramahi is strictly a zero-abrogation reader of Qur'an. Muhammad from God says he thinks abrogation could be real but the verse in Baqarah gives a criterion that the new thing must be better, hence he doesn't accept the hadith-abrogation of inheritance wills, and Dr. Ramahi has a lot of discussion in favor of a Qur'an-based writ of inheritance, citing his grandmother's loss of benefit of all her family's land in Palestine (nevermind what Zionists would likely do to the land later on).

Khaled and Perfect Dawah had a good discussion about the hadd punishment of cutting off the hands. Dr. Ramahi reads this as metaphorical and thus imprisoning thieves would effectively cut off their means, he analogizes the metaphorical nature of God's hand meaning

agentic connection to an effect - clearly he is not an Athari. Khaled says that all the hadd punishment verses must be read as mubin, clear, not metaphorical, and Muhammad from God says we don't beat our wives, but he does support cutting off hands, but more for white collar financial criminals who steal en masse. Of course in Brother Muhammad's fiqh, would the line be drawn on entrepreneurs issuing stock and the enterprise fails, and does that interfere with capital formation? Would the Theranos case, which resulted in a long jail sentence for the founder based on private stock sales only, but with fraudulent premise, merit a hand chopping? What about e.g. let's say Meta (formerly Facebook) went bankrupt after having a good long run, is that a ponzi scheme? We cannot escape tafsir and fiqh.

Getting back to Khaled and Perfect Dawah, Perfect Dawah was in favor of the metaphorical reading. If we assume Khaled's usool that all hadd punishment verses are not metaphorical, what about 4:34? Because if strike in that context means, separate from her temporarily, strike off, strike out, and Joseph A. Islam's tafsir-al-Qur'an is correct, that the strike word has a direct object in all other contexts, then is the husband-administered penalties to a wife of nashuz (rebelliousness) equal a hadd punishment? Or hadd is just major sins and society-level punishments? Seems like the only explanation that keeps this revisionist tafsir held together.

What about the term munafiq, a frightening category in which a person can be unfaithfully fulfilling all the pillars of Islam and go to a worse hell than people having a lot of fun doing haram and not bothering with salah. How broad is this term? It has several contexts in the Medinan surahs, mostly related to draft dodgers, militarily insubordinate ansar and dissenters from the commands of the Nabi. Does this term's context abrogate the use of an analogous term in the plausibly sahih Injil? One of the things that classical Sunni scholarship agrees on about the Messiah is that he came to correct the hyper-legalism of the Pharisees, something that Quranists would seize on as the root of hypocrisy and many of the problems plaguing the Ummah for 1400 years. From a Quranist, Ibadi and Shia position this also addresses the short-comings of the politically subversive companions who helped end the Rashidun Caliphate.

In the gospel of Mark, which has priority among the canonical gospels according to the majority consensus of gospel scholars and therefore the highest preponderance of sahih hadith, Jesus (saws) says (paraphrasing, this is hadith after all): "Beware the hypocrite who teaches the law but impoverishes the widow, they will be punished the worst on the Last Day."

It would be my contention that this sense of munafiq is not abrogated and is intact wahy, and it helps one truncate the scope of nifaq per the Qur'an but also extend it to some of the greatest enemies of Islam. If we can find one point of common ground with traditionalists to galvanize reforms in the way usool governs the Muslims, it would be in that hadith.

I intend, insha'Allah, to write a book on tafsir of Qur'an al-Injil for my next project, perhaps starting next Ramadan. If we're not categorically rejecting Sunnah, just revising what it really means, and we are serious about not making distinction between the Messengers and not nullifying important guidances in the Qur'an, then filtering with care on what Qur'an confirms

and corrects in previous revelation is an important exercise. Additionally the project of filtering on hadith jurisprudence by respecting the Qur'an's primary and contemplating how the Qur'an can and does not abrogate itself in revelation sequence, is a science that has been dormant for almost 1000 years, since Ghazali, but requires renewed rigor and precision.

May Allah guide us with signs of wisdom and useful cross-reference.

What is the best Ibadat?

Let's make this a very short chapter.

There's a set-up from hadith that one can get tremendous points-multipliers for praying in masjids (especially in Mecca and Medina), fasting on certain days (Arafah, Ashura, the white days) and that Laytul Qadr has a ~30,500x multiplier on all prayers performed and charity given (some Salafis say the charity part isn't true, just the prayers, so don't wait to give, which seems like moral advice). There's also this idea of sending lots of salawat on the Nabi (which Nabi? THE Nabi) so you get a quid-pro-quo on judgment day, and extreme version that if you pray for that one Nabi to get a place in Wasilah, a one-person VIP suite on top of the Burj Khalifa of Paradise, then you're *guaranteed* intercession, which to me is a guarantee of shirk/kufr because you're very significantly going against the anti-intercessor ethos of Qur'an *and* sharply making distinction between prophets, and even violating clear commands from the hadith not to make distinction. That Wasilah thing is a spiritual murder-hole that even the Salafis will hold up.

All these chutes and ladders shortcuts make Islam seem gamified, and this can be fun and galvanize renewed effort by people who are low on emaan or new to the Din. Gamification can in general be very helpful, in any context, at increasing engagement, conversion rates and average revenue per user, the only problem is that Islam is not Farmville. We're talking about purifying ourselves and exhibiting gratitude to the creator of all reality and bestower of all our talents and strengths by leveraging whatever we can to improving the well-being of our fellow humans and vindicating God's legal definitions of beauty in our deeds, a focus on scoring points can rob this qualitative quest of its sincerity.

In Surah Kahf in the Clear Qur'an translation, which wears Sunni orthodoxy on its sleeve through footnotes and bracket text, there's a verse that says (paraphrasing): wealth and children are but adornments for this worldly life, but it is the everlasting good deeds that are best in Allah's sight. And the footnote says: e.g. saying "Alhamdulillah", "La ilaha illAllah", "SubhanAllah".

Now, I say these things numerous, during and after my Salah, based on Qur'an's recommendation to make abundant zikr and Ibadat based on some hadith that this was practiced by Aisha and others (the 34x post-Salah puts a fine number on "abundant"). I even try

to remember God during the mantra, to feel more gratitude, to ponder creation and creativity, and not just rack up mindless repetitions for puntos.

However! To neglect the idea that interpersonally helping people, whereby financial help is a finite but clear tool, is what “good deeds” means, in favor of verbal, ritualized zikr, may be indeed forgetting Allah, or perhaps neglecting the beautiful names, The Most Generous, The Giver of Gifts, The Protector, The Most Loving.

Likewise this ties into the last verse of Surah Kahf -

Say: I am just a man like you
To whom it has been revealed that our God is but One God
So, if you look forward to a meeting with your Lord
Perform works of righteousness
And do not shirk in the ibada of your Lord, anyone.

I leave shirk and ibada untranslated because I don't want to load them with semantics prematurely.

One interpretation is that shirk means “associate” and ibada means “worship”, thus don't bow down to money or Pharaoh or a scholar or a Krishna idol in addition. The verse says “anyone” not “anything” so you're safe from liking nature and being grateful to God for it, as long as you're not a pantheist.

Another interpretation is that shirk means “share in” and ibada means “serve” and it's the world that's sharing in service to transient things and anyone who is nice and happens to conform to scriptural ideas of good is not in service to evil and therefore not a mushrik. And I like that. But that ain't the truth.

Now maybe what it means, is if you accept everything I'm telling you, then you're the mushrik, and I'm the tyranny of the scholarly taghut, but I'm trying Ringo, I'm trying ***real hard***... to be ana basharun mislukum yoohaa, ilaya anamaa ilahun ilakuhum Waahid.

Now get on outta here.

That's the ending of Pulp Fiction.

We have this idea of riyas in hadith that Quranists might be tempted to ignore, and maybe the Abu Huraira hadith qudsi where the martyr, the major philanthropist and another major virtue-signaler get to hell because all their deeds were done for human approval and not God. It's based in the Qur'an somewhat (charity done for Allah is like planting on a fertile hill but charity done for publicity is like planting on thin soil) and also in Injil - if you do your charity publicly then the approval is all the reward you're going to get. This actually proves Khaled's theory (shared somewhat by classical Islamic scholars) that shirk is on a spectrum and not a

one-and-done nullifier of deeds. Shirky sins are not forgiven and shirky good deeds are not credited. There is to some extent, a system of credits and debits and the 10x multiplier on good deeds found in Qur'an. Psalm 23 says "he guides me in the paths of Tzedek l'man schmo" (righteous deeds done in His name).

Maidah 5:27 has Abel taunting his angry brother by saying Allah only accepts sacrifices from the muttaqeen, the people of Taqwa. Now you might imagine, if this were strictly true then none of the good deeds done by irreligious people are counted, and many deeds done by monotheists are not counted, and we'd end up with a similar scenario as Shaytan predicts that the *majority* will be found ungrateful. What's interesting is both of these crucial statements are not directly from Allah but attributed to finite persons in the narrative storytelling; the Abel statement is recapitulated and attributed *to* Allah by Ali (ra) which may be enough of a reason for a Quranist or a modernist to not be Shia even though the Shia are often very nice people. So where does Allah expound on this term more generally?

This term muttaqeen is expounded on in Baqarah 2:2 and 2:177, which we touched on in the chapter on Kufr:

(2:177) It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Revelation (*Al-Kitab*) and the Prophets; and gives his wealth – however much he may cherish it — for the love of Allah, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the poor and the wayfarer and the beggars and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; and is constant in prayer, and pays the poor due (*aqamas salata wa'ataz zakata*). And those who keep their promises when they make one, and are patient in times of misfortune and hardship and in time of stress. It is they who have proved themselves to be true, and it is they who are the *Muttaqeen*.

So some like Brother Khaled interpret the criteria to not be totalizing but an ideal, and that many who fall short of it, including Muslims who are less than true believers, non-Muslims and so on, can still be somewhat of the muttaqeen, and what this verse outlines is what it means to be a great monotheist and/or Muslim. Others like Peter from the Tuscon Masjid/QuranTalk channel, does take this verse to be table stakes to get your deeds counted, at least with the promised 10x multiplier, on the Last Day.

What about the opposite sort of verses, talking about deeds scattered like ash? We can imagine examples of people who professed to do good but took a lot of utilitarian short-cuts to try and optimize, the founder of the FTX exchange who professed a philosophy of "Effective Altruism" and is currently serving a 25 year prison sentence for giga-scale fraud comes to mind. If he had been following Quranic guidance, he would have made better business decisions and might be enjoying a sustainable philanthropy career instead, which, if coupled with being more low-key on the public relations front, might have added up to a lot of ajr with Allah swt for him and those working for him to administer those funds.

So is Sadaqat the supreme ibadat? It's more complex. The source of funds must be clean, this is supported by a verse in Qur'an saying that donating riba doesn't earn with Allah, and likewise massively defrauding people to do some charity is not a net-winner either, whether or not you steal X and God counts you for -X + charity or whether it's just -X, in eschatological terms this is at best a difference between a shallower level of hell. It's very interesting that the Hebrew cousin word **Tzedakah** does not etymologically mean charity, it means justice. According to Tovia Singer, the ethos is that HaShem has loaned you the extra 10% of your harvest and to be just you must help the widows and orphans with that or you're stealing. Even more interesting is how this root-word tzedek, which could be analogized to salihawn, works of righteousness, can also be traced-forward to Zindiq, which means "fake Muslim", presumably an analog to Munafiq - these concepts could not be more opposite in the divine order. Gnostic Qur'an traces the evolution of the "Zindiq" term to the historical context of Khorasan (Iran) which has another cousin language, specific to the Zoroastrian or Jewish converts that were secretly seditious to the new Rashidun, then Umayyad rulers. Perhaps the Zindiqs thought they were righteous but the munafiqeen were more in the milieu of looking out for themselves.

Side Note: Rahmanna, the Hebrew cognate for Ar-Rahman, is also in the Hebrew bible from Genesis to Isaiah

There's a lovely verse in Qur'an (33:35):

Innal muslimeena wal muslimaati wal mu'mineena wal mu'minaati wal qaaniteena wal qaanitaati was saadiqeena was saadiqaati was saabireena was saabiraati wal khaashi'eena wal khaashi'aati wal **mutasaddiqeena** wal **mutasaddiqaati** was saaa'imeena was saaa'imaati wal haafizeena furoojahum wal haafizaati waz zaakireenal laaha kaseeranw waz zaakiraati a'addal laahu lahum maghfiratanw wa ajran 'azeemaa

Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. [Sahih International]

Highly recommended for your Salah. Notice how sadiqeen is not the charitable, that's being truthful, like in the closing verses of Surah Maidah when it says the truthful (often mis-translated to the faithful) will be granted paradise. It's the muta-sadiqeen that are charitable. Muta means to cut-off, hence the Muta-zila, those who withdrew, or Muta-Nikah, a term-limited marriage, it means that charity is breaking off a piece of God's truth, the food or money you gift. Hence the optimization of righteous ibada through charity makes sense but in the context of a just economic system.

Thus, insha'Allah, we have a clearer idea of what service to Allah means. Not just optimizing for dollars donated, but reinforcing the overall society along the lines of the sharia in

the *true* sense. From a Quranist or modernist critique of Ummayah-era Sunni codification of sharia, the argument is that a lot of that isn't really sharia and is contaminated with shirk, serving taghut scholars and rules who want lots of money and slave girls, and not the pure rules of God.

Is Ijma Shirk?

The above is the title of a lecture by Dr. Omar Ramahi that deconstructs the mechanics of legal governorship, madhab affiliation and scholarly fatwa that administered rule in Muslim lands for 1300 years up to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. His rhetorical implication is, yes it is, you can't have humans signing on behalf of Allah. The Quranic community tends to take a dim view of Islam QA cites, with their fatwas on every edge case, concluding with "Allahu Alam" - Allah knows best. It's good to show epistemic humility, and maybe that disclaimer is enough to separate the scholar from God and assert the fatwa is an informed opinion, but still fallible.

In practice, the lay Muslim is not strongly differentiating from the fallible and infallible. In Twelver Shiism even the ayatollahs are fallible, it's only the 12 historical Imams that are infallible. The Ismaelis have a living lineage of Imams and invest faith in their infallibility, and it's a stronger concept of infallibility than Catholic Popes have, not truncated by an "ex cathedra" (from the cathedral) speaking opportunity which is rarely taken. For the most part, Islam has operated on an epistemics of authority similar to Protestant Christianity where there is fine-print on every missive and a curious person can look at the hadith, their chains, the Qur'an verses cites, the associated tafsir, and unravel the logic behind the scholar's opinion. Islam then claims a rational epistemology even in its most literalist forms like the Hanbali school, divorced from an ecclesiastical core institution that gives divine blessings.

We have to consider that a fringe reform movement can debate things from a theoretical perspective and perhaps learn a lot in doing so, but when it comes to actually ruling nations according to some concept of sharia, you end up with a big, thick 'ol book of fiqh. This problem is not exclusive to Islam, prior to the work of Free Masons and my ancestor's brother, promoting what's called by traditionalist Christians "Americanism" and making American Catholicism more inherently secular, there was an idea that the Catholic Church or the Eastern Church should be the core of law in society, which monarchs would ultimately be piously submitted to. That King Henry VIII (another ancestor) felt the need to place himself as Head of Church as well as Head of State when breaking away from the Catholic Church reinforces the historical reality of this. I'm not saying decoupled law from religion is strictly a Free Mason idea (that's the genetic fallacy), how about Cicero? But in the course of history that's how it happened.

What we saw in the last 500 years of Christianity was a rupturing of Christian Ijma, or consensus, and then a repairing of it under the new political reality of decouple church and state, what's called ecumenicism. A big theme in this book is how to reduce sectarianism in Islam through methods other than taqlid, just agreeing on stuff, because that taqlid can perhaps overwrite good habits or even the meanings intended for us by God. Indeed that's the crux of the gripes against ecumenicism by highly particularist Christians such as Jay Dyer of the orthodox church, who thinks the radical ecumenicism of the Catholic Church under Francis (giving a hat tip to the Pacha Mama, for example) is very bad and a CIA psyop (detailed in *Doctrinal Warfare: How Catholics Came to Accept the American Proposition*, by David Wemhoff). One might analogize the US geopolitical paradigm and ecumenical Christianity with the taqlid of Sunni Islam vis a vis the political needs of historical Sunni empires.

This is all making it sound like I really do think Ijma is shirk. What I'm trying to nuance is, it definitely *can* be shirk, especially when the consensus goes against God's word in a clear sense. When God's word isn't simply clear, then the differences of opinion are, as the Sunnis put it, a mercy from Allah. However the idea that disagreeing with Ijma is kufr may be shirk, because of how circular a definition it is. Anyone who is a minority dissenter is out of Islam therefore Ijma remains pristine. Also, it's asserting the epistemics and information resources of scholars to be on the level of God's supreme knowledge to judge someone as doomed, all else thrown out, because they disagree with you and the rest of the academy. God's ways are not subject to a series of referendums, if there is indeed a reality to progressive revelation, dispensations and covenants across ages, it's coming from God and not from human consensus.

Omar Rahmahi does a great job of eloquently deconstructing all of the logical conceits involved in institutional Sunnism. When asked to condemn Sunnis as mushriks by a caller, he said "I cannot, I will not". He takes a fairly bare-bones reading of Qur'an alone and concludes, like say the Tuscon Masjid folks, that many Sunnis and Shia are in great peril, but he does not prosecute a jihad of language. I think Dr. Rahmahi represents the very best of what you might call the hardline Quranist view, he has Qur'an Alone fiqh, assumes there's one mubin interpretation, uses electrical engineer reasoning (logic gates) and Arabic etymology to extract that interpretation, and then holds good adab to not extrapolate dramatically in the social sphere. Most of his harshest criticisms are for the minority of Sunnis who are professional clergy.

Starting this book I thought the ijma of "Quranists" was open-ijtihad, the consensus of different opinions, then I realized it's taking "make no distinction between any of the Messengers" to not have a circumscribed meaning, but a nearly absolute meaning. One exception is the author of the Marvelous Qur'an channel, Dr. Hany Atchan, who does unique tafsir with a high metonymic usool to identify Ishmael (saws), Adam (saws) and others as being Muhammad (saws) in a different form of poetic frame. The Nur-Muhummadi-as-Logos idea might reconcile that, but that is not how Dr. Atchan tends to compose his tafsir.

Notably the only thing I encountered online that said dissent-from-Ijma is eternally damning kufr, was in Arabic. The Overton Window on what is considered germane to orthodox Sunni dawah (evangelism) has moved over the last decades just like the fiqh on photography has, or the political climate in Saudi Arabia has changed (it's still hot though). Given the language of the attempt to bridge between sects issued recently in Mecca, cited in the chapter on Kufr, it's unlikely that this love-affair with safety-in-numbers will end completely before judgment day.

Instead, perhaps Muslims will be forced to acknowledge that Ijma ain't what it used to be. The circle of things considered to be consensus, common sense, agreed interpretations of Qur'an and Sunnah, may contract to a more manageable radius. It is in this epistemic humility that we avoid shirk.

May Allah guide me and correct me if I have made any mistakes writing this book.

What is Jihad?

The hardest problem in tafsir is how to interpret the what, how, why and when of jihad. This is not a question of technical legality, such as covered in the Ayat/Abrogation chapter. The penalty for avoiding jihad when you are able to pursue it is condemnation as a munafiq and an eternity or full-hell-duration in the deepest pit of black flame. To quote Bane: "it would be extremely painful".

Why say "full-hell-duration" as an alternative to eternity? Ibn Tammiyah, or in modernity Adnan Ibrahim, or in the Quranist community Lamp of Islam author, all find some release valves in Qur'an to suggest an eventual annihilation of hell.

Nonetheless, to paraphrase the Wu Tang clan, nifaq ain't nothing to faq with. For women the religion is tough for all the male gaze dimension of wearing khymar, and hadith about keeping women cloistered in houses their whole lives, but men are expected to go out and "strive in the cause of Allah" as the apologetic modern translations unpack "jihad".

I was in a financially stressed period and praying to Allah to both deliver me from the cash-crunch and keep me on the path, away from hypocrisy, when things break my way. I was tested with a seemingly random encounter where a young woman had been beaten by her boyfriend and I granted her hospitality and guidance in exchange for some cleaning services, with the assent of my spouse. This turned into a scam very quickly which ended up bringing a dangerous male criminal into the house, I discovered the kitchen butcher knife in between the couch cushions and laughed it off as the doing of my toddler, then fed the criminal lad a nice lunch with cheese and mustard and olives, and gave him dawah that his sins could be forgiven and his whole life could change if he turned to God. I doubt the dawah was very effective but at least he didn't try to hold my toddler hostage to extract more funds out of us.

Is that a form of jihad?

7 weeks later, after working very hard without breaks, I raised some money and escaped the cash crunch. On the first day of no-crunch we went out for errands and I found some cherries for sale, \$5 for a big box, on the roadside, and I spent several nights processing all the cherries to make jam. I saw a young Muslimah's Twitter citing "Allah may make you do something you hate but it is good for you" and I analogized it to the cherry work, months later I'm still enjoying the cherry jam.

However! Re-reading the Qur'an in the alleged revelation order during Ramadan, I happened upon the Quranic verse in Surah Baqarah, that fighting has been prescribed for you even though you hate it, sometimes what is hateful to you is good for you. My spouse then, late in Ramadan, feeling that Laylatul-Qadr energy, was curious about converting to Islam and read the Qur'an in the classical order with Baqarah first, she was fine with it until the verses about men having a degree over women and that fighting verse. She said it seemed like a karmic trap.

If we look at the history of the Muslims, we can simplify it by saying that, even if there were no sects and no hadiths, the interpretation of that verse and a matrix of later verses increasing the political pressure to go out for jihad and not be a munafiq, presented a major problem for Muslims. When does the context of the Medinan Surahs change and abrogate the dire circumstances where a man must risk his life in battle or be condemned to super hell?

Furthermore, it's in these contexts where we find practically all of the verses cited in support of hadiths. Your faith isn't complete until you submit to the Rasul in all disputes (hypocrites and Medinan governance context), take what the Rasul has offered and stay off of what he has forbidden (war spoils allocation context), if you disobey the commands of the Rasul we'll let you do your thing but then later burn you in hell - followed by the verse saying shirk is the only unforgivable sin. This can be extremely confusing for a new convert to Islam or a young Muslim trying to find an intellectual footing in the faith. Is Islam a religion about worshipping God with no partners, making no distinction between any messengers, or a religion about worshipping God via the sole-avenue of one messenger who is the latest and therefore best? This dichotomy forms the simplistic dialectic struggle, or jihad, between ardent Quranists and Sunni Traditionalists, which this book seeks to reconcile with ilm.

When I re-read Qur'an chronologically I felt a lot of heartache in the Meccan surahs with explicit hellfire descriptions and many stories of destroyed civilizations, and then a lot of release in Baqarah where it's like, ok you submitted, you fear Allah and his judgment on the Last Day and seek compliance, here's how you do it, it's not so much, you can even take sick days in Ramadan. But then this fighting thing is there, and the sequence of Surahs re-escalates from that relief, a Muslim man is always an army reservist.

A Quranist would say, this is specific to the context, we have to read these literally and not as having timeless metaphorical meaning that can be used in usool al fiqh. Wiping yourself

with an even number of stones or having a slightly modified prayer form is not the same thing as excusing yourself from a battle in which many of your companions are killed or plotting with political enemies. By that same token the verse about not taking Jews and Christians as *alwiya*, they are *alwiya* to each other, is often broadly construed as a prohibition on Muslims befriending from those groups or being legal residents of countries run by such - one might instead refer to the alliance between the Meccan *henlotheists*, the Jews of Khaybar and the Byzantines in standing against the Muslims of Medina. There's a middle path where you can analogize that the USA has a lot of Christians in power still, they're modern Byzantium, and they're allies to the Zionists who are genociding Muslims, so don't pay taxes to them or at least minimize the tax bill through deductible charity and other work-arounds. Then we get to the idea that Muslims voting to punish the sitting US president in swing states even if the other guy overtly hates Muslims, is a part of *jihad*.

Indeed this desire to analogously discharge one's *jihad* obligation is clearly a motivation for a lot of Muslim activity on the internet. *Dawah*, scholarship and activism seem to count in many people's minds, but also sectarian speech against groups of Muslims they consider *kafir* *mushriks* also gets mixed in there, or speech trying to police Muslim women. Conversely there's a smaller thread of Muslimah feminists fighting *jihad* against the haram police men. We find ways to fight each other even if they're facile and nit-picking, click "Send" and call it a *jihad* - whew, guess all my prayers and deeds are still valid and I'm avoiding super-hell.

In the wider geopolitical arena, Muslims will fight each other in brutal civil wars with a sectarian veneer, as we explored in the Shia chapter with the anecdote of discussing Iranian foreign policy. When the Shia-attracted revert brother pointed out the Ali image, he was attracted to the sword, whereas I noticed the *Wudu/Dua* symbolism of the cupped hands filled with later - later I would learn from Ismaeli tradition that this is a ritual of purification from sins. Some people are more focused on Islam's spiritual purification and others on the implements of doing violence to evildoers in Allah's name - I suppose the figure of Ali Ibn Talib combines these, hence they're symbolized in the same image.

Quranists tend to focus on how, if you abandon the usool of saying there's abrogation of verses all across the text, the "sword verse" in Surah Tawbah is strictly defining a "just war theory" of defensive *jihad* only, with clear rules for armistice, truce and treaty. It's also argued that the *jizya* tax is a war reparations method and not a *de facto* poll tax based on religious affiliation, which dilutes the typical totalitarian view westerners have of an Islamic Caliphate. The Quranist and Quran-centric narrative is that greedy *munafiqeen*, the most evil *munafiqeen*, the ones who converted after Mecca was defeated and forgiven, they invented a perverse imitation of the Qur'an and tried to subvert its meaning.

Dr. Javad Hashmi's Ph.D dissertation is on this topic and takes a plain-text reading of the verses to show that this defensive-warfare doctrine makes sense. As I like to do when someone quotes the sword verse at me to suggest - why are you in this insanely violent religion - I say: what does the next verse say? It says to stop fighting them if they repent, donate to the poor and pray, not specifying how. What Dr. Hashmi's thesis does it strip down the logics that lead to

the medieval empire-excusing reading, highlight the acknowledgement of classical tafsir scholars that the text can mean one of two things, and show how without abrogation and the extra-logic of the medieval tafsir it really means what it says.

Dr. Hashmi is a Modernist and not a Quranist, a hallmark of modernism is resorting to modes of tafsir that eschew the Hanbali verbatim Word of God mode, such as a historical contextual approach. His primary reference is one of the first “Quranists” and “Islamic Modernists”, Cheragh Ali (d. 1895). Quranists often, funnily enough, stick to the Hanbali approach to tafsir, and these often overlap with those who call Sunni and Shia mushriks and wish to make at least a verbal, social media jihad upon them. The Quranist reading that Quranic jihad doctrine is purely defensive usually comes from rejecting the hadith suggesting a command from Allah to make war on the kuffar until they become Muslim, but Dr. Hashmi shows you can get the just-war doctrine from mubin (clear), plain, fideistic, no-additional-abrogation, one-verse-follows-another parsing of the first verses of Surah Tawbah, without using modernist lenses or rejecting hadith.

Therefore if one accepts that hadith that seems to be underwriting the aggressive Rashidun and Umayyad conquests (and the Mughal, Ottoman etc. conquests) one can simply contextualize it as something that Muhammad (saws) said *in the context* of the Mecca war, and indeed, they were fought *until* they agreed to pay zakat and establish salah. Problem solved.

Dr. Hashmi notes that this interpretation is now mainstream in Sunni Islam, taught at Al-Azhar university (which is a somewhat sophisticated Ashari institution) and widely recognized in orthodox Muslims scholarship. However in the popular concept of being Muslim, there’s still a lot of guys (mostly guys, sometimes women) on the internet calling Indians epithets (even if they are themselves ethnically Punjabi or such) and wondering when the Hindu genocide will commence, or pining for a caliphate to be installed so women can be captured to deliver them from inceldom. The broad-based definition of “kuffar” as being all non-Muslims is still very popular and the notion that Muslims who disagree are even worse-off, munafiqeen, lurks in the shadows, even in the minds of pious Muslims who are guilty of being nice to people outside their Ummah.

For the record (taken down by the angels on my shoulders) I think the idea of Qur’an condemning hypocrisy is overall healthy, it’s important to take a holistic reading to understand what the parameters of nifaq really are. I’m willing to say that Quranists trying to wage jihad on all the other Muslims (arguing they’re actually mushrikeen najas and not Muslims at all) could verge on nifaq, for instance, how would a minority succeed at that? Probably by allying with the western governments. The UK former army guy who reverted and is now a militant Quranist, threatening Sunnis with being “taken to the wall” for citing the infamous Aisha-age hadiths, is in particular danger. But part of the thesis of this book is that this path of conflict makes one indeed a sectarian mushrik anyway, which every sectarian justifies via minoritarian or majoritarian fallacies and the fallacy that the “true position” is not a sect at all. So the nifaq question is just added depth of punishment.

There's a hadith actually collates all the stuff about nifaq in Qur'an into a neat list of 4 things: breaking covenants, lying, using foul language when confronted and not being trustworthy. You can tell that this was something people were concerned about. There's another hadith from later collections that says the munafiq eats with 7 stomachs, but in the Muwatta there's a more elaborate narration where a guest of the Prophet eats gleefully, then converts to Islam that night and in the morning has a more circumscribed appetite, hence it's not the munafiq but the unbeliever that eats with 7 stomachs. Perhaps I'm justifying my own corruption as I just had chips with cheese again as a 4pm snack.

The idea of a deeper punishment for those who make a faith commitment and don't fully prosecute it may seem unique to the Qur'an. However in the (what I consider to be) sahih gospel, such as in gMark, Jesus (saws) warns: beware of the hypocrite who teaches the law but impoverishes the widow, they will be punished the worst. So the idea is actually consistent across scriptures, and applying that other aspect to usool would be very useful for reforming Islam, and it's easier to make the argument that this is an uncorrupted part of Injil, the authentic hadith of Isa (saws), than to convince all Sunnis to reject hadith, especially when hadith actually truncates the nifaq question to a manage-able list. There's also a paradoxical bit on nifaq in Surah Nur, where Allah asks rhetorically, if they are munafiq because they fear Allah will not be just with them? So by fearing that you may be judged as a munafiq for vague reasons, you paradoxically therefore become a munafiq.

Muslim Revert Tweak: I can't stand the ambiguity around nifaq! It's too much pressure!

Sufi Tweak's Dad: Calm down Tweak, have some turkish coffee.

That's a South Park reference.

Speaking of which, in Surah Tawbah the munafiqeen are admonished for mocking God's signs and messenger, and then try to walk it back by hiding behind irony and mere jest, and this is not described lightly or forgivingly. Thus the (old, pre-Sufi) Mufti Abu Layth method of chuckling at everything *can be* theologically problematic for a Muslim, but also, here's where hadith can be helpful, there are numerous hadith where Muhammad (saws) laughs heartily in different situations, showcasing his jovial manner. By and large Muslims tend to shy away from being too funny, and I'm indeed trying to be somewhat careful about use of humor in this book, it does however help ease tension while highlighting relatable human emotional dilemmas.

The etymology of nifaq has to do with tunnels, hence the munafiq is secretly tunneling a path towards the other side, hedging their allegiance. This accusation is lobbed at liberal Muslims by traditionalists and at traditionalists by reformers, and there may be some truth to both angles. Being kept on your toes, not too comfortable with just praying and eating, forcing

yourself to push on ibada through nafl prayer at night, going to the Masjid for fajr, or more donation and volunteering, is potentially quite healthy. According to a Jewish Rabbi (a woman, Reform Judaism) there's an epidemic of embezzlement in US synagogues and churches, something like 80% of them have religious leaders skimming from the till. This goes beyond a Mufti Abu Layth naughty-naughty admonition, these people may be doomed to super-hell, worse than a godless murderer, even though they haven't entered the Quranic covenant, otherwise what is that hadith from gMark about.

Then there's nifaq at a geopolitical level. Rich gulf states sponsoring proxy wars for resource extraction. Pimping teenage girls in mutah nikah and blessing each trick with a dua. You can see how particularly ugly it is to sin grievously and then dress it up as holy.

Later scholars would try and broaden the concept of nifaq to include, for example, those who are not mindful in their salah or those who claim to be reformers but are actually corrupt (early in Surah Baqarah), as well as in works of fiqh. Inserting [hypocrites] in different sections, based on the assumption that this is what Allah meant by implication. If that insertion is presumptuous then there may be an intermediate category: someone who is convicted sincerely of faith but who is self-righteously subversive to the proper reality of Islam. This is similar to the etymology of Zindiq explored in the previous chapter, it doesn't really mean "fake Muslim" but rather "self-righteous Muslim", hence the submission to God is not complete because of following one's hawa, one's religious desires. Clearly you don't want to be one of these people either, but for the sake of nuance, they may be a less-bad category.

So for example, if the Hanbali interpretation of Islam is truly the correct one, then other Sunni schools are less correct but perhaps acceptably so (hence the big tent of Sunni Orthodoxy) and as you get further away to Shia, Quranist etc. things get more dire, one might even be a Zindiq. But a proper Munafiq would be someone abetting the slaughter of Muslims through proxy wars or insincerely watering down the religion to the point of letting evildoers do so (a critique of Salafists against Western Muslims who are not sufficiently cranky).

So let's avoid nifaq by doing jihad! But how? Killing people? What if we kill the wrong people, then we will be of the losers, like Cain. Ain't nobody saying radi Allahu annam after that guy's name. Killing other Muslims of a different sect might be shirk. Killing non-Muslims seems to also be shirk based on scholarly scaffolding unless there's a Quranically justifiable inciting violence, and not respecting a sue for peace may also qualify. But we can't just eat shawarma and play FIFA all day either. Maybe we should go protest? Maybe we should upload more religious YouTube videos? Maybe write a free book? When it comes to jihad there's an ocean of qiyas.

The concept of jihad is not exclusive to Islam. Christianity has it, sure the "crusade" term is a reactionary one, but the Christian concept of martyrdom is similar adapted to Islam (in the hadith, not in the Qur'an). Arguably the Christian centuries of persecution that prevailed in an imperial taqlid of... something monotheistic, was a jihad. The Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr.

theory of nonviolent resistance is a jihad that has a mixed record, Gandhi won, MLK no, Malcolm X was so frustrated with it he became a Muslim and got shotgunned.

Hegel's concept of history as a dialectic procession of struggles, jihads in other words, stripped out the concept of "Ruh" or spirit from the trinitarian concept and generalized it to human beings, more on that angle in the next chapter.

The guy who coined the concept of "Jihad-al-Nafs", that jihad is about continuing to push ourselves to greater spiritual growth, was a Hanbali who founded the Qadiriyya Sufi Tariqa, one of the oldest. This idea has been around for almost 1000 years. It is critiqued by Salafis who want to claim their interpretation of Sunnism as the Ijma of Sunni, which has mostly back-fired in the last 100 years, rather in orthodox Sunnism it's understood that Jihad-al-Nafs is an acceptable idea even if it's not ensconced as Ijma itself. Islamic terrorism has also mostly come from extreme Salafi theories performed under qiyas, like if it's ok to eat pig when you're starving, maybe it's ok to blow up "innocent" civilians when they pay tax to the US and therefore aren't really innocent, and post-colonial geopolitics leaves us without effective warfare strategies.

I think the greatest jihad is to combine the Jihad-al-Nafs with the exterior jihad and what this amounts to is something like what Imam Ali would have represented if people with more sloppy interpretations of jihad had not murdered him. That those Khawarij were interpreting the Qur'an semi-literally at the time speaks to the limitations of a Quran Only textual method - sorry to my Quranist brothers but you can't claim 1st century hijri Khawarij as being the proof of Quranism's historical roots and then ignore their mistakes in tafsir that basically ensconced Muawiya and enabled Sunni hadithism to flourish.

Jihad must be approached with wisdom and novel strategy.

I'm not saying me writing a book with Murjite under-tones of "lets all get along" is the best jihad, because taken to an extreme, that would be denying jihad. There's definitely something to this theme in the Qur'an. We'll explore such strategy at the end of the book.

The irony that I'm a white revert talking Islamic strategy when I know the plot of Dune, all the books, with the golden path leading to insane civilian casualties across many worlds, is not lost on me.

What is the Ruh Qudus?

The words “Ruh Qudus”, “Ruh” by itself and the phrase “Malaikatu wa’ruhu” in Surah Qadr are all in the Qur’an, and there’s cousin-word resonance with the Hebrew book of Genesis, a spirit over the waters in the primordial stages of creation. That sort of language can be used for all sorts of theological speculation, such as a Logos theology which is subordinationism (e.g. Ismaeli, Ackbarian, Neo-Platonist theologies in general) or binitarian (which would be quite haram), and often Christians read the Qur’an and they get confused at what the text is trying to critique from their Din, because it sounds like the trinity is in there. What the Qur’an is most likely doing by acknowledging a particular relationship between Jesus (saws) and the Ruh Qudus, as well as calling him *a* word *from* God rather than *the* Word *of* God, is to give Christians a unitarian form of Christianity to follow or even convert them to the full Quranic covenant by impression of similarity. Simultaneously the Qur’an is short-circuiting the penal atonement theory, the trinitarian theology in the strong, shared-essence sense, and the assertion that Gospel miracles or resurrection imply Godhood when they are really gifts from God.

However the Ruh Qudus also has some relationship to the Qur’an itself and its Messenger. In Sunni orthodoxy it is assumed that the Arch-angel Gabriel/Jibreel (as) and the Ruh Qudus are metonymously linked. They also develop an usool that the Qur’an must be referring to sets in a specialized succession, such as - John is an Army Officer, a General. This rule for parsing the text is how a strict Seal of the Prophets approach is justified, as well as asserting that 3:19 is somehow abrogating or circumscribing the verses promising broad

salvation, making them apply only to Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians etc. prior to the advent of Qur'an, because the Ibn Ma'sud qiraat use of Hanifiya for Islam correlates to Ibrahim (saws) being referred to as a Muslim, Hanif. This sort of codified textualization is the spine of Sunni doctrine.

The Shia, on the other hand, see the Ruh Qudus as its own thing, resonant to the verse that it is not for Allah to speak to humans... except for: behind a veil, through prophetic texts, with a messenger angel and inspiration. Inspiration is subtle, intuitive and prone to diffusion with the ego of the inspired individual, the crux of Christian modernism is that the biblical books can have authors who were inspired to different degrees. A messenger angel is more stringent, you can get a verbatim (Athari) or at least consistently principle communication of words (Ashari/Maturidi) transmission from God by proxy of the angel, this is where Jibreel comes in. Sunnis and Ibadis would tend to circumscribe the temptation to cite inspiration based on another verse cautioning against going off claiming to be inspired - they would tend to also cite a metaphorically narrow transmission of Qur'an via Jibreel and thus Qur'an has only one author - Allah. Jibreel was the postman, and the Nabi was the postmaster general, responsible not just for passing the message but also regulating it and providing customer service. The concept of wahy cited in hadith apologetics is irrefutably an appeal to inspiration, but again it's narrowly applied to just this one special human, the final prophet.

Narrowing inspiration leaves us with a post-apocalyptic world in the sense that apocalypse means "revelation", everything that is to be revealed has been revealed, the Qur'an's endorsement of inspiration is left to hadith collection and the science of filtering those hadiths for concordance with Qur'an, and after the final messenger's death, that science is all that's left. Sufis and the under-stated Ibadi tradition of Inner Knowledge provides some exceptions to that in those traditions, but which is often swept under the rug and kept for initiates, so as not to rock the boat of exoteric legal authority.

For the Shia, citing the Ruh Qudus as an independent mechanic for God's guidance is essential to the theory of Imamate, these sons of Ali (ra) are not prophets, that would break the seal, but they do have this wahy of the Ruh Qudus, hence they are infallible. It would be possible for the next Ismaeli Nizari Imam to soften the risk of saying something controversial and losing faithful on the all-or-nothing proposition of infallibility by infallibility asserting a doctrine that the Imam is only infallible when he speaks ex cathedra, similar to how the Catholic Popes do that. For Twelvers the infallibles are truncated to the 800s when the 12th Imam was swept up into occultation until the end-times, so they end up with the Sunni Ulema methodology on the track of Jafari Fiqh and some other hadiths from the other 11, but the difference is the black turbaned Sayyidis are more inherently qualified to be 12'er Shia Ulema due to perhaps incremental Ruh Qudus benefits inherited from their Ahul Bayt descendancy.

In Surah Isra Allah says that the Ruh is a mystery to most and it's best not to speculate wildly. For Shia, their Imams citing its inspiration is qualified. For Sunnis, the assertion that it's just a synonym for Jibreel (as) is defensive against corruption from either trinitarian doctrine or Shia doctrine, however given the warning against speculation in Qur'an, may not be the most

pious choice. A big thesis of hadith-criticism, explained by Hassan bin Maliki, is that a lot of hadith fabrication is motivated not by material or moral corruption, but by just cause corruption, people wanting to do something good like forbidding sins and encouraging prayer by using a new hadith to authoritatively scare people into it. There may be a similar tendency in translating the Qur'an itself.

The r/Quraniyoon community polled on this, with a small sample size, a minority follow the Ruh Qudus == Jibreel idea, about half believe it's an inspiration mechanic (presumably in a broader sense than Shia Imamate) the winning category was to follow the Qur'an's words that its best left a mystery, and another minority had custom explanations. One reporter cited the strong textual coupling of the Messiah with the Ruh Qudus, such as the ability to speak in infancy and perform miracles, to mean that Ruh Qudus is a conduit for more gifts from Allah than mere intuitive guidance, and a sub-commentator said it sounds like the trinity idea and raises a sense of caution. It was interesting to see some of these historical patterns about parsing the phrase repeat themselves in the audience.

The Tuscon Masjid tafsir from Rashad Khalifa takes the Ruh Qudus == Jibreel position, which is interesting because you can imagine Dr. Khalifa having taking the Imamate/post-Seal of Prophets sub-Messengership position that he was inspired to discover Code 19 by the Ruh. However the argument he ultimately made to back up his claimed of Messengership was a textual one, that his name is in the text. That was Messengership with a capital "M", not in a diffuse, broadly accessible sense proposed by Muhammad from God in a video, where he cites Muhammad Ali's example and dawah.

The idea that God guides people is broadly accepted as essential to Islam and often cited, even if passive aggressively. If someone is expressing a rather liberal take on fiqh, someone else might say "May Allah Guide You" and the implication is, they *really* need that guidance. Often though it's said in a humble way, like, we all need guidance, may Allah guide us all, we don't know everything and all need it. How does this guidance happen, theologically speaking? Does Allah intervene directly into your brain? Does Allah send guardian angels to stop you from taking the wrong turn down a dark alleyway? Does Allah send another type of agentic servant, a diffuse spirit rather than a pristine intellect, to communicate feelings rather than words? Does Allah manipulate subtle aspects of causality to embroil you in a series of synchronicities?

It's like that scene in Full Metal Jacket:

Soldier you've got Abd Al-Qur'an on your helmet yet you also have a dove symbolizing a holy spirit? What's that supposed to be some kind of sick Shia joke?

Sir no sir!

What is it supposed to mean?

I don't know sir!

Are you some kind of Zindiq crypto-Christian?

No sir!

Answer my question or you'll be standing tall before Allah on the Qiyamah ready to go to Munafiq hell.

I think I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man sir.

What?

The duality of man, the Jungian thing, intuitive synchronicities guiding us between textual research references.

Whose side are you on!?

Our side sir!

Then how about getting with the program? Why don't you jump on the team and come in for be big win?

Yes, sir!

Son all I've ever asked for my Mujahadeen is for them to obey my orders as if they were the word of Allah azzawajal, we are here to help the kuffar because inside every kafir is a Muslim trying to get out. It's a hardball cosmos son. We've got to try and keep our heads until this Quranism craze blows over.

Protestant Christianity appeals to its dissent from Ecclesial authority by claiming that God is powerful enough to decentralize His guidance viz the holy spirit. Jews and Muslims would say that deifying this concept is placing a shirk intercessor between use and the Haqq of Allah/HaShem, but without deifying it, there are degrees of acceptance that God guides people. The epistemic problem posed in Protestantism by a flurry of competing holy spirit claims then defaulted to textual exegesis and the slippery slope of modernist permutations of those reading glasses, Muslims would say this precipitated the moral decline and abundance of atheism and relativism that plagues the west.

Philosophers have taken the holy spirit idea in interesting directions, most notably Hegel, who decouples it from trinitarianism and applies it more broadly to create an historical theory of social process, in the process he brings back the idea of jihad in a more academically palatable way with "dialectics", or broad-based struggle in society. Through the reconciliation of dialectic tensions society goes through a series of phase transitions and the spirit of the age advances to

the next stage of, what one might call societal evolution. Marx got rid of the spirituality hence the term “dialectical-materialism” that Marxists use, which is often called an “immortal science” though I suspect mortality and science are intimately linked. Marxism-Leninism added the Salafi-esque overt jihad imperative but without an epistemics that has objective morality, leading to deca-million casualties. Fabian Socialism is more sustainable, the Munafiq version compared to violent Mushrik Terrorism, and we’ll discuss that more in the next chapter.

Jay Dyer’s over-simplification of Hegelianism is that it’s basically Buddhism and part of this same glomming-together of souls that we see in all the new agey, perennialist, Neo-Platonist systems. Which is interesting because the Ismaeli Imam Hasan II, when he declared partial Qiyamah (Qiyamah in Ismailism is an era of revelation and sifting the pure from the corrupt, and not just an afterlife event) decreed that we would end up merging with the universal soul, going off of a Neo-Platonist, emanationist theology where Allah creates the finite but perfect First Intellect (Nur Muhammadi, the Pen cited in Qur’an) and the First Intellect creates the imperfect but cosmic Universal Soul. Ismaelis takes the Ibn Tammiyah reading of annihilationism (albeit after a lot of burning) further to a universalist Islam where the companions of the fire are eventually admitted to paradise, purified of their sins and theological errors. This sort of thematic is present in the Vedic tradition, which Ismaelis claim is part of the prophetic tradition from Adam (saws) and also in Hermeticism, Gnosticism, new age systems like Theosophy, and if you count the spiritual-but-not-religious modality that about a quarter of the world semi-subscribes to in post-post-modernity, then you might say Hegelianism (before Hegel ever coined it in western-academica-friendly verbosity) is more successful than ever. We’ll explore this more in the chapter about possible One World Religion conspiracies.

Relevant to the Ruh Qudus vs. Ruh-by-itself distinction in Qur’an is the idea that the Universal Soul perfects itself by collating individual purified souls, an idea common to all reincarnation-based theologies. It’s no wonder that the Druze, who see Plato as an Imam and believe in reincarnation, were an offshoot of Ismaeli Shiism.

This chapter touches on tafsir, not just how to interpret Ruh Qudus but also its implications for tafsir in general, and then we have to admit that aqeedah, theology, is inline to that. In the major Sunni schools of aqeedah, Allah is one and paradoxically transcendent yet agentic, there is none like The One, yet Allahu Ahad can answer duas, so call on Him with the best of names. There’s an implication about causality and choice in that, which we’ll explore in the next chapter, but also on how God “is” and how God “works”.

In an Athari creed, we would accept that the text says Ruh Qudus, accept that it warns us not to speculate wildly, and stop it, talking about Ruh Qudus would be practically haram. In an Ashari/Maturidi system, if the perhaps politically motivated insistence to assert Ruh Qudus == Jibreel were not in effect, we could say that the Ruh Qudus is an agency of Allah’s attributes of Wisdom and Faith Infusing, if not others. In a Mutazilite theology, assuming they were willing to get a bit mystical, they might say its a necessary instrument of God’s justice in a unified attribution, the delimiter between a diseased heart and a pure one, this is a Quranic rhetoric that

Khaled from Quranic Islam uses to simplify tafsir - just read it with an unlocked heart. Who seals the hearts? Does God do that or do we do that to ourselves? That aspect is for the next chapter.

If you're too corrupted to be guided, by whatever mechanic, your heart ends up sealed, this might be analogous to "blasphemy against the holy spirit" in gMathew, which is often apologized for as not be a literal statement of blasphemy but closing oneself off from guidance. Nice try Christopher Hitchens! (He encouraged young people to blaspheme against the holy spirit in a YouTube challenge in the late 2000s). By that logic is the Shia are more correct and the Sunni idea is not, that can be forgivable so long as the individuals in question are not totally gone into sectarianism.

In Neo-Platonic systems like Ackbarianism (Ibn Arabi), Ismaeli or Ibn Sina Falasafa, the Divine Simplicity of Allah is insulated by the agentic emanation of the First Intellect/Spirit of Guidance and Universal Soul. Ackbarianism is trying not to seem like kafir mushriks to their more conventional Sunni friends so they'll taqlid on enough things to understate this, but in general the idea is that Allah is unchanging and to get du'a answered you need to rely on intermediate agents *while* avoiding shirk by assigning Allah credit by proxy (being the source of all causation). Quranists are more likely to side with the Sunnis on this one, they often accuse Sunnis of shirk for sending salawat upon one prophet exclusively with hope for intercessionary favors.

Every aqeedah system has a stopping point where an appeal to mystery is made. In Hanbali Athari thought it's at the level of simply reading and affirming the literal text, in Salafi Athari thought they go a step further and affirm the *apparent* meaning of e.g. Allah's hand which leads to problematic philosophizing about Ibn Tammiyah regarding God's speech, such that God's attributes can accrue over time, this is antithetical to divine simplicity, in an attempt to take the text simply, but then continuing to think, they arrive at complex theism. In Ashari it's at the level of the paradoxes in created Mushaf/Uncreated Qur'an, Deterministic Free Will in Occasionalism, and other conundrums that leave them at a loss when debating Christians.

For Catholic Trinitarians the 1-in-3-ness is a mystery but the Orthodox have a complex theistic system of will, nature, and energies that are distinguished so the trinity is monarchical to God The Father yet somehow not in a subordinationism way, and the appeal to mystery is in the essence. If Christians are crossing the line of shirk according to Qur'an, and it's hanging on this word "essence" but they concede the essence is a mystery, then why is affirming that mystery so important to feeling safe from lines in gJohn about the only way to God is through the Messiah? There's some intermediate steps of logic here, affirmed by a series of ecumenical councils that are said to have holy spirit infallibility sealing their rulings on heresy vs. orthodoxy. The early history of Christianity is very similar to the early history of Sunni Islam covered in the chapter on Kufr, in that, a series of extrapolations from the text that are affirmed as necessary for salvation.

Jay Dyer says that the other "divine persons" (or "hypostases" to use Orthodox nomenclature) can't be mere attributes because the Wisdom, Mercy, Love etc. is between them

and in them each. I really wonder though how provably (from scriptures Christians accept) heretical it would be to take a more monarchical trinity stance that might be Qur'an compliant, e.g. subordinationism, where essence isn't shared and the other persons are attributive divine agents but not "members" of "Godhead". Something between emanationism and trinitarianism... you're slightly more than halfway to Quranic Mesih and Ruh Qudus. More on that in the dawah chapter. Of course Quranists would not even accept that because it's making distinction between the Messengers, this like of reasoning is only worth entertaining if you're willing to believe most Sunnis are not upon fatal shirk.

Christianity generally rejects as heresy any trinity models where there is a dialectical tension between the persons, yet also depends on them to account for God's love as a dynamic attribute rather than what they critique Islam has having more flatly. The Qur'an does say God is loving but it's overshadowed by scarier parts of the text. However the Quranic Ruh Qudus is clearly not in dialectical tension with Allah either, per the line in Surah Qadr, they descend with their Lord's permission.

I wonder if Allah will hold Hegel accountable for Marx and Lenin and the crimes of their followers? The Qur'an says none will bear the sins of another but also talks of leaders getting double the punishment of their followers. Maybe the "results" or more loosely, ripple effect, of Hegelianism are a warning for pontificating about Ruh Qudus too much.

But then again, probably the reason people love Slavoj Zizek so much, other than the funny comments on movies and the iconic accent, is that he represents a glimmer of spirituality in his Hegelianism, and people have become starved for that sense of spirit and directly experienced divine love. This problem facing debauched agnostics and disillusioned Marxists also seems to be facing Muslims today. But maybe that divine gift of directly experienced transcendent love is right there waiting for them in the Qur'an, they just have to find it in between the scary parts.

What is Qadr?

Whew, let's finish this book huh? Let's keep this super brief, especially since we hit on a lot of the technical details in the Ibadi chapter and alluded to implications in the last chapter.

Qur'an has indications that can be translated to suggest strongly that some people are doomed to hell or consigned to salvation by default. It also has parts that suggest we have choices, the whole point of existence is to see who is best in deeds, and as Dr. Rahmahi points out if Allah created Human and Jinn only to serve Him, but many people aren't doing, what went wrong? The choice to come to Allah is the point. There's no compulsion in the Din and if Allah had willed it, everyone would have been believers. So this suggests that sure, Allah has the power to make our reality a totally 2d, linear story with a precluded ending, but this was not Allah's will.

In a limited-sample-size poll on the r/Quraniyoon subreddit, a small minority voted for full predestination (similar to Athari creed and in similar proportion), a smaller minority voted for full Free Will (in the radically assertive sense of Catholics and Mutazilites) and the rest were split between something like Ashari Occasionalism (mostly determined, some free will periodically) and a more complex 4th thing, where there's a lot of free will but it's constrained. Some of the comments described, as if from first principles, something like Occasionalism where there is a graph of nodes and Allah sees the whole tree but our experience is only of the path we take through that graph abstaining from temptations, taking opportunities to do good deeds and so

on. Someone linked to a Shabir Ally video where he questions the traditional predestination argument by citing verses from Qur'an where one chooses Allah and Allah makes it easy for you to earn the good deeds, this *changing* the Qadr. So Qadr is not *pre*-destiny, it's just destiny, but also Dr. Ally's explanation was not so radical as to up-end an Occasionalist framework.

There are hadiths that more aggressively frame-up strict predestination, and hadiths that suggest otherwise, such as the famous one of the Jewish sex worker feeding water to a dog and being forgiven for it. There's a hadith about one's fate being decreed in the womb and a verse in Qur'an about Allah knowing us from the womb, and the footnote adds that this means predestination per the hadith. There's the Hadith Jibreel with a single transmitter from Basra that has no indication of being heard in the Muwatta of Imam Malik, where Qadr is cited as the 6th pillar of emaan, next to angels, books, messengers, Last Day and One God.

Dr. Ramahi has a whole pair of lectures on there being no predestination in the Qur'an and is questioned about how can Allah not be all-knowing? He comes back to his reading of the verses warning against lying about God and refraining to speak on what you do not know, that it really means a more attainable "understand", and says that Allah *understands* the future. After all (literally) there will be a judgment day, this is a major, major theme in Qur'an, the Last Day is inevitable and inescapable and there is no refuge from God's justice. Allah understands this very well, but it also seems like Allah doesn't know in advance who is going to make it, because if He did, he wouldn't be a just judge. Allah created the world to see who is best in deeds, hence Occasionalism makes peace between omniscience and the Qur'an's stated point of creation by giving us just enough free-will rope to hang ourselves with.

Going off of Dr. Rahmahi's idea of "Allah *understands* the future", let's use an analogy from videogames, which is familiar to our modern frame of reference. The designers of World of Warcraft understand there is an end-game where Level 60 (or higher, post expansion packs) characters will try to farm rare gear and group together to take on raid bosses. They intentionally put in randomized sets of gear drops and some other events to spice up the game. The game is largely deterministic, however, so World of Warcraft isn't the best analogy. But there's clearly no conflict between the game designers' control over the game world as existing on a higher-order level of reality (our world) and the non-deterministic parts of the game.

Let's say you made a game about the 3-body problem, perhaps a puzzle game where you put rockets on a moon in a 3-moon system and try to manipulate the objects to fall into a black hole, the black hole is small enough (<0.01 solar masses) that its gravity anchors the 3-body system of moons but doesn't overwhelm them, and it's also hard to hit so you need to really line up your gravitational sling shots with a good angle. Sounds like a fun game. There's a high degree of unpredictability in the system such that basic Newtonian trigonometry won't do it. The statistical flow chart concept then seems very basic compared to a wildly chaotic system with more complexity, and surely such systems are within Allah's power to create.

When I was coming back to faith I started by letting go of desire to be rich and famous and practicing gratitude for what I had. I went on a trip to visit family on my return flight was delayed to the point that it seemed I would miss the overnight connecting flight scheduled for 11:59pm (the end of the legal timeframe). Additionally it was during COVID and my >\$100 test to qualify for re-entry had a strict time window so missing the flight posed uncertain delays and at least one night of hotel plus another test, my anxiety spiked when the first flight was closing in on MIA airport, I was counting the minutes, ready to rush out the door. Myself and a cohort of elders with even worse lung-health than I had crowded by the door ready to jog the full length of the east wing of the airport in a 15 minute window. A helpful cart driver scooped us up, making the connection tenable in both time and lung capacity. We barely made the flight, minutes to spare.

On the flight I watched the first episodes of The Foundation, based on the Issac Asimov books, and the scientist guy pitches the emperor that the empire *will* decline, but the chaotic interregnum period might last ~800 years or many thousands of years, if they decide to make the titular foundation as a back-up. Reflecting on my narrow boarding of the flight and the concepts in the sci-fi show, a notion of constrained free will coalesced in my mind. The information we have available, our access to resources, our self-knowledge and self-restraint, our training to make decisions under duress, these all amount to constraints that puts the absolute free will of the Catholics or Mutazilites through a prism of realism.

So what about du'a? The Qur'an says to call on Allah by His beautiful names and ask of Him, so what are we asking? Why are we asking? Will our dua only be answered if it's in accord with a pre-measured decree of Allah or is there flexibility?

One thing I think Quranists and Quran-centric Muslims, and Salafis and a lot of madhabi Sunnis for that matter, will not compromise on is an aversion to tawassul, istighatha and assorted dua to other than Allah. According to Khaled's tafsir, there are verses in Qur'an that indicate this is a forgive-able sin. There is another verse that Shia and Sufis cite to justify tawassul. The more cautious monotheists among these cohorts would rather have their dua directly to Allah be unanswered, take the unanswered dua as a sign to make dua that is in synchronized with Allah's presumed will for us (e.g. ask for protection from temptation, better anger management, inspiration to more good deeds etc. rather than material outcomes), and be glad for that. It's also possible to consult Jinn to get fast results for all manner of things, but this is generally considered unequivocally haram (there are a few people who claim to consort with nice Jinn and that it's not haram). Making prayers for intercession of saints, Imams, or prophets is not unequivocally haram, it's certainly disliked by one wing of the Ummah, but it does raise questions about causality.

In a sense the major thing setting Qur'an Only and Qur'an Centric Muslims apart from Salafists other than hadith filtration, is the rejection of salawat for intercessory purposes. There are Qur'an Centric Muslims who will speak salawatu alaihi wa salaam after saying a prophet's name, to fulfill the asserted commandment, and extend that to all prophets to fulfill the true believer criteria of making no distinction between them, but when it comes to prophetic intercession, there's a respect for God's justice. Whereas, in fear of punishment, one might want

to say salawat 1000 times a day, it's like overpaying for insurance, can't have too much insurance? Interestingly the same scholars who encourage intercessory salawat believe insurance contracts to be akin to gambling and therefore haram.

If Quran-oriented people don't put their hopes in intercession, they do so out of a respect for free will, the idea that you might be predetermined to be faithful, but do a lot or zina or something, and then end up bailed out by intercession, is offensive to them. This sort of theological twist is not unique here. The Ibadis believe in a strong determinism with limited choice, like Occasionalism, but also that the Qur'an was created. The Murjites were the People of the Promise, resting on guarantees stated in the Qur'an as a contractual *de minimus* for their faithful observance of salah, zakat and sawn, yet their premier theologian, Jahm, believed that God's attributes were created, hence God retains absolute free will to uncreate and recreate His attributes and the qualities that underlie the promise might then change? Atharis believe in causality that is logically sequential but predetermined, yet Salafi Atharis also believe God can accrue attributes through the issuance of Uncreated Speech?

Late in the series *Breaking Bad*, there is a fateful episode called *Ozymandias*, after the king whose mighty works were ruined, Walter White begs his government agent brother-in-law to say the right things to be saved from execution at the hands of violent criminals. The *Ozymandias* reference is highly resonant with the thematic of the Qur'an's stories of destroyed civilizations and arrogant, taghut rulers. The scene reminded me of the hardline predestination idea.

"Hakim! Just say you believe in the correct aqeedah!"

"Ibn Walteer, you're the smartest Quranic Scholar I ever met, but you're too stupid to realize, He made up his mind when I was stitched in the womb. <Turns to face The Lord on Qiyamah> So you just better go ahead and do what you got to"

<woosh>

If not believing in strict predestination is haram then everyone who doubts it was predetermined to, and their sacrifice of food in Ramadan, time in salah, money in zakat and so forth is in vain, what can you do? If our choices *really do* determine our Qadr, then that's actually more terrifying, because like the Qur'an says, you could be punished horribly and reminded that a messenger came to you and spelled out the rules you broke intentionally.

When we sit and do zikr, what do we think about? Often we may think about how the moon is carefully calibrated in its orbit, how the weather is balanced to enable our biome, how the chemistry of soil retains water well enough to sustain plant life, how we're lucky to have a home, how our food and money depended on a series of events that were curated by Allah, how the stars are majestic and so on. All of these natural phenomena are cited in Qur'an as signs of Allah, and they all entail causality, with a backwards trace back to The One. Qadr perhaps, is just the converse of that, going in the opposite direction in time. And time is of the essence.

Surah Qadr, about the Laylatul Qadr, is significant, and appreciation of it is something that unifies all Muslims, Quranist to Amahdi, Salafi to Ismaeli. If I had not had an unexpectedly transformative experience staying up on Laylatul Qadr, I may not have decided to take the dive and become a Muslim, or probably would have not been as ardent a believer. Something happens on this night, it's like a hyperbolic time chamber. Every bill you pass out to beggars, every rakat you do, every zikr, every minute in meditation, they're all opportunities to make choices and they all ostensibly have either a quantitative (~30,500x or more multiplier) or qualitative (soul growth) effect. It's kind of like grabbing the invincibility start in Mario and going for a sprint through crowds of enemies, racking up escalating points, pushing yourself through the night. And what of the original Laylatul Qadr, when the Qur'an first came down to its Messenger?

If you believe the Qur'an is Uncreated, in a strict Athari sense, then the Messiah had to be betrayed by the Sanhedrin, all the other twists and turns of prophetic stories, the wars, the Arian civil war failing to the trinitarians, all that stuff was precluded just so God could drop the Qur'an on us and put a bow on a bunch of people pre-determined to go to Jannah. If you believe the Qur'an is Uncreated in the Ashari sense, then the principles of its communication were eternal but maybe the Occasionalism choosings of the people of Medina for instance could have molded particular verses as they translated to Arabic in context.

If you believe in a broader concept of free will, it befits that the Qur'an would have to be created, God's attributes might be uncreated (Mutazila theology vs. Jahmite theology) but they're expressed improvisationally. Therefore the Sanhedrin could have accepted the Messiah and a different timeline would have been experienced. Or the Arians could have won and God might have still send the Qur'an to the Ismaelites if that devolved into Binitarianism. In Twelver Shia theology, adapting the Mu'tazila ideas, the interruption of Ali's Imamate was due to avoidable bad decisions by hypocritical Muslims. In the Ismaeli concept, the Fatimid Caliphate fell to Salahudin after a period of weakening because it wasn't the job of the Imams to be rulers, but to be humbled and keep their guidance somewhat esoteric.

In light of the minoritarian viewpoints that embrace free will to explain history, it's interesting that there's a common sentiment among more shirk-focused Quranists that the majority of Muslims simply won't give up their shirky practices until Judgment Day. In the subreddit they calculated that applying strict definitions of shirk, 0.01% of humanity would be saved, which seems out of step with the Qur'an's statement that throngs will enter Jannah and throngs will enter Jahannam, but definitely in step with what Shaytan is quoted as saying. In this fashion the Ibadis-esque version of Quran Only ends up believing in a super-minority salvation, as the Ibadis did, but with a higher degree of free will, as the Ibadis did not. It's one thing for Ibadis to think that God's standards for avoiding fisq, which they assert is kufr, can only be attained by an elect few practically determined for that, and it's another to think one out of a thousand people will be saved just because people love to choose idolatry so much.

In contrast there's a professor, Dr. Ramon Harvey of Cambridge University, who specializes in the Maturidi aqeedah with a mix of Husserl's philosophy to spice things up.

Husserl rejects historicism as a way of understanding history and predicting the future in favor of an idealistic flattening of history against universal realities. Husserl's philosophical understanding of "things-in-themselves" following Kant is somewhat analogous to the Maturidi concept of divine attributes and the critique of historicism is resonant with Maturidi soft-determinism, which is similar to Ashari Occasionalism but without the adherence to the graph of decision nodes as a dominant metaphor and associated rejection of any efficient causation.

Husserl was a Lutheran and that church similar has a soft-determinism that rejects Calvinist hard determinism based on the concept of divine grace being freely given to everyone who wants is, so one can see how Husserl and Maturidi theology are a good pairing. It's also interesting how the critiques of historicism from Husserl and later Karl Popper reflect on the Quranist and other Islamic reform critiques of the hadith corpus, this is a bigger topic but I'd venture to say in passing that the Hanafi desire to taqlid with the Shafi and Hanbali larger hadith corpus as a basis of fiqh represents some tension between this Maturidi/Husserl analogy and the critiques of historical sciences as being unbiased. Also, if you believe in a divinely deterministic world, why adopt a probabilistic grading system of hadith as a basis for divine law? Instead of leaving the question dangly unfairly as a rhetorical attack on hadith-based fiqh, I'll refer you to Tim Winter's recent talk: "Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche from an Islamic viewpoint" which makes a sincere effort to answer. I'm glossing over these concepts without deep diving all these authors and these two paragraphs alone could be expanded into a whole book.

Side note: Pairing an aqeedah with a latter-day philosopher is an interesting approach. If I had to assign an early-mideival aqeedah school and just one philosopher as a companion to the Quran Only usool, I might choose to revise the Mu'tazali theology with Wittgenstein to put a brake on the limits of certainty from tafsir, or pair that theology with Deluze to draw a rhizomatic web in Quranic tafsir (M. Muhammad Knight has a book about this called Sufi Deleuze: Secretions of Islamic Atheism, which, not gonna lie, does sound vaguely blasphemous, and also William S. Burroughs vs. The Qur'an). Another good pairing with Mu'tazali theology might be John Locke or Rousseau to tease out where Mu'tazali theology overlaps with humanist ideas of justice vs. divine command, and in contrast to Thomism which is post-Aristotelean and probably closer to classical Mu'tazali theology. Another book, insha'Allah, if it is in my Qadr.

In game design theory there's an idea of formal and material constraints, the formal have to do with telos, the goal, the win conditions, and the material have to do with implements to achieve that. So you could have a very difficult scenario with a lot of resources or a very easy scenario with sparse resources such that it's left an elegant puzzle. This may analogize well to the way Islam answers theodicy, the problem of evil in creation, by saying that life is a test and everyone is tested by both pleasurable and difficult circumstances. To whom much is given, much is expected. Whereas if you're barely surviving as a war refugee, just keeping the faith and doing prayers with tayammum (e.g. sand or dust purification) is admirable in those circumstances.

In conclusion we can draw the Qur'an movement along at least two poles based on their apprehension of Qadr and shirk, which are interconnected. Both tend to have a view of free will at least as charged up as Ashari Occasionalism, and there's more nuanced free will philosophy in the movement based on reading of Qur'an and systems thinking drawn from modern life. Many of the people doing tafsir in the movement have an engineering or programming background to replace classical tafsir usool with systematic logic, syntax and semantics.

Nonetheless, like the Khwarij who killed Ali (ra) it's possible to read the Qur'an as constraining salvation to only an elite few, to take Shaytan at his word, with or without belief in much free will. The idea that shirk is everywhere and totally nullifying, thus only ~0.01% of humanity is saved, is enough to drive someone to the Quran-centric positions where Mutazilite theology tends to emerge with a justice thematic and more emphasis on nuance in choice and mercy in conditions. For Allah does not charge a soul with what is beyond its capacity.

What harams are Quranists unwary of that hadiths cover?

Coming back to the couch cushions hadith, what exactly is wrong with not following all the hadiths? If we can adopt a non-sectarian standard of "Muslim" where different interpretations of Qur'an are not treated as rejection, we might include Qur'an Only Muslims in the Din as a mainstream category but assume they are liable to be fasiqeen for committing sins defined in hadith. What are some examples?

- Anal intercourse (a tafsir of a verse from Qur'an)
- Gold jewelry and silk clothes for men
- Menstruation prohibitions for women
- Hair extensions
- Tattoos
- Passing wind in the direction of the Qibla
- Praying specifically during sunrise or when the sun is at its zenith
- Sculptures and painting

- Musical instruments
- Skipping the Witr (odd-numbered rakat at the end of Isha or triplet of Rakats in Hanafi)
- Touching a non-Mahram
- Pet Dogs
- Playing Dice
- Playing Chess
- Eating with left hand
- Pants not rolled up in salah
- Shaving beard or doing a fade
- Resist a tyrant
- Celebrating festivals other than Eids
- Greeting Jews and Christians
- Any bid'ah (or maybe some are ok, depends on the madhab)
- Going more than 3 weeks without attending Jumaa prayer
- Refusing intercourse when a husband requests it
- A husband doing what his wife requests
- A woman traveling more than 24 hours without a mahram (international flights make this easier)
- Using an even number of toilet paper pieces
- Trading in gharar (what that means specifically depends on the qiyas of a madhab)
- Takfiring a Muslim is betting one's soul on the truth of that

There are probably many more than these, but these are some of the notable ones that get people conflicted. The ongoing potential for people on the internet to demand compliance from you bringing you new hadiths from the many thousands is often a source of stress for new Muslims and young Muslims who are learning more about the Din. This open-ended sense of submission to arbitrary things brought before the believer then motivates either a soft-core compromise which we might call progressive or reformist Islam, or a hardcore compromise where one seeks a firmer ground in a Quran-only usool.

What about an usool where one rejects a lot of hadiths based on their matn (content) in contrast to the Qur'an? An usool where Isnad (chains of narrations) is used to falsify hadith rather than prove them, and where the idea of throwing someone out because they drank alcohol or accepting a transmitter because they're in your sect is revised as fallacious and unscientific.

I'll note that I tried in good faith to apply the don't-listen-to-wife hadith in good faith and devised a system where my wife asks me *not* to help when she needs specific co-ordination and then if I help I'm going against what she says. My kid vomited a bunch of pasta all over himself and my wife said "would you *not* help me" and I refused to be ordered around and immediately got to helping.

Now if we truncate this based on the guidelines of e.g. the early Maliki school and going off of the Muwatta of Imam Malik as the authoritative hadith book, we arrive at a more narrow list:

- ~~— Anal intercourse~~
- Gold jewelry and silk clothes for men
- Menstruation prohibitions for women
- Hair extensions
- ~~— Tattoos~~
- Passing wind in the direction of the Qibla
- ~~— Praying specifically during sunrise or when the sun is at its zenith~~
- Sculptures and painting (except 2d, of non-animals, incomplete or deprecated context)
- ~~— Musical instruments~~
- ~~— Skipping the Witr (odd numbered rakat at the end of Isha or triplet of Rakats in Hanafi)~~
- Touching a non-Mahram
- Pet Dogs
- Playing Dice
- Playing Chess or games in general (in the Muwatta this is clearly Malik's opinion reading 10:32)
- Eating with left hand
- Pants not rolled up in salah
- ~~— Shaving beard or doing a fade~~
- ~~— Resist a tyrant (There's nothing about resisting unjust rulers)~~
- Celebrating festivals other than Eids
- ~~— Greeting Jews and Christians~~
- Going more than 3 weeks without attending Jumaa prayer (the 3 weeks hadith isn't in but congregational prayer is extremely strongly recommended)
- ~~— Refusing intercourse when a husband requests it~~
- ~~— A husband doing what his wife requests~~
- A woman traveling more than 24 hours without a mahram
- Using an even number of stones to wipe *if* you use stones
- Trading in gharar (examples more narrowly defined in the Muwatta)
- Takfiring a Muslim is betting one's soul on the truth of that

One prohibition that one can glean from the Muwatta that is healthy is violating married captive women:

31.6 Prohibition against intercourse with married slave-girls
7 Yahyā related from Mālik from Ibn Shihāb that 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir gave 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān a slave-girl, who had a husband, that he had purchased at Basra. 'Uthmān said, "I will not go near her until her husband has separated from her." Ibn 'Āmir compensated the husband and he separated from her.

Counterpoint, just because the prohibition on anal intercourse isn't in there doesn't mean that hadith isn't real or that its tafsir on the Qur'an saying to be intimate with wives in their hearth is not valid. There's a line where someone might be skeptical of hadith but some of the more sharply prohibitive ones still evoke caution. Conversely, as a logical exit from the Quranist "everything from tradition that's not explicitly in Qur'an is *shirk*" argument, it can't be shirk to simply refrain from anal intercourse, right? If it were somehow, that would be crazy.

The left-hand thing is a bit much, but it makes sense in the context of a time where utensils for food were not widely used nor when bathroom sanitation was as thorough as now. A lot of people are left-handed naturally, just not the majority. One may wonder if this is like the stones rule, where, if you're not using stones, and you're using forks, one is not eating *with* the hand, and even if one is eating with the left hand, the context has changed. This is an argument Muhammad From God made in a video about hadith generally, they're contextual to that time, even though he doesn't generally take this approach in reading Qur'an. The stones hadith is definitely contextual to its time, which others are is an exercise left to the reader.

The Muwatta isn't perfect and I don't believe that everything those people were practicing was totally correct, particularly when it comes to the treatment of slave women. Ibn Umar was himself particularly notorious for treating slaves in such ways, and the other bulk of the hadiths in the Muwatta are common-linked to Abu Huayra hence where much of the overlap comes in the above lists. However, the details-orientation to prayer, hajj, wudu, fasting and trade, the marriage fiqh, and much of the other details don't seem oppressive, and one can take an intermediate position between taqlid with all the hadiths ever deemed canonical by Sunni scholars, and rejecting all hadiths. Nouman Ali Khan for instance, identifies as "early Hanafi" and he hasn't been widely takfired like Mufti Abu Layth was. Speaking of inappropriate behavior, Ali Khan was semi-cancelled by progressive Muslims for flirting with women over instant message, but consider how this paragraph started.

The music prohibition that Salafis often cite: if it was widely circulated in the Sunnah as practiced by the Medinans that simply hearing music is sinful, I think it would have been in the Muwatta.

When I realized that it's not shirk to simply refrain from some of the hadith prohibitions, I began to exit the hardcore rejectionist frame of mind, and thus cultivated an ability to return to some kind of sane moderation from the early tradition while also judiciously analyzing progress ordained by God's will.

By contrast here is a list of Quranic Do's and Don'ts compiled by /TheQuranicMumin, a moderator of the r/Quraniyoon subReddit:

Do this:

Serve God (1:5)

Ask God for help (1:5)

Believe in Unseen (2:3)

Uphold the salāt (2:3)

Believe in the Qur'an and what preceded it (2:4)

Be certain of the Hereafter (2:4)

If in doubt, bring a Surah like it (2:23)

If there comes to you guidance from Him, follow it (2:38)

Render the zakāt (2:43)

Be in ruku' (2:43)

Use reason (2:44)

Seek help in patience and salāt (2:45)

Consider your meeting with the Lord (2:46)

Be in prudent fear of the judgment day (2:48)

Trust in God, the last day, and do good (2:62)

Be good to parents (2:83)

Be good to kin, fatherless or the poor (2:83)

Be in prudent fear (2:103)

Pardon and forbear (2:109)

Send good ahead (2:110)

Bring proof of claims (2:111)

Submit to God (2:112)

Do Good (2:82)

Trust in God and the last day (2:126)

Hold to the creed of Abraham (2:135)

Say that you trust in Him, what He has sent down (2:136)

Make no distinction between the prophets (2:136)

Immerse in Him (2:138)

Respond to those who say that Abraham (and descendants) were Christians/Jews with “know you better, or does God?” (2:140)

Direct your face to the inviolable place of worship wherever you are (2:144)

Remember Him (2:152)

Be grateful to Him (2:152)

Be patient (2:153)

Bear glad tidings to the patient (2:155)

Repent / Ask forgiveness (2:160)

Love Him (2:165)

Eat what is halāl or tayyeb (2:168)

Trust in Him, the last day, the angels, the Writ, the prophets (2:177)

Give wealth to relatives, the fatherless, the needy, and the wayfarer (2:177)

Manumit slaves (2:177)

Keep a covenant when you make it (2:177)

Qisās ‘prescribed’ (2:178)

Pay blood-money if no Qisās (2:178)

Will ‘prescribed’ (2:180)

Make right when you notice testator partiality (2:182)

Fasting in general ‘prescribed’ (2:183)

If sick or on journey, carry fasting forward (2:184)

Pay fidya if fast missed (2:184)

Fast in Ramadān (2:185)

Respond to Him (2:186)

Trust Him (2:186)

Lay with a spouse after fasting (2:187)

Seek what he prescribed (2:187)

Eat and drink until the white thread is clear from the dark, then fast till sunset (2:187)

Approach houses by doors (2:189)

Fight those who fight you (2:190)

Kill those who fight you (2:191)

Turn out those who turned you out (2:191)

Don't fight in the inviolable masjid until fought (2:191)

Fight until they desist, or until the end of fitnah (2:193)

Qisās in the sacred months (2:194)

Spend in His cause (2:195)

Do the hajj (2:196)

Do the offering of animals if not possible (2:196)

If sick, or hindrance of the head: redemption by fasting, charity, or penance (2:196)

If cannot attend, fast three days during it, the seven days upon return, save if family is permanently resident on site (2:196)

Take provision (2:197)

Remember Him at al-mash'ar al-harām (2:198)

Pour forth from where men have poured forth (2:199)

Remember Him like the remembrance of your father or stronger, after rites finished (2:200)

Ask Him to give you good in the World and Hereafter, and to protect you from the punishment (2:201)

Sell yourself for Him (2:207)

Enter into submission completely (2:208)

Fighting 'prescribed' (2:216)

Trust (2:218)

Emigrate (2:218)

Strive in His cause (2:218)

Hope for his mercy (2:218)

Spend the surplus (2:219)

Approach purified women in the correct manner (2:222)

Purify yourself (2:222)

Bear glad tidings to the mu'minūn (2:223)

Wait four months after forswearing women (2:226)

Divorced women wait themselves for three menstrual courses (2:228)

When divorcing, retain them or release them (2:231)

Remember His favor (2:231)

Children are suckled for two 'haūl' (2:233)

Father provides provision and clothing (2:233)

Widows must wait for 4 months and ten days (2:234)

When divorcing her and you haven't touched her nor appointed an obligation for her, make her a gift (2:236)

If they have an obligation appointed, then give half, unless forgoed (2:237)

Don't forget the bounty between you two (2:237)

Preserve the salawāt (2:238)

Stand up for God humbly obedient (2:238)

If in fear, waking or riding (2:239)

Widows are to receive one years maintenance with no expulsion (2:240)

Divorced women receive provision (2:241)

Fight in His cause (2:244)

Spend of what He provided (2:254)

Deny tāghūt (2:257)

Spend in His cause (2:261)

Give up usury (2:278)

Defer money return until ease upon borrower (2:280)

[Follow debt contract instructions] (2:282)

If on journey and no writer, then a pledge in hand (2:283)

Make no distinction between messengers (2:285)

Obey Him (2:285)

Be truthful (3:17)

Seek forgiveness at dawn (3:17)

Be obedient (3:17)

Bear witness that there is no God save He (3:18)

Ask those given the writ and the unschooled if they've submitted (3:20)

Obey Him and the Messenger (3:32)

If they turn away, bear witness that you are submitting (3:64)

Fulfill your covenant (3:76)

Make no distinction between the prophets (3:84)

Spend of what you love (3:92)

Make pilgrimage to the house (3:97)

Hold fast to Him (3:101)

Hold fast to the rope of God together (3:103)

Have a community that invites to God, enjoins what is fitting, and forbids perversity (3:104)

Compete in good deeds (3:114)

Place trust in Him (3:122)

Be in prudent fear of the fire (3:131)

Vie with each other for forgiveness (3:133)

Control wrath (3:134)

Travel in the Earth to see the final outcome of the deniers (3:137)

Seek His approval (3:162)

Respond to God after injury befalls (3:172)

Fear Him (3:175)

Remember Allah standing, sitting, on the sides; reflect on the creation (3:191)

Be steady (3:200)

Give the fatherless their property (4:2)

If there is an injustice of the fatherless, then perform polygamy (4:3)

Give women their dowries (4:4)

If they remit anything voluntarily, then consume it with satisfaction and pleasure (4:4)

Feed and clothe the incompetent (4:5)

Test the fatherless when they reach marriage, if they are sound then give their property with witnesses (4:6)

Men/Women have a designated share of what parents/relatives leave (4:7)

If the fatherless and needy are at the site of division, then give part of what is left (4:8)

[Inheritance laws] (4:12-13)

[*] (4:15-16)

If you can't marry free women, then from believing slave-maids, marry them with the leave of their people (4:25)

Slave-maids are due half the punishment of free women if they commit fāhisha (4:25)

Avoid enormities of what's forbidden (4:31)

For men and women is a share of what they earned (4:32)

Give shares to those whom your oaths have bound (4:33)

Men have responsibility over women (4:34)

Women are to be humbly obedient and keeping unseen what God keeps (4:34)

If you fear contempt from your women, then admonish them, and leave in beds apart, and [*] them – save that they obey you (4:34)

If a breach is feared, then an arbitrator from both sides are to be raised (4:35)

Good conduct towards relatives, the fatherless, the needy, the neighbor, the companion, the wayfarers, and MMA (4:36)

Spend of what Allah provides (4:39)

If you are ill, on a journey, have defecated, or had intercourse, and find not water, then perform tayammum (4:43)

Deliver trusts to owners and judge with justice (4:58)

Obey those in authority amongst you (4:59)

If you differ in a matter, refer to God and the Messenger (4:59)

Turn away from munāfiqūn, and admonish them (4:63)

Ask the messenger to ask forgiveness for you (4:64)

Take precaution and advance in groups/together (4:71)

Fight satan's allies (4:76)

Consider the Qur'an with care (4:82)

Interceding in a good cause (4:85)

When you are greeted, return it, or greet with something greater (4:86)

Take not that munāfiqūn as allies until they emigrate in His cause, if they turn back then kill them (4:89)

If they withdraw and offer peace, you have no path against them (4:90)

Accidental murder of a mu'min: Manumit a mu'min slave and give blood-money to family – save forgiveness (4:92)

Fast two months consecutively if not possible (4:92)

Verify/investigate when you go forth in His cause (4:94)

When you are amongst them then perform the salāt for them[follow procedure mentioned] (4:102)

When that salāt is concluded, remember Him standing, sitting, on the sides, and when at ease (4:103)

The salāt is required to be performed at set times for the mu'minūn (4:103)

Submit your face to Him, do good, follow the creed of Abraham (4:125)

Stand up for equity for the fatherless (4:127)

Be witnesses to God (4:135)

Bear tidings to the munāfiqūn (4:138)

Desist from tritheism (4:171)

[Kalalah inheritance] (4:176)

Fulfill contracts (5:1)

Assist one another to virtue (5:2)

Eat from what is caught by what you have trained of animals of prey as trainers (5:4)

When you rise for the prayer, wash the face, the hands, the arm, and the feet to the ankles (5:6)

If you are unclean, then purify yourself (5:6)

Lend to God a goodly loan (5:12)

Bury after death? (5:31)

If one wages war against God and His messenger, and work corruption in the land: Then kill them, or crucify [or put to death by stake] them, or their hands and feet be cut off, or they be banished (5:33)

Seek to Him the means of approach (5:35)

[Punishment for stealing] (5:38)

Let ahl al-injīl judge by what God sent (5:47)

Take Him, His messenger, and those who trusted as allies (5:56)

Be moderate (5:66)

Prevent one another from performing perversity (5:79)

Eat of what God has provided from what is lawful and good (5:88)

[Oath expiation] (5:89)

Avoid khamr, games of chance, altars, and divining arrows (5:90)

Bear responsibility for yourself (5:105)

[Testimony after death] (5:106)

Listen (5:108)

Travel in the Earth to see the final outcomes of the deniers (6:11)

Use reason (6:32)

Call to Him (6:41)

Humble yourself (6:43)

Turn in repentance after committing evil by ignorance (6:54)

Measure God with the measure due (6:91)

Preserve your salāt (6:92)

Leave those who fabricate, and what they fabricate (6:112)

Eat over which His name has been remembered (6:118)

Leave the outwardness and the inwardness of sin (6:120)

Work according to your power (6:135)

Render due on day of harvest (6:141)

Inform with knowledge when making claim (6:143)

Follow the straight path (6:153)

Dedicate your salāt, penance, your living, and your dying to Him (6:162)

Uphold countenances at every place of submission (7:29)

Call to Him sincere in doctrine (7:29)

Take your adornment at every place of submission (7:31)

Acknowledge Messengers when they come (7:35)

Call to Him humbly and in secret (7:55)

Be patient for the judgment (7:87)

Repent and believe after evil deeds (7:153)

Follow the unschooled prophet (7:157)

Forbid evil (7:165)

Use your [metaphoric] senses (7:179)

Call to Him by his names (7:180)

Call your partners and see if they respond (7:194)

Seek refuge in Him from the satan, if provoked (7:200)

Heed to the Qur'an and listen attentively (7:204)

Reserve spoils for God and His messenger (8:1)

Make right in what is between you (8:1)

Respond to Him and His messenger when He calls you to what gives you life (8:24)

Fight until no fitnah (8:39)

If they turn away know that He's your protector (8:40)

What you obtain of spoils, a fifth belongs to God, His messenger, relatives, fatherless, the poor, and wayfarer (8:41)

If you fear treachery, cast them back (8:58)

Prepare forces and calvary to terrify them (8:60)

If they incline to peace, then incline to it (8:61)

Consume what you took of spoils (8:69)

Strive with four property and lives (8:72)

Help those who seek help within the deen (8:72)

Bear tidings to those in kufr of a painful punishment (9:3)

Kill, seize, ambush, and restrain the mushrikīn once the inviolable months have passed (9:5)

Release them if they repent, and perform the prayer, and render the zakāt (9:5)

If a mushrik seeks protection, grant it, until he hears His words; then escort to his secure place (9:6)

Fight those who make not unlawful what is unlawful (9:29)

Fight until the jizya is payed (9:29)

Give the Rabbis and Monks tidings of a painful punishment (9:34)

Please Him (9:62)

Let them be (9:95)

Act (9:105)

Rejoice in the contracted bargain with Him (9:111)

Keep His limits (9:112)

Be with the truthful (9:119)

Fight the kufār close to you (9:123)

Be harsh with them (9:123)

Serve Him (10:3)

If they challenge the Qur'an, ask them to bring a Surah like it (10:38)

Declare yourself quit of them (10:41)

Consider that the punishment can come at any time (10:50)

Take a straight path (10:89)

Look at what is in the heavens and the Earth (10:101)

Humble yourself unto Him (11:23)

Be clement, compassionate, penitent (11:75)

Be right-minded (11:78)

Right ordering (11:88)

Watch (11:93)

Fear the punishment of the hereafter (11:103)

Uphold the prayer at both ends of the day, and at the night's approach (11:114)

Forbid corruption (11:116)

Use reason (12:2)

Pick imprisonment over sexual immorality (12:33)

Invite to Him with insight (12:108)

Respond to Him (13:18)

Join what's commanded to be joined (13:21)

Avert evil with good (13:22)

Find rest in remembrance (13:28)

Be patient wherein you are hindered (14:12)

Fear His station (14:14)

Speak a good word (14:24)

Leave them to enjoy themselves (15:3)

Give glory (15:98)

Warn that there is no God save Him (16:2)

Be virtuous (16:32)

Ask the people of the remembrance if you know not (16:43)

When you recite the Qur'an, seek refuge from the accursed satan (16:98)

Falsely declare things to be lawful/unlawful (16:116)

Repent, despite committing evil out of ignorance (16:119)

Invite with wisdom, comely admonition, and dispute with what is best (16:125)

Retaliate with the like of what wherewith you are harmed, save that you forgive (16:126)

Strive for the hereafter (17:19)

Good conduct to parents (17:23)

Speak to them a noble word (17:23)

Be gentle with them and make supplication for them (17:24)

Speak a gentle word to those who need charity, but you can't provide (17:28)

Weigh with the straight balance (17:35)

Recite the Qur'an (17:45)

Say that which is best (17:53)

Uphold the prayer at the merging of the sun until the dark of the night (17:78)

Recite at dawn (17:78)

Keep a vigil with some of the night (17:79)

Ask God to cause you to enter a true entrance and to leave at a true exit (17:80)

Declare that truth has come, and vanity is to pass (17:81)

Declare Him a sufficient witness (17:96)

Perform salāt at a medium volume (17:110)

Whoso wills, let them believe – and vice versa (18:29)

Be steadfast in His 'ibādah (19:65)

Eat and attend to your cattle (20:54)

Give glory before rising of the sun, before it's setting, some of the night, and at two ends of the day (20:130)

Extend your eyes towards what has been granted to others (20:131)

Call in hope and fear (21:90)

Be a righteous servant (21:105)

Feed the unfortunate poor (22:28)

Make an end of unkemptness (22:29)

Fulfill vows (22:29)

Walk around that ancient house (22:29)

Honor the sacred things (22:30)

Avoid false speech and abomination of idols (22:30)

Incline to Him (22:31)

Honour the tokens of God (22:32)

Sacrifice at ancient house (22:33)

Remember His name over camels when they are in lines (22:36)

When their flanks collapse, eat thereof and feed the reticent poor and the beggar (22:36)

Be in ruku', and sujood (22:77)

Be a mu'min (23:1)

Be humble in salāt (23:2)

Preserve chastity (23:5)

Preserve your salawāt (23:9)

Leave them in their flood of ignorance, for a time (23:54)

Have a heavy balance (23:102)

Lash the unchaste woman and the unchaste man each with 100 lashes, have no pity on them, and let it be witnessed by mu'minūn (24:2)

Lash those who accuse chaste women with insufficient witnesses with 80 lashes, and never accept them as a witness (24:4)

If you, as a visitor, are asked to leave, then leave (24:28)

If you are a man, lower your gaze (24:30)

As a woman, you should also lower the gaze, you must additionally not reveal adornment except what is apparent, and you should cover the bosom [except to listed people] (24:31)

Give in marriage the unmarried (24:32)

Abstain if you find not marriage (24:33)

Emancipate those who seek it, if there is good in them, and give them of your wealth (24:33)

Declare allegiance (24:51)

If you are part of one's right hand possessions, or one who has not reached puberty yet, then – ask permission before entering at the three times of their nakedness (24:58)

Greet with a greeting from God (24:61)

Rest at night (25:47)

Walk modestly (25:63)

Speak peace when addressed by ignorants (25:63)

Spend the night standing and in sujūd (25:64)

Seek a middle ground when spending, if you must (25:63)

Pass by vain speech with dignity (25:72)

Request to Him that your wives and progeny be made a comfort, and make you a good model (25:74)

Obey the command of the committers of excess (26:151)

Warn relatives (26:214)

Help people out (28:25)

Seek provision with Him (29:17)

Discover how He originated creation (29:20)

Reflect within yourself (30:8)

Provide to MMA (30:28)

Set yourself towards the right natural deen (30:30)

Desire His face (30:38)

Prepare for yourself (30:44)

Grateful to parents (31:14)

Be modest in walk (31:19)

Lower the voice (31:19)

Fall in sujūd when reminded of proofs (32:15)

Forsake your bed (32:16)

Call the adopted children by their fathers (33:5)

Take the messenger as a model

Stay within houses [prophet wives] (33:33)

Give glory morning and evening (33:42)

Give those whom you divorce before consummation provision (33:49)

[Historic conduct regarding prophet's house] (33:53)

Greet the prophet with a valuation (33:56)

Women draw down over themselves some garments, for recognition (33:59)

Stand up for God in twos and alone, then reflect (34:46)

Let the workers work (37:61)

Remember David, the repentant (38:17)

Be humbly obedient in the watches of the night (39:9)

Hope for His mercy (39:9)

Expand your breast to submission (39:22)

Experience a positive reaction to the Qur'an (39:23)

Come with the truth and live in accordance to it (39:33)

Follow the best of what is sent down (39:55)

Invite to your Lord (41:33)

Grow not weary in giving glory (41:38)

Take the Qur'an as a healing (41:44)

Defer disputes to His judgment (42:10)

Uphold the Deen (42:13)

Be in dread of the hour (42:18)

Love your kin (42:23)

Avoid enormities of sin and immorality (42:37)

Conduct affairs by mutual consultation (42:38)

Help yourself when insolence visits (42:39)

Remember His favor once settled on cattle (43:13)

Watch for the day of the obvious smoke (44:10)

Watch (44:59)

Forgive those who look not for His days (45:14)

Follow the sharī'a (45:18)

Keep to the path (46:13)

[Say what is mentioned upon reaching forty] (46:15)

Believe in what was sent down upon Muhammad (47:2)

Smite the necks of those in kufr when in battle (47:4)

Grace or ransom war captives (47:4)

Help Him (47:7)

Be obedient (47:21)

Consider the Qur'an with care (47:24)

Sue for peace when you have the upper hand (47:35)

Honor the messenger (48:9)

Be hard against those in kufr (48:29)

Lower voice in presence of messenger (49:3)

Verify the report of a perfidious one (49:6)

Make right between groups of mu'minūn (49:9)

Fight the oppressive group (49:9)

Make right between brothers (49:10)

Preserve modesty and duties (50:32)

Give ear with a conscious mind (50:37)

Glorify at the ends of the sujūd (50:40)

Listen for the day that the Caller will call from near (50:41)

Sleep little of the night (51:17)

Ask forgiveness before break of day (51:18)

Give glory when arising (52:48)

Give glory at the retreat of the stars (52:49)

Remember the ayah of the ark (54:15)

Remember the Qur'an, which is easy for remembrance (54:17)

Remember destruction of sects (54:51)

Fear His standing (55:46)

Aim to be of the sābiqūn (56:10)

Touch the Qur'an only when purified (56:79)

Aim to be of the muqarrabūn (56:88)

Fight before victories (57:10)

Lend to Him a goodly loan (57:11)

Compete for forgiveness (57:21)

Observe good/neutral innovations with due observation (57:27)

If you go back on what you have said, then free a slave before touching [other circumstances in next verse] (58:3)

When engaging in private conversation, don't allow it to be of a sinful kind (58:9)

Make room in the assemblies when instructed; arise when instructed (58:11)

[Charity before conversation with messenger historically] (58:12)

What the messenger gives you, take it [and opposite] (59:7)

Protect from avarice of the nafs (59:9)

Look to what you have sent ahead for the morrow (59:18)

Take Abraham and his companions as good models [see full verse] (60:4)

Examine the emigrated women, to determine their faith; if they are mu'mināt, send them not back (60:10)

Return the mahr to those whom have had wives flee to kuffār (60:11)

Fight in compacted ranks (61:4)

When the call for the Friday salāt is heard, hasten to it (62:9)

Disperse upon completion, seek His bounty (62:10)

Spend before death arrives (63:10)

Beware of enemies amongst wives and children (64:14)

Listen to the Qur'an (64:16)

Count waiting period after divorce (65:1)

Turn not divorcees out of house, unless they commit immorality (65:1)

Separation to be witnessed by two just men (65:2)

If no menstruation, count three months (65:4)

If pregnant, wait until end (65:4)

Lodge then where you are, according to means, don't press them (65:6)

Spend if they have a child, until delivered (65:6)

If they suckle, give them their reward; consult honourably (65:6)

If difficulties between you, let another suckle (65:6)

Let him with abundance spend out of it (65:7)

Fear your Lord while unseen (67:12)

Walk in the tracts (67:15)

Be patient with comely patience (70:5)

Be constant in your salāt (70:23)

Confirm the day of judgment (70:26)

Be in dread of the punishment (70:27)

Be upright in your witness (70:33)

Preserve your salāt (70:34)

Follow the broad ways of the Earth (71:20)

Recite the Qur'an distinctly (73:4)

Devote yourself completely to Him (73:8)

Recite what is made easy of the Qur'an (73:20)

Magnify Him (74:3)

Purify your garments (74:4)

Forsake defilement (74:5)

Give food out of love of Him to the prisoner (76:8)

Seek a way to paradise (76:18)

Remember His name morning and evening (76:25)

If you have a plan then plan against Him [challenge] (77:39)

Be lowly (77:48)

Take the day as a living (78:11)

Take your Lord as a journey's end (78:39)

Fear His station (79:40)

Let aspire those who aspire (83:26)

Let look at what you are created from (86:5)

Take heed (87:10)

Purify yourself (87:14)

Remember His name (87:15)

Look at the creation of the camel, sky, mountain, Earth (88:20)

Free a slave (90:13)

Feed in a day of starvation a fatherless relation, or a needy one in misery (90:16)

Counsel one another to compassion (90:17)

Increase the nafs in purity (91:9)

Confirm the best (92:6)

Recount His favor (93:11)

When unoccupied, make ready (94:7)

Turn your desire to Him (94:8)

Enjoin prudent fear (96:12)

Draw near (96:19)

Be pleased with Him (98:8)

Have a heavy balance (101:6)

Counsel each other to truth (103:3)

Sacrifice (108:2)

Declare that you serve not what those in kufr serve (109:2)

Declare the oneness of Him (112:1)

Seek refuge in Him from the evil of what He created, the darkness, the blowers on knots, and the envier (113:5)

Seek refuge from the evil of the retreating whisperer (114:4)

Don't do this:

Buy error at the price of guidance (2:16)

Make equals with God (2:22)

Deny before bringing a surah like it (2:24)

Break the agreement (2:27)

Work corruption in the land (2:27)

Deny the āyāt (2:39)

Conceal truth knowingly (2:42)

Enjoin virtue and forget yourselves (2:44)

Ask to see/interact with Him openly (2:55)

Change the saying (2:59)

Complain (2:61)

Kill prophets (2:61)

Exceed bounds / Transgress (2:61)

Transgress the Sabbath (2:65)

Ask unnecessary/excessive questions (2:71)

Assume (2:78)

Fabricate a kitāb, claiming it's from God (2:79)

Ascribe what you know not (2:80)

Allow offenses to encompass you (2:81)

Kill amongst you and turn out of homes (2:84)

Assist in sin (2:85)

Believe in part of the kitāb and reject the rest (2:85)

Buy this life over the hereafter (2:86)

Wax proud (2:87)

Claim that your heart is covered (2:88)

Deny what God has sent (2:90)

Ignore/Deny clear signs (2:92)

Commit shirk (2:96)

Be an enemy to Him, angels, messenger, or Gabriel and Michael (2:98)

Practice sihr (2:102)

Say "attend to us" (2:104)

Ask Muhammad the same way that Moses was asked (2:108)

Exchange security for kufr (2:108)

Attempt to bring people into kufr (2:109)

Claim who enters paradise (2:111)

Hinder places of worship (2:114)

Say that He has a son (2:116)

Follow vain desires (2:120)

Be in kufr (2:126)

Be averse to the creed of Abraham (2:130)

Die save you are submitting (2:132)

Conceal witness from Him (2:140)

Say that those martyred are dead (2:154)

Follow the footsteps of shaytān (2:168)

Commit evil (2:169)

Commit the immorality (2:169)

Follow/Trust forefathers blindly (2:170)

Eat carrion, blood, or flesh of al-khinzīr (2:173)

Eat what is dedicated to other than Him (2:173)

Buy punishment at the price of forgiveness (2:175)

Differ concerning the kitāb (2:176)

Transgress after qisās settlement (2:178)

Change the will (2:181)

Lie with women when remaining in masājīd (2:187)

Consume wealth in vanity (2:188)

Bribery (2:188)

Shave head until animal is at slaughter place (2:196)

Destroy yourself (2:195)

Have sex, do perfidy, or quarrel during hajj (2:197)

Ask God to give to you in the World (2:200)

Complete the hajj in less than two days (2:203)

Destroy tilth and progeny (2:205)

Have pride in sin (2:206)

Exchange favor of God for denial (2:211)

Fight in the sacred months (2:217)

Expel those of the inviolable masjid (2:217)

Consume khamr or engage in games of chance (2:219)

Marry mushrikīn until they are safe from calling to hell (2:221)

Approach women during menstruation (2:222)

Make God a cover for oaths (2:224)

Conceal pregnancy (2:228)

Take what you have given women unless they cannot uphold the limits (2:229)

Transgress the limits of God (2:229)

Remarriage not lawful till she marries someone else (2:230)

Retain women through harm (2:231)

Take ayāt in mockery (2:231)

Constrain not those whom you divorce from marrying spouses (2:232)

Allow a mother/father to be harmed by child (2:233)

Take an oath with those whom you intimated of women regarding proposal, save you speak a fitting word (2:235)

Decide upon knot of marriage until writ reaches its term (2:235)

Force others into the doctrine (2:256)

Hinder (2:262)

Commit immortality (2:268)

Consume usury (2:275)

Commit sin (2:276)

Conceal the witness (2:283)

Seek the interpretation of what is ambiguous, seeking fitnah (3:7)

Kill those who enjoin equity (3:21)

Say that the fire will touch for days numbered (3:24)

Take kāfirūn as allies (3:28)

Engage in scheming (3:54)

Dispute regarding what you have no knowledge in (3:66)

Clothe truth in vanity (3:71)

Seek outside the doctrine of God (3:83)

Deny after faith (3:86)

Obey a faction of those given the writ (3:100)

Be divided (3:103)

Take intimacy with other than your own (3:118)

Consume usury (3:130)

Faint/Grieve (3:139)

Assume entry to jannah (3:142)

Weaken/Yield (3:146)

Be like those in kufr, who believe that different circumstances would have saved their brothers (3:156)

Coercion (3:161)

Incur His wrath (3:162)

Say with your mouths what isn't in your heart (3:167)

Think that those killed in his cause are dead (3:169)

Fear not Satan's allies (3:175)

Buy denial at the price of faith (3:177)

Be miserly with what God gives of His bounty (3:180)

Say that God is poor (3:181)

Having pride and pretending (3:188)

Exchange your bad things for their [fatherless] good things (4:2)

Polygamy if you fear that the fatherless will not be justly treated (4:3)

Give the incompetent your wealth (4:5)

Consume the property of the fatherless wastefully/hastily (4:6)

Try repent last minute (4:18)

Inheriting from/Constraining women against their will – save that they commit fāhisha (4:19)

Take from the fortune that you gave your first wife for your new wife (4:20)

Marrying what your fathers married (4:22)

Marrying your mothers, daughters, sisters, p/m aunts, nieces, milk-mothers, milk-sisters, mothers-in-law, step-daughters under protection, daughters-in-law, being in wedlock with two biological sisters simultaneously (4:23)

Marrying married women – save MMA (4:24)

Take secret friends (4:25)

Kill those amongst you (4:29)

Consume wealth in vanity (4:29)

Wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others (4:32)

Being a conceited boaster (4:36)

Being miserly and enjoining miserliness (4:37)

Spend wealth for recognition (4:38)

Oppose the messenger (4:42)

Approaching the salāt when intoxicated or unclean – save passing by upon the path – until you wash (4:43)

Twist tongue and slander the Deen (4:46)

Beliefs in fictions and tāghūt (4:51)

Envy the bounty of others (4:54)

Referring legislation to tāghūt (4:60)

Staying behind from fighting (4:72)

Try hiding away (4:78)

Conspiring (4:81)

Leaking information regarding public safety (4:83)

Interceding in an evil cause (4:85)

Killing a mu'min on purpose (4:92)

If one greets with peace, don't declare them a non-mu'min (4:94)

Being sedentary (4:95)

Making excuses about being oppressed, to justify wronging their souls (4:97)

Faint in seeking the people (4:104)

Advocating for the treacherous (4:105)

Argue on behalf of those who deceive themselves (4:107)

Commit an offense upon an innocent (4:122)

Make a breach with the messenger after the guidance is clear (4:115)

Following desires, changing the creation (4:119)

Incline towards only one wife, leaving the other hanging (4:129)

Distort/Evade (4:135)

Wavering (4:137)

Sit with those who discourse vainly concerning the proofs of God until they move to another subject (4:140)

Seek to deceive God (4:142)

Performing the salāt to be seen (4:142)

Public mention of evil, save when wronged (4:148)

'Choosing' messengers (4:150)

Ask to see God (4:153)

Be tritheistic (4:171)

Hunt when forbidden (5:1)

Violate the tokens of God, or the inviolable month, or the offering, or the necklaces, or the visitors (5:2)

Commit injustice to those who turned you out of the inviolable place of worship (5:2)

Consume the strangled, the beaten, the fallen, the gored, that eaten by the beast of prey – save what is slaughtered, that sacrificed upon the alter (5:3)

Seek apportionment by divining arrows (5:3)

Deny the faith (5:5)

Claim that God is the Messiah, son of Mary (5:17)

Claim that you are His sons and beloved (5:18)

Kill another soul (5:30)

Fear mankind (5:44)

Take the Jews and Christians as allies (5:51)

Take those who take the dīn in mockery as allies (5:57)

Take the call to the salāt in mockery (5:58)

Claim that His hand is fettered (5:64)

Forbid the good things made lawful (5:87)

Kill game when forbidden (5:95)

[Expiation for killing] (5:95)

Ask about things that would distress you if made clear (5:101)

Follow forefathers (5:104)

Declare clear signs to be sorcery (5:110)

Take Jesus and Mary as gods (5:116)

Ask for angels (6:8)

Mock messengers (6:10)

Be among the mushrikīn (6:14)

Oppose Him (6:15)

Be a wrongdoer (6:21)

Declare the Qur'an to be legend (6:25)

Claim that there is only one life (6:29)

Denial of the meeting (6:31)

Of the ignorant (6:35)

Call to other than Him (6:40)

Take an intercessor besides Him (6:51)

Drive away those seeking His face (6:52)

Sit with those who discourse vainly concerning His proofs (6:68)

Take your deen as play and diversion (6:70)

Clothe the faith with injustice (6:82)

Deny the Writ, judgment, and prophethood (6:89)

Claim revelation (6:93)

Be deluded (6:95)

Make the jinn partners of God (6:100)

Revile those whom are called besides Him (6:108)

Seek other than Him as a judge (6:114)

Be of the doubtful (6:114)

Obey most on Earth (6:116)

Lead astray by vain desires without knowledge (6:119)

Eat not that over which His name has not been remembered (6:121)

Assigning a share of His creation to partners (6:136)

Declaring things to be taboo (6:138)

Kill your children (6:140)

Make unlawful what He has provided you (6:140)

Commit excess (6:141)

Approach open or concealed immorality (6:151)

Follow other ways (6:153)

Wait for angels (6:158)

Divide the deen into sects (6:159)

Allow the satan to subject you to fitnah (7:27)

Commit excess when eating and drinking (7:31)

Make unlawful the adornment of God (7:32)

Sectarian zealotry (7:33)

Wax proud at proofs (7:36)

Be a mujrim (7:40)

Seek to make His path crooked (7:45)

Name names with no authority (7:71)

Scorn His command (7:77)

Approach men with lust, rather than women (7:80)

Lie in wait on the road, threatening and turning away from The Path (7:86)

Being blind to lessons (7:95)

Bribe using promise of power (7:114)

Bewitch people (7:116)

Be stubborn (7:132)

Be heedless of proofs (7:136)

Follow that path of the workers of corruption (7:142)

Take the wrong path, ignore the path of sound judgment (7:146)

Be impatient over His command (7:150)

Be a forger (7:152)

Scorn what you've been forbidden.(7:166)

Deviate concerning His names (7:180)

Public speech (7:205)

Dispute the truth after it's clear (8:6)

Retreat (8:15)

Turn away when you are near (8:20)

Pretend to hear (8:21)

Betray (8:27)

Turn away from the inviolable place of submission (8:34)

Make a mockery of the salāt (8:35)

Spend wealth on turning away from path of God (8:36)

Dispute together (8:46)

Be boastful (8:47)

Let those in kufr believe that they got away (8:59)

Bear tidings of a painful punishment to the mushrikīn with whom a covenant has been made, who haven't been deficient towards you in anything, nor assisted anyone against you (9:4)

Allow your beloved things to be dearer to you than Him and His messenger (9:24)

Allow the mushrikīn to approach the inviolable place of submission (9:28)

Take Rabbis and Monks as lords (9:31)

Wrong yourselves concerning the count of months (9:36)

Engage in their postponement (9:37)

Spend unwillingly (9:54)

Come to the prayer as an idler (9:54)

Allow their wealth and children to impress you (9:55)

Complain regarding charity distribution (9:58)

Hinder the prophet (9:61)

Enjoy perversity and forbid what is fitting (9:67)

Withhold His bounty and turn away (9:76)

Deride the believers who willingly give charity (9:79)

Remain behind due to weather (9:81)

Perform the funeral prayer for any one of them (9:84)

Staying behind due to affluence (9:86)

Make excuses (9:94)

Take what you spend as a loss, await reversals (9:98)

Take a place of submission in harm and denial (9:107)

Ask forgiveness for the mushrikīn (9:113)

Go forth all at once (9:122)

Look not for the meeting (10:7)

Neglect after being helped (10:12)

Desire for the Qur'an to be changed (10:15)

Rebel in the Earth after being delivered (10:23)

Deny before interpretation arrives to you (10:39)

Allow their speech to grieve you (10:65)

Repent too late (10:91)

Hide away (11:5)

Wish that a treasure or an angel had been sent upon him.(11:12)

Make the path crooked (11:19)

Dismiss on basis of mortality and lack of bounty (11:27)

Claim that your deity caused messenger to be touched with evil (11:54)

Follow that command of tyrants (11:59)

Heed due to their disappointment (11:62)

Decrease the measure and the balance (11:84)

Respect others for power more than you do Him (11:92)

Rely upon those who do wrong (11:113)

Reveal dreams that could cause enmity (12:5)

Falsify evidence (12:18)

Sexual assault (12:23)

Despair of the comfort of God (12:87)

Deny physical resurrection (13:5)

Seek to hasten the evil instead of the good (13:6)

Sever what's commanded to be joined (13:25)

Become bored when being presented with ayāt (14:9)

Threaten to expel warners (14:13)

Respond to Satan (14:22)

Speak a bad word (14:26)

Ignore similitudes (14:45)

Be of those who despair (15:55)

Refuse to provide rights and hospitality (15:70)

Build bunkers to feel secure from Him (15:82)

Make the Qur'an into parts (15:91)

Seek to hasten the command (16:1)

Be an open disputant (16:4)

Offer submission too late (16:28)

Appoint daughters for Him (16:57)

Refuse to give provision to those that their right hands possess (16:71)

Make conceptual comparisons for God (16:74)

Be a burden (16:76)

Take oaths as deception (16:92)

Take another disposer of affairs (17:2)

Being hasty (17:11)

Be perfidious (17:16)

Say "fie" to / Repell old parents (17:23)

Squander wastefully (17:26)

Be extreme on both ends of charity (17:29)

Kill your children for fear of poverty (17:31)

Approach zina (17:32)

Commit excess in lawful killing (17:33)

Walk exultantly (17:37)

Be neither loud nor quiet in salāt (17:110)

Say that you will do something later without declaring that it's dependant upon God's will (18:23)

Show-off (18:34)

Declare something to be eternal (18:35)

Be contentious (18:54)

Try refuting the truth (18:56)

Do shirk in the 'ibadah of Him (18:110)

Follow lusts instead of the salāt (19:59)

Deny, then claim that you will receive wealth and children (19:77)

Neglect the remembrance (20:42)

Carry injustice (20:111)

Oppose His command (20:121)

Have a distracted heart (21:3)

Declare the Qur'an to make no sense (21:5)

Declare yourself to be a God (21:29)

Be devoted to statues (21:52)

Divide your affair amongst yourselves (21:93)

Serve upon an edge (22:11)

Be a treacherous ingrate (22:38)

Take what Satan casts as a fitnah for you (22:53)

Seek behind relations with wives or MMA (23:7)

Declare His promise to be far-fetched (23:36)

Be self-exalting (23:46)

Divide your command into writings (23:53)

Talk to no purpose into the night (23:67)

Have a light balance (23:103)

Marry other than one unchaste or a mushrik, if you are unchaste (24:3)

Accuse chaste women without sufficient witnesses (24:4)

Love that there be spread of immorality (24:19)

Swear not to give (24:22)

Enter other's houses without having asked leave nor greeted those therein (24:27)

Strike feet to reveal adornment [for women] (24:31)

Compel your girls to whoredom, if they desire chastity (24:33)

Submit only when the truth is to your liking (24:49)

Swear that you'd do what the messenger commands (24:53)

Slip away surreptitiously (24:63)

Be greatly scornful (25:21)

Make friends with wrong people (25:28)

Abandon the Qur'an (25:30)

Take desires as a god (25:43)

Spend extravagantly and miserly (25:67)

Bear witness to falsehood (25:72)

Disbelieve on basis of abject followers (26:111)

Build bunkers to live forever (26:129)

Lay hold as tyrants (26:130)

Cheat with men (26:166)

Follow poets (26:224)

Hasten on the evil before the good (27:46)

Commit immorality with open eyes (27:54)

Approach men with lust instead of women (27:55)

Divide and oppress people (28:4)

Seek the ignorant (28:55)

Exult in riches (28:76)

Assume that you won't be tried (29:2)

Obey parents who compel you to shirk (29:8)

Take idols as love between you and the life of this world (29:25)

Cut off the way (29:29)

Commit perversity in your assemblies (29:29)

Believe in vanity (29:52)

Change His creation (30:30)

Become sects, divide your deen (30:32)

Allow the uncertain ones to sway you (30:60)

Purchase the diversion of narration to lead astray (31:6)

Walk haughtily (31:18)

Let this life delude you (31:33)

Declare you adopted children as your children (33:4)

Be soft in speech [prophet wives] (33:32)

Disobey the messenger (33:36)

Obey masters and great men leading you astray (33:67)

Be as those who hindered Moses (33:69)

Let the deluder delude you about God (35:5)

Hasten in forefather's footsteps (37:70)

Make between Him and the jinna a kinship (37:158)

Be in dissention (38:2)

Ask Him to hasten you lot (38:16)

Assume no purpose behind creation (38:27)

Discriminate (38:78)

Be in dread of one other than Him (39:36)

Take intercessors besides Him (39:43)

Hate Him (40:10)

Be a baseless skeptic (40:34)

Try reach the causes (40:36)

Be filled with haughtiness (40:75)

Render not the zakāt (41:7)

Prefer blindness over guidance (41:17)

Speak nonsense regarding the Qur'an (41:26)

Submit to the sun or moon etc (41:37)

Deviate from the proofs (41:40)

Dispute concerning God after answer has been made (42:16)

Be blind to the remembrance (43:36)

Laugh at proofs (43:47)

Anger Him (43:55)

Claim to determine matters (43:79)

Be a deceiver (45:7)

Create vanity (45:27)

Wax proud in the Earth without right (46:20)

Eat as that cattle eat (47:12)

Express distaste at the contents of a Surah (47:20)

Sever kinship (47:22)

Be averse to His approval (47:28)

Think an evil thought about Him (48:6)

Set in your heart bigoted disdain of ignorance (48:26)

Be forward before Him or messenger (49:1)

Raise voices above the voice of the prophet, or be loud to him (49:2)

Let a people deride another people (49:11)

Speak ill of yourselves (49:11)

Insult with nicknames (49:11)

Avoid assumption (49:12)

Spy (49:12)

Think of submission as a favor to Him (49:17)

Hinder good (50:25)

Play in vain discourse (52:12)

Dispute that which the messenger claimed to have seen (53:12)

Vaunt your own sense of purity (53:32)

Puff up in heedlessness (53:61)

Invalidate by number of adherents (54:24)

Claim immunity via writings (54:43)

Claim victory by support (54:44)

Deny blessings (55:13)

Attempt to penetrate the regions of the heavens and Earth (55:33)

Be among the companions of the left (56:41)

Persist in the Great Perjury (56:46)

Send the nafs back (56:87)

Subject yourself to fitnah (57:14)

Grieve over what eludes you (57:23)

Enjoin miserliness (57:24)

Claim that those who you assist among wives are their mothers (58:2)

Greet with the greeting that He didn't use (58:8)

Return to bad private conversation (58:8)

Take oaths as a cover (58:16)

Love those who oppose Him or His messenger (58:22)

Believe that strongholds will protect you from Him (59:2)

Be like those who forgot Him (59:19)

Say what you don't do (61:2)

Desire to extinguish His light with mouths (61:8)

Be as the example of a donkey bearing books (62:5)

Disband to trade or diversion (62:11)

Take everything personally (63:4)

Turn away from invitation of forgiveness (63:5)

Sanction the mu'minūn until they disband (63:7)

Make unlawful what has been made lawful, to get approval (66:1)

Make excuses if in kufr (66:7)

Obey the deniers (68:8)

Make no allowance for His will (68:18)

Be like Yunus when he called in anger (68:48)

Encourage not the feeding of the needy (69:34)

Take refuge in the jinn, increasing you in baseness (72:6)

Call not [in service] with Him anyone in the masājid (72:18)

Show favour seeking gain (74:6)

Perform not the salāt (74:43)

Desire that the scriptures be given unfolded (74:52)

Recite hastily (75:16)

Love this fleeting life (75:20)

Give not credence (75:31)

Think that you are left to no purpose (75:36)

Obey a sinner or ingrate (76:24)

Believe in a hadīth after it (77:50)

Expect not a reckoning (78:27)

Claim to be The Lord (79:24)

Attend to the self-sufficient instead of the one striving and in fear (80:10)

Accomplish not what has been commanded (80:23)

Be immoral (80:42)

Bury the infant girl alive (81:8)

Be niggardly of the unseen (81:24)

Deny the Judgment (82:9)

Be licentious (82:14)

Be an unfair trader (83:1)

Laugh that those who believed (83:29)

Do not enter sujūd when the Qur'an is recited (84:21)

Resent other with faith (85:8)

Subject mu'minūn to fitnah (85:10)

Honor not the fatherless (89:17)

Consume inheritance with greed (89:19)
Love wealth with much wealth (89:20)
Think no-one has power over you (90:5)
Think no-one has seen you (90:7)
Attempt not the steep path (90:11)
Bury the nafs (91:10)
Deny the best (92:9)
Give for a favour (92:19)
Oppress the fatherless (93:10)
Repel the petitioner (93:11)
Forbid a servant from performing salāt (96:10)
Have a light balance (101:8)
Compete for increase (102:1)
Be a slanderer, fault-finder (104:1)
Accumulate and count wealth (104:2)
Think that wealth makes you immortal (104:3)
Be heedless of your salāt (107:5)
Make show (107:6)
Refuse small things (107:7)
Hate the prophet (108:3)
Perform evil magic (113:4)
Be an envier (113:5)
Be a whisperer of evil (114:4)

And there you have it. A series of fairly clear guidelines on a broad variety of key issues extractable from the plain text in a colloquial Arabic with a modicum of translation sense for how

Arabic syntax and 7th century idiomatic phrases worked. You surely need a matrix of extra-Quranic understanding to interpret Qur'an, particularly the more thorny and mysterious parts, the historically contextually relevant parts, and so forth, but you don't need so much of a matrix to get moral guidance from the text.

If Quranists are sinning because of neglect of hadith-based rules, how many traditionalists are sinning for neglect of the Quran-based rules?

Saying that the Qur'an is unintelligible without hadith is like saying that the Bible is unintelligible without church tradition (rejected by a large portion of protestant Christians 500 years ago to mixed success) or without the historical critical method (rejected by most fundamentalist Christians and Jews).

This was what brought me to the Quranic community and why I stay in their orbit: they focus on tafsir, they try to do it as honestly as possible, and I needed to understand what parts of Islam were inferable solely from Qur'an vs. what comes solely from hadith and what comes from hadith as a lens on reading Qur'an.

It's also comforting to me that by simply pasting in this sampling of Quranic lessons, I ended up with 20% of the book's page length. It's a nice anchor vs. all the philosophical conceptual essay I've been spiraling on.

It's my hope that the learning process I went through and the decent place it took me is a microcosm for where the Ummah, including waves of new reverts and returning apostates, will end up in this second reformation.

Section 4

Community

What is attractive about Quranism to reverts?

Firstly, why do people have conversion experiences in general, and to Islam in particular? It's something I've paid attention to since my journey into Islam, and also through Christianity from secular humanism. There are diverse reasons, sometimes people research everything and settle on a religion logically, sometimes a prospective marriage does it, often people are burned out on bad lifestyle habits enabled by a prior worldview and find religion at a breaking point. In a minority of cases people are attracted to a particular sect within a religion or a new religion for specific theological or moral reasons.

Why do people leave religions? A conversion is technically leaving a religion for another, and we might accept the framing that atheism or secular agnosticism is itself a worldview, even if someone is ill-informed about the philosophical and theological implications of those positions. It seems like a top reason for people to leave religion is religious trauma, being directly

terrorized or abused by someone seemingly to represent the religion, often a parent, spouse or, less often, a religious guide. A second-place reason is indirect religious disenchantment through apparent hypocrisy of religious figures. For instance, when I first left Catholicism at age 18, I was displeased with George W Bush's representation of Christianity as a justifier of massive violence in the Iraq War, the hatred towards gay people as a misdirection from that political issue in an election year, and the hang-over of having gone to a Catholic highschool and having an extremely theological Catholic father quoting gJohn at everyone who would listen.

The obverse of those reasons is a soft-disenchantment with religion on intellectual grounds, such as the Dhul Qarnayn story in Surah Kahf or the Genesis creation narrative, having invested in a literal interpretation and then finding that incompatible with scientific evidence. If you have to chose between science and religion, one might just quit with the cognitive dissonance. The obverse to the conscientious objection example cited above with the Iraq War, is finding one's religion, shall we say, insufficiently "based", not conservative or sharply distinctive enough, which can be a motivator for defections from e.g. Catholicism to Islam or ecumenical protestant Christianity to Orthodox Christianity.

In Islam, many sources cite a drop-out rate for converts of ~75% over 3-5 years, though take those figures with a grain of salt, we lack strongly sampled survey data. One citation is the New Statesman article from 2013 "Confessions of an Ex-Muslim". There is a lot of quiet or overt apostasy between people raised in the religion in both the east and west. This may mirror what happened with western Christianity a couple of decades earlier, a wave of ardently political religiosity gave way to a backlash embodied by the 2000's New Atheist movement, followed by a cresting of that wave, a softening of anti-religious sentiment int the name of inclusivity, and finally a boomerang back to some kind of religiosity as people reach middle age and seek a frame for their life an death. This is how Islam happened to become associated with left-wing politics in the United States.

Since joining the Din I've been interested to observe who converts often take a lead in the religion, though this could be my sample bias, Hamza Yusuf, Tim Winter and the parents of Hasan Spiker come to mind. While these names do not represent the vanguard of reformism, if you pay close attention their positions are *relatively* reformist compared to the hardcore Salafism promoted by Saudi in the 1980s or compared to the brocore Salafism promoted on YouTube in recent years. In this book I've highlighted some folks I've encountered who came into the Din, usually interacting with Salafiya and then being repelled by its political hypocrisy or bad theology, find their way to Twelver Shiism or Ibadism or some other more obscure sect.

On the r/ProgressiveIslam sub I see a lot of young Muslims raised in the Din who are trying to get more serious, or new converts, and the discourse is level one type stuff: problems with sexuality, marriage fiqh, basic questions about the duration of hell in the Qur'an or how to think about Aisha (ra) or 4:34. I try to help a lot of people to feel more comfortable with praying and really connecting in Salah instead of being anxious about formal perfection as a beginner, or to avoid leaving due to harassment from (typically) Salafi Haram Police bros who generally make it unpleasant and frightening to be a Muslim on the internet. The r/Quraniyoon sub is then

level two, people seem to have reconciled their dissonance with the Haram Police by wanting to really learn the Qur'an and have knowledge to refute bullies. In that community, there's a huge range of difference of opinion, and one can feel safe that they can speak, think and speculate about meanings while being mostly respected. Even though a more normative set of readings tends to predominate, politeness (adab) and some sense of religious siblinghood is usually practiced.

Having a good community where one feels safe, accepted and most of all, free to question and learn, is a huge feature to religion. Getting married and into a family is taking that to another level, but just having supportive online acquaintances can be significant. What can often come with this education in tafsir key Quranic terms, is an ideology of the "ism" in Quranism, where reading the Qur'an without a secondary matrix of interpretation then requires having an "ism" to interpret it. This "ism" is usually colored by the philosophical and moral assumptions of modernity and usually involves a master conspiracy theory in which all of God's religious revelations are corrupted by human idolatry. This conspiracy theory is a compelling lens by which to understand religion's prior to Quranic Islam, from the Rabbinical Judaism to Christian Ecumenical Councils adopting trinitarianism to Sunni Islam's dogmas, in part because this history is very complex and in part because the simple "they are all upon shirk" theory is not false, perhaps just inaccurate.

A notable example of this is a prominent YouTuber whose name I won't mention for fear of the sin of backbiting, but he came into the Din, found Protestant style "Qur'an study" groups online or in person to replace the masjid experience, and became ardently Quran Only, to the point of making YouTube videos mass-takfiring mainstream Sunnis as mushrikeen. Then after attending masjids and going through the experience of seasoned Sunnis correcting prayer form and discussing the nuances of the Din, he flipped, not becoming a Hanafi-Maturidi or a Shafi-Ashari, but going all the way to Salafi-Atharism. More on that in a couple of chapters.

It cannot be overstated how much people's motivations in seeking a religious path in life dovetail with social dynamics of community, having support from peers, and perhaps finding a stable marital life. We all want to be loved and the love that other humans have for us can be a natural proxy for God's love. By the conception of riyas, or minor shirk, basing one's religion *entirely* on succoring the approval of other humans is a recipe for disappointment on the Last Day. Yet none of us are fully free of the need for approval, except through years of training, what Sufis call Jihad-al-Nafs unto Fan'a.

This may also explain why Ex-Muslims tend to make their apostasy a whole identity and latch onto the same talking points that Christian polemicists seize upon. They need to heal from their trauma by relating to other Ex-Muslims. Then, after a period of cleansing and commiseration, some of them may find a sense that God is real, and perhaps also, God is One, and this leads them back into the periphery of your progressive Islam or Quranist communities.

There are many intermediate examples of young Muslims getting burned out on dad quoting hadiths at them all the time, their emaan drops, then they find renewed trust in Allah

from reconstructing an understanding of Qur'an without the noise. Michael Muhammad Knight thinks the term "revert" is silly exceptionalist marketing because its etymology means, one who has apostated, but indeed the attraction of Qur'anic Islam for reverts transcends this because it covers both converts from outside Islam as well as Muslims struggling with faith.

Another great example here is an ex-Catholic who turned to Islam then left with a big fuss over the hadiths justifying violation of married captive women. One solution to that predicament other than leaving the Din out of moral objection, is to believe that the hadith was fabricated to justify the lusts of corrupt men, then examine the fine details of Arabic syntax and semantic in the verses that are supposedly linked to that hadith, and finding an alternative interpretation. Then the door opens: we cannot simply assume that Muslims in the year 640 were doing everything correctly and emulating them is a path to Jannah. Then: what else were they getting wrong?!

This can lead to an extreme, you might think that there's no viable interpretation of "layl" in regards to the end of fasting other than sheer nightfall, taking it even further than the Shia do, and assume that most Muslims are invalidating their fasts by ending them just a bit early. Then what? You might assume the widespread practice of sending salawat on one prophet is shirk, instead of a more moderate condemnation of the practice, you might assume that saying tashahhud with the "O Prophet!" formulation that is commonly said, is also shirk. Then you can only conclude that the hyper-majority of people of humanity will fail this test, and end up in an even more isolated saved-Sect mindset than Sunni Muslims who believe there's no salvation outside of the Jamaa, but at least they can huddle together in a majoritarian narrative in countries riddled with corruption, even calling it hijra. For an ardent Quranist, the only hijra is to Jannah.

Many reverts to Islam are coming from Christianity, it's a simple step from accepting Messiah to adding just one more prophet and book, and both Christians and Muslims constitute about a quarter of the world population. Some of these are then attracted to a Quran Only or Quran-centric position due to having already divorced themselves from an interpersonal assurance of salvation and love from a humanoid intercessor, why replace him with another?

"The Messenger has believed in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and the believers as well. All have believed in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers. "We make no division between any of His Messengers," and they have said: "We have listened, and obeyed. Our Lord, (we seek) Your pardon! And to You is the return." (2:285 - Pickethall translation.)

This verse is restated in Imran (3) and Maidah (5) as well as Nisa (4), in this formulation it sounds like taking "no division" often also translated as "no distinction" seriously makes one a believer, or Mu'min. In the Fred Donner "Muhammad and the Believers" thesis, a Mu'min is actually any monotheist who is friendly to the Quranic movement, in the parlance of most Muslims a Mu'min is a Muslim who is not merely in compliance but excelling in faith, it's a higher grade. This latter interpretation is more favorable because most Muslims definitely *do* make

distinctions between Messengers. They put the Seal of the Prophets as the greatest Messenger and are not shy about the distinction, they even assert that one is not truly a Muslim without making this distinction. Shiism is also based on the sense that the authoritative line of Imams comes from this one Messenger, although in Ismailism there's a sense that there are other Ahul Bayts in history or in the world today, descended from other Messengers.

Other phrasings of the "no distinction" verses have the quoted people mirroring that sentiment say "we are Muslims" e.g. in submission to Allah. A hardline Quranist position could be to read that and say, those who make distinction are not really Muslims, they're people of the book, they hold the Qur'an as scripture but don't truly submit to it, instead having a dusty idolatry that is in orbit of real monotheism. Ultimately it's the decision of each person flying through the crowd of this Quranic revival movement to decide which it is, are mainstead Muslims indeed Muslims just not top-tier believers? Or are they fallen from the "true" Islam in the way that Christians are implied to be?

If one accepts the more nuanced position that they're indeed Muslims, at least they're trying, but maybe not getting it totally right, then it opens the door to reading some hadiths, even if in the more limited lens of early fiqh, and observing some of the additional stuff. One can accept hadith without treating it as a package-deal the same way that Muslims can read the Bible without becoming Messiah-rejecting rabbinical Jews or trinitarian Christians, it involves effort and research.

A mental health/fitness guru for women proposed a revolutionary app: one that encourages you to keep up a routine of healthy activity without quantifying weight-loss. The teaching is that it's ok to be a bit chubby as long as you're eating healthy and not neglecting exercise. This abandonment of all-or-nothing thinking is highly relevant to religion, and this is what the Haram Police won't understand until they too burn out from fanatical Qur'an wa Bukhari protestantism and go through a proper crisis of faith. Even if you prosecute the all-or-nothing thinking effectively and get into the top 5th percentile of physical fitness, financial acumen, or memorizing Qur'an and hadith without understanding them, it can just lead to pride and an idolatry of formalism leading one further away from Allah and accumulating bad deeds from the alienation of your fellow humans, your fellow religionists.

There's a hadith which I love (didn't expect me to say that right, *and* it's an Abu Huayra transmission!), where the Prophet Muhammad (saws) is said to have said something like:

"Verily, you are in a time in which whoever among you leaves a tenth of what he has been commanded will be ruined. Then there will come a time in which whoever among you practices a tenth of what he has been commanded will be saved."

The scholarly apologia for this hadith is that it's not literally true, you are still expected to keep the fard. By this logic, the fard is 10% of the Din. I'm not going to split hairs here trying to measure out everything recommended and demanded between the Qur'an and the

expanded-universe hadith collections to nitpick the quantities. However I suspect they are running interception on some deep wisdom.

The anti-eating-disorder fitness guru suggested that most fitness gurus do not advocate for healthy-but-chubby-is-ok psychology because they fear that people will just take that as a green light to binge eat. So if scholars said 10% is enough now, we're close to Qiyamah, it might encourage people to drink a little, to skip prayers, to indulge in faisha and so on. But not defaulting from "all" to "nothing" requires faith, in the etymological sense of "emaan", trusting in Allah. And religious leadership that doesn't assume the worst and dares to be honest involves faith in your fellow religionist.

There's a teaching in traditionalism that an Imam or scholar should lie to downplay their past sins and hold up a higher example for students. Yet truthfulness is a prime virtue in the Qur'an. Religious institutions that run a deficit of truth to spend on growth may find themselves hollowed out by bad faith.

Quranism is increasingly the alternative polarity to the Conversion->Orthodox Sunni->Salafi pipeline. Part of the objective in this book is to show where this alternative pipeline might lead. Conversion->Quranism->Quran-centric non-sectarianism.

Applying this reading of Qur'an as being very anti-sectarianism to the broader ecumenical theme perhaps overstated by Fred Donner, but sharply understated by Orthodox Sunnism, it's a major problem for converts to Islam having to worry about your family members. Another big attraction to reading the Qur'an fresh without scholarly blinders on is being able to take its plain words, promising Jannah "Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day" in 5:69, and then still worry about your family based on 5:70-5:75. Yet this fresh take on Islam, that's it's been horribly maligned by institutionalization, is also essential for getting Christian familiars into a softer position towards the Din, one where they may just qualify as a quietly modalist or subordinationist trinitarian or even become a Unitarian. Even persuading them to respect the core of Islam as being a legitimate revelation from the same monotheism, though they might think it's corrupted at the Quran-verse level, that the anti-trinity stuff is not informed on the monarchic nuance of Orthodoxy or post 1256 Council ruling from the Catholic Church, it can't hurt them on the Qiyamah to be more respectful of the Qur'an and its Messenger.

I remember when I was early in the conversion and my father came to visit for my son's Catholic Baptism, I scheduled it months prior to unexpectedly being guidance on this journey. I don't know if it'll be the last time I see my dad, who lives far away, or if we'll see each other in Paradise. But I was waxing exegetical about all things Islam and he was intrigued to learn. We were talking about family history and stumbled upon a polemical essay by a tradCath angry that our ancestor's brother enabled the trend of Americanism with his Free Mason buddies that began the historical transition from the hardcore, heretic burning church to the Pacha Mama-respecting ecumenical pussy cat that is the church today. I acknowledged a number of problems with traditional Islam as I was studying it but pointed out deeper realities behind the polemical talking points. I had taken to praying quietly in the bathroom in order to not blow my taqiyah cover.

We watched some Norm MacDonald clips from the last decade of his life, he was a fairly devout Catholic with some gambling sins, and took to consulting a Jewish scholar to gain deeper knowledge about the Torah and Tanakh, which may have subtly nudged him towards a more unitary understanding of Allah. Norm made a lewd joke on the Conan show and capped it with "Modern Medicine!" and we had a sincere laugh.

On his last day we sat outside and enjoyed the nature, his bad head baking red with the radiation of the sun. I obliged myself to cover his head improvisationally, this took the form of a quilted kitchen rag anchored with my wife's white scrunchy; I had inadvertently dressed my father like a Saudi from the Najd. The irony was not lost on us.

When my cat died, run over perhaps by local dirt bikers, and I buried him with my Buddhist wife and secular brother and sister-in-law, I thought about the exclusivist viewpoint and I felt so spiritually sick in that moment, like I might never be happy in Jannah even if I earned it. According to some scholars, I am not allowed to interpret Qur'an 5:69-54 in its plain wording, I must access Jannah through their interpretation or have all my deeds forfeit. Therefore the logical response to this Pascal's Texas Hedge is to leave the Din and maybe sin harder than I did as a secular humanist. They will never be happy with you until you embrace their Milla. But I am not afraid of their idols, I am only afraid of Allah, who I love and trust. And I have the path through Qur'an tafsir from first principles to thank for that, mash'Allah.

Can Quranism abet a Shaytanic One World Religion?

You've borne with me through all this philosophy, history, comparative religion epistemics and anecdotes, let's have a bit of fun and go somewhere interesting. A lot of counter-reformationists believe in an imminent end-times scenario involving a Dajjal or Anti-Christ who would institute a One World Religion as part of his diabolical strategy, and accuse reformers of being useful idiots at best or corrupt munafiqeen at worst in service to this agenda. But how would that actually work?

The conspiracy theory of a One World Religion foisted by corrupt elites has been around for a while. Protestant and Orthodox Christians have cited the whore of Babylon in revelation as being the Catholic Church, which they see as complicit in this thread. Barry Goldwater in a 1960s speech suggested there was an international conspiracy to up-end institutions along lines political, economic, social and ecclesiastical. When I hear that back in my 2000s internet conspiracy days, I didn't even know what ecclesiastical meant, it googled up as a broad synonym for religion, but now I have a better idea of variety of Christian epistemics and ecclesiology is part of their appeal to divinely guided infallible tradition along the lines of ecumenical councils (similar to Sunni Ijma) or papal authority (similar to Shia Imams). Quranism, like Salafism, is at root a protestant movement appealing to the primacy of scriptural interpretation over ecclesial consensus.

Goldwater's allusion to ecclesial corruption was probably a wink to his largely protestant audience of John Birch Society members who buy into a largely factual narrative of the Catholic Church's slow erosion from a rigidly exclusivist, imperial governing body, which protestants dislike, into a borderline-perennialist institution that follows natural theology to its logical conclusion of universal theism, which is practically where it is today with Pope Francis paying respects to Pacha Mama. Apologists like Michael Lofton will cite that as a show of respect for a cultural symbol that is not inherently religious, and therefore not an endorsement of idolatry. But this delineation of secular and religious is itself an idea slowly introduced into the west by the Free Masons, something that Muslims are so reactionary against that a book like Sherman Jackson's "The Islamic Secular" inspires tepid debate from social media reactionaries who haven't read it but hate the title.

Let's summarize the history of the Catholic Church viz Freemasonry over the last 1000 years. The Roman Church had schism with Constantinople in 1054 and 40 years later initiated the 1st Crusade in response to Muslim piracy and other aggression that is largely not endorsed by the Qur'an. Over the subsequent two centuries the crusades had the effect of exacerbating tensions with Constantinople, mass abuse of Byzantine citizenry in Antioch in the 1st crusade, the sacking of Constantinople in the 4th crusade, but also of introducing the possibility of syncretic influence to the west by Knights Templar secret societies who adopted Islamic ideas in some form and the secret-master-hierarchy structure of Sufi Tariqas which were beginning to institutionalize in the same period.

It's worth speculating on Sufi influence on the Cathar movement that prompted the subsequent Albigensian Crusade, which killed between 200k and 1M people in Southern France under the papacy of Innocent III (should have called him Pope Guilty).

The mass burnings of 50 knights templar in one day in 1310 in Paris was less than two months shy of the burning of Marguerite de Pourier who wrote a book identifying God in unitarian mystical terms as "Love", in some way influenced by Sufi ideas from Andalusia, which then influenced Meister Eckhart to suppose that beneath the trinity was a deeper groundswell of being that could be called the singular, one true God. Eckhart would be later tried as a heretic but died of old age before they could inflict death upon him, in 1329. In this period we can

surmise the church was still very much in control, and the tenor of its judicial violence is very similar to how Muslim rulers would execute Sufis, they just didn't use burning for fear of shirk.

Jaques de Molay was burned alive in 1314 and called down a curse on King Phillip II and Pope Clement that they both perish within one year, and indeed that occurred on the record, leaving a pious Muslim to speculate that such Qadr may have been God answering Jaques dying du'a. After bringing hawala-style money transmission and great wealth to Europe, the Templars were not so easily vanquished, moving to Scotland and Saxony, which is speculated to be the seeding ground for the early Free Masonic lodges. Skipping along several centuries to the 1700s, through the reformation, renaissance, 100 years war in continental Europe and a century of sectarian turmoil in England, we have the Catholic Church still somewhat in control publishing encyclicals against Free Mason affiliation. Nonetheless, the United States of America was founded in 1776 by a bunch of Masons, one of whom was a fan of the Qur'an's civic rules. Shortly thereafter my great-grandmother's great-great-grandfather's brother went to bat for an "Americanism" take on the Catholic religion as bishop of Baltimore.

Fast forward about another century to 1884 and we get an anti-Masonry encyclical from Pope Leo XIII, some excerpts:

"2. This twofold kingdom St. Augustine keenly discerned"...", the partisans of evil seems to be combining together, and to be struggling with united vehemence, led on or assisted by that strongly organized and widespread association called the Freemasons. "

"5. The first warning of the danger was given by Clement XII in the year 1738,(3) and his constitution was confirmed and renewed by Benedict XIV(4) Pius VII followed the same path;(5) and Leo XII, by his apostolic constitution, *Quo Graviora*,(6) put together the acts and decrees of former Pontiffs on this subject, and ratified and confirmed them forever. In the same sense spoke Pius VIII,(7) Gregory XVI,(8) and, many times over, Pius IX.(9)"

"9..."They speak of their zeal for a more cultured refinement, and of their love for the poor; and they declare their one wish to be the amelioration of the condition of the masses, and to share with the largest possible number all the benefits of civil life." ... "if any are judged to have betrayed the doings of the sect or to have resisted commands given, punishment is inflicted on them not infrequently, and with so much audacity and dexterity that the assassin very often escapes the detection and penalty of his crime." (sound familiar?)

"12. Now, the fundamental doctrine of the naturalists, which they sufficiently make known by their very name, is that human nature and human reason ought in all things to be mistress and guide. Laying this down, they care little for duties to God, or pervert them by erroneous and vague opinions. For they deny that anything has been taught by God; they allow no dogma of religion or truth which cannot be understood by the human intelligence, nor any teacher who ought to be believed by reason of his authority." (This sounds a lot like the Hanbali attack on Mutazalite ideas or the modern recapitulation of Salafi attacks on the compromised Ashari theology, that kalam is bid'ah)

“13”...”By a long and persevering labor, they endeavor to bring about this result - namely, that the teaching office and authority of the Church may become of no account in the civil State; and for this same reason they declare to the people and contend that Church and State ought to be altogether disunited.“

“20. Moreover, human nature was stained by original sin, and is therefore more disposed to vice than to virtue. For a virtuous life it is absolutely necessary to restrain the disorderly movements of the soul, and to make the passions obedient to reason. In this conflict human things must very often be despised, and the greatest labors and hardships must be undergone, in order that reason may always hold its sway. But the naturalists and Freemasons, having no faith in those things which we have learned by the revelation of God, deny that our first parents sinned, and consequently think that free will is not at all weakened and inclined to evil.” (They’re Pelagians!)

“21. What refers to domestic life in the teaching of the naturalists is almost all contained in the following declarations: that marriage belongs to the genus of commercial contracts, which can rightly be revoked by the will of those who made them, and that the civil rulers of the State have power over the matrimonial bond; that in the education of youth nothing is to be taught in the matter of religion as of certain and fixed opinion; and each one must be left at liberty to follow, when he comes of age, whatever he may prefer.” (This sounds somewhat like the Quranic concept of marriage and No Compulsion in Religion but taken to a secular extreme).

“22. Then come their doctrines of politics, in which the naturalists lay down that all men have the same right, and are in every respect of equal and like condition; that each one is naturally free; that no one has the right to command another; that it is an act of violence to require men to obey any authority other than that which is obtained from themselves. According to this, therefore, all things belong to the free people; power is held by the command or permission of the people, so that, when the popular will changes, rulers may lawfully be deposed” (This seems totally normalized in the west by now, and one could stretch the “govern by mutual consent” line in Surah A’shura to this if one were so inclined)

Tyler Durden: That's right; *one* can make all kinds of explosives using simple household items... Narrator: Really? *Tyler Durden:* *If one were so inclined.*

- Fight Club

“30 .Whatever the future may be, in this grave and widespread evil it is Our duty, venerable brethren, to endeavor to find a remedy. “

Ok so let’s see how that went.

[“The death of Pope **John Paul I** on September 28 1978 stunned the world, coming so soon after the 15-year reign of Pope Paul VI. Raimondi is the nephew of notorious godfather Lucky Luciano. He claims he was recruited for the murder at the age of 28 by his cardinal cousin, Paul Marcinkus, who ran the Vatican bank”]

Herald Sun, Oct. 20, 2019

[‘Had John Paul I “kept his mouth shut,” Raimondi writes, “he could have had a nice long reign.”

The body was barely cold when a new plan was conceived to kill his successor, John Paul II, who appeared poised to take action against the scammers as well, Raimondi writes. So the made mob man was summoned back to the Vatican and told to prepare for a second murder.

“ ‘This guy’s gotta go, too,’ they said. ‘No way,’ I said. ‘What are you going to do? Just keep killing popes?’ ”

Ultimately, John Paul II decided not to act because he knew he too would die, Raimondi told The Post, then went on to become the second-longest-serving pontiff in modern history, until his death at 84 in 2005.

His change of heart also prompted a booze-fueled celebration among crooked cardinals and mobsters in Vatican City, according to Raimondi.

“We stayed and partied for a week with cardinals wearing civilian clothes, and lots of girls,” he writes. “If I had to live the rest of my life in Vatican City, it would have been OK with me. It was some setup. My cousins all drove Cadillacs. I am in the wrong business, I thought. I should have become a cardinal.”]

- New York Post, Oct. 20, 2019

Keep in mind this is all after Vatican II:

“The 3 chapters on ecumenism (a merger of 3 previous documents) took a very positive view of ecumenism, and said things some bishops had never heard before:

- Catholics must be involved in ecumenical endeavors (a reversal of the pre-conciliar ban on involvement)
- Catholics should acknowledge that faults by Catholics in the past often contributed to separation
- The document contained no call for non-Catholics to "return" to the Catholic Church
- Chapter 3 listed many admirable features of non-Catholic Christians.”

- Wikipedia article on Vatican II, **Schema on Ecumenism**

There was also a Schema on non-Christian religions, initially a rejection of anti-Semitism and the idea that Jews were cursed for the crucifixion, but expanded to include Muslims so they wouldn't seem Zionist by exclusion. The liturgy was revised and localized into the native languages of each parish, and this was the somewhat relativized form of Catholicism I grew up in.

The "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" was signed in Abu Dhabi on February 4, 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.

If you listen to Jay Dyer's philosophical unpacking of Thomism, it might seem like this is all a logical conclusion of neo-Platonist philosophical influence and natural theology. If you define God within divine simplicity, the impact of revelation on God's attributes and character can be left secondary, and one can get a preference-less God of the Hindus and Hippies, a mostly Neutral God of the Philosophers and Free Masons, the isolated Tawhid of Ismaeli/Ackbarian theology or the modal collapse-prone concept of the Catholic Trinity. The Orthodox Christian theology is by contrast like the Athari theology of the Salafists, they take from scripture, affirm apparent meanings and adopt a model of complex theism that is highly specific and exclusive.

If you listen to Orthodox Christians on YouTube, such as Dyer's contemporary Jeem, you may glean some tidbits such as the Orthodox church doesn't believe in universal morality, they believe in tribal morality per the Torah extended to the revised covenant of the visible Church (their Church) and affirm the genocide of women and children in those contexts, as well as the exiling of heretics (instead of execution per the Ikrima hadith's influence on Sunni and Twelver Shia Islam). Jeem also theorizes that civility is a concept invented by evil-doers to grease the wheels of commerce in the 1700s, even though there's clearly support for the idea being polite and speaking well in the Qur'an.

One interesting side note is that this practice in Constantinople of sending gnostics and other deemed heretics out to the Levant or Arabia seeded the environment in which the Qur'an was revealed and may explain some of the unorthodox takes on Christianity found therein.

The OrthoBros are good at philosophy and demonstrating why Sunni theology schools have weak footing to debate trinitarians, why Orthodoxy's complex theism is more robust than the Augustinian/Thomist takes on trinity, and highlight that the only hope for Islam to roundly win a debate about trinitarian dogma is in either Neo-Platonic theology or Neo-Mu'tazilite theology, which we'll touch on in the next chapter.

In this environment of liberalized Christianity where salvation maybe kinda might be encountered outside the formal church, it's not surprising that I ended up not taking the religion seriously, rejecting the violent hypocrisy of Evangelical dumbed-down neo-conservative versions of it, and being attracted to hippie ideologies and spiritualities downstream of Neo-Platonism. In college, early in my apostasy, I studied postmodernism as a spoiled child of upper middle class

boomers, as one does, and rejected Platonism broadly in favor of Epicurean/Nietzschean philosophy of flux. It's like, quantum man.

The Free Masons: "We got 'em!"

It's also no wonder that later in life, seeking structure and divine reality after re-reading the bible naturalistically in a unitarian lens (e.g. reading Mark 10:18 and Exodus 20:3 without John 1 in my mind) I would become attracted to Islam via the door of Sufi mysticism. Part of what attracted me to Christianity again after 18 years was the idea that Christian ethics influenced the improvement of society, and going deeper past Christian Exceptionalism, I arrived at a narrative where Islam influenced the missing pieces of the Christian ethic, evidenced by the brutality of Church rule and the narrative of progress told above.

That doesn't mean Free Masonry is Godly and without blight! Clearly there's a lot of pride and greed overriding the piety of Qur'an in the prevailing ethic of modernity.

The Qur'an calls for a natural theology via the idea of identifying One God as one's Lord by nature, it's in the fitrah, and also calls for multiple laws, faith communities and save-able groups, despite efforts to mis-translate and abrogate it to curtail that into an exclusive Sectarian dominance. Quranists also tend to be skeptical of hadiths about Dajjal and also often buy-in to the Sunni orthodoxy that the bible is too corrupt to be worth studying, hence most haven't seriously read the Book of Daniel which makes the Dajjal hadith somewhat redundant. Eliminating apocalyptic signs from religion in favor of a far-off eschatology is similar to the post-millennial doctrine of Calvinism, where we're just building up society incrementally in God's name for the foreseeable future. However, Quranists are too focused on theology, piety and rigorous adherence to Quranic Sharia to be as pliable for a One World Religion as more strongly perennial spiritual-but-not-religious tropes.

It's a bit funny but worth noting that in the popular protestant apocalyptic book series, Left Behind, the One World Religion is basically hippie relativism plus idolatry with a sprinkling of sexuality, and the Muslims are given an honorable mention as resisting it.

I don't think of myself as evil, but let's say I was, and had a job at a think tank funded by the elite to try and cook up a strategy for fomenting a One World Religion. Time to microdose LSD, grow out my male-pattern baldness top-head hairs into something I can scrunch into a frail man-bun, put on a Steve Jobs sweater and head to the office. How would one try and roll-up major populations into something that the majority of the world population could actually get behind?

People choose a particular religion because they believe it to be very specifically correct, thus getting them to glom into a supra-religion is tough. But many people don't really choose their religion, they just stay in it via inertia, pressured by family, society, and institutional support, if not legally enforced lack of religious freedom. However the control structures that underpin that soft majority have a highly vested interest in reinforcing the particular religious structure,

even if they themselves are hypocrites. On first analysis, this One World Religion thing seems really hard, I'm going to need to do more research if I want to keep mining these think tank paychecks.

Ok some religions have structures where there's a central authority. If those authorities can be persuaded to join the plan, we might be able to plug them in together.

Other religions have a perennial concept built into them. Islam has this at the level of prior prophetic revelations. Bahai and Druze take it further, including Plato and Buddha. Hinduism tends to see there being many paths to truth. What are the Bahai coming off of? Ismaeli Shiism, there we have a perennial idea of Hinduism being a corruption of Adamic (saws) revelation plus there's a central authority.

By the way I hope this thought experiment isn't offensive to Ismaelis, I don't think the Aga Khan IV or his successor would be amenable to elite plans, but what if they were?

Next we need to get the Chinese on board. We need Xi Jinping to marry his daughter, who is quite fetching, to the next Imam, thereby unifying over 1.5B Chinese with the Ismaeli structure. Then we can get the Iranians to accept that the Madhi is born rather than de-occulted and roll in Twelver Shiism. Then we go to Narendra Modi in India and propose to quell all the Muslim-Hindu tension with the idea that Hindus are really people of the book, they just need to tighten up on the whole idolatry thing. Tighten up guys!

Next we're going to meet with the Jesuits. Get on the plane Xi's daughter! We're doing it, we're doing it. This One World Religion is *happening* people. The Jesuits were initially formed as a counter-reformation intelligentsia but took on a life of their own, installing an Argentine Montanero as Pope, if we didn't bring them to the table what would be the point of the Jesuits ever existing? At the meeting we will also include Frau Farbissina, the founder of the militant wing of the LPGA.

Can we make a deal folks? We can roll up 1.5B Chinese, at least 1B Indians, close to 200M Shia Muslims, and whoever doesn't trad-defect entirely from the 1B Catholics. That's 3.7B people, close to half the world's population, but it's not enough. We need to have a comprehensive marketing plan to get affluent Californians and hippie Latinos on board, and we need to get a massive marketing presence linked to job and investment opportunities in Africa. We will expect resistance from conservative protestant and orthodox Christians as well as conservative Sunnis, but we may be able to get a lot of liberal protestants and Sunnis on board as well, pushing us to 4-5B people on the big team.

Again, not picking on Ismailis, if anything their story is so cool that it's one of the only plausible skeleton keys by which a cabal might put together a deal like this.

A Quran Only or Quran-centric approach to Islam might be able to tell a story of reinforcing western civilization with pillars of progress via side-avenues, something I'll build on in

the next chapter, but I think passages in the Qur'an about not following the majority that Quranists like to focus on leads to not doing taqlid with a feel-good amalgamation of world religions. It's also worth noting in the prophetic hadith foretelling the coming of Quran Only Muslims, the sahih version says "soon", which may imply either a fabrication in the late first century hijra to edge one over the debates with the early Hanafi school, or taking it as a literal, authentic, and predictive prophecy, it was fulfilled by the early Hanafi fiqh doctrines; indeed taking that hadith at face may be part of the social pressure that led to Hanafi taqlid with later hadith collection.

Whatever is the correct lens to interpret Qur'an the only way one can truly argue that following the Qur'an is going to pave the way for a Dajjal religion is to assert, as Christian opponents sometimes do, that the Qur'an is of shaytanic inspiration. But that is not an opinion a Muslim can take without leaving the fold of the Din. The only way to take that position intra-Islam is to say that the tafsir is kafir-tafsir based on a lens of liberalism and contrary to Allah's intent. The previous section on Revised Usool may, inshAllah, provide a compelling picture that the truth is more complex than that argument could bear. Sola scriptura can surely go wrong but its tendency to fragment between interpretations, as evidence by the plentitudes of Christian protestant denominations, suggests that expansive perennialism is a more serious angle to realize an ecclesial conspiracy.

Can the Quranic Reformation Do Better Dawah?

Convincing people to change religions is hard, following a religion your whole life is hard, staying happily married is hard, doing what is right is hard, reconciling problematic issues in a religion with our sense of what is right is even harder. Often the most successful marketing campaigns for religions focus on just the first part and leave the remainder as an exercise to the buyer, caveat emptor. Evangelical Christianity in recent decades is like a mirror to the Salafi Dawah, they both simplify their host religions into a readily marketable form with peer pressure, promises of salvation and a quick initiatory ritual you can undertake on the street or over a

podcast. The problem is that conversion rates are not the only metric for success, if we look at product management there are other key metrics:

- churn rate; what % of conversions drop-out within a year or 5 years?
- referral rate; what is the average number of new conversions that a convert will successful bring about?
- Average revenue per user; in religion this can be translated as average hasanat per user, how much good are people actually doing due to their conversion? Are they helping others? Helping themselves? Better partners?
- Engagement rate; how dedicated are the new converts? Are they praying regularly? Attending group events? Learning more?

The recent history of the internet is littered with videogames, diet fads, pop psychology theories and indeed old-time religious revivals of varying stripes that excelled on conversion and viral referrals but burned themselves out with low engagement, churn and toxic behavioral patterns. The Salafi stereotype of this is the street dawah guy in the UK who hustles someone into saying shehada and then leaves him saying “right, be sure to look up some prayer videos on YooTuube and do it five times a day, that’s like, really impo’tant mate!”

Nonetheless the Salafists have become extremely successful at dawah, not just hustling people into Islam but attracting new converts into deepening their Islam along their reconstituted “way of the Salaf”. This narrative of simply living as people did in a specific, special time period is much easier to learn than the history of the madhabs, the nuances of Shiism and Ibadism, usool al fiqh and all the rest. It’s a one-size-fits-all approach that presents itself as pure and a lot of new Muslims go for it. It’s easy to say that Salafis only constitute a minority in the Adl Sunnah, but this understates how they have a super-majority of the mindshare in terms of Islam’s representation to non-Muslims. It may also be that social media promotes them takfiring Shia and criticizing Salafi-Deobandi marriages as not being pure enough.

The Deobandi seem like Salafists and they focus on dawah, forming crews and “going out” to run Jehovah’s Witness style door-to-door dawah campaigns, Deobandis hate Barelvis for believing in a Neo-Platonic Prophetic Logos and consider it shirk, yet to Salafis they are too soft. Deobandis analogize more to Evangelical Christians while Salafis are like a non-existent militant wing of 7th Day Adventism or something like that.

Before strategizing our Dawah strategy let’s look at some of the majorly effective dawah waves that spread Islam previously:

- 1) Jizya Dawah - get conquered, pay jizya, convert for the tax break, this was how proto-Sunnism was widely spread in the early caliphates and later Sunni empires, the famed “conversion by sword” which is a misnomer.
- 2) Sufi Dawah - mystical people who are also somewhat worldly move along the Silk Road and other trade corridors and interact with people of other religions, showing their good

example and discussing concepts in a monotheistic frame. This helped spread Islam to Kashmir/Punjab and other northern India regions before the Mughals.

- 3) Ismaeli Dawah - like the Sufi dawah but with the structure of an Imamate, eventually coalescing into the Fatimid Caliphate, Ibrahim and Moses Maimonides seeking refuge from the Spanish Reconquista. In Ismailism "the dawah" is a wider concept where the invitation is not just to convert but the overall structure of the community, leadership and so on, covering the additional metrics of retention, engagement, optimizing for good deeds and so on. Admittedly this peaked after the peak of the Fatimid rule and subsequent centuries of Alamut assassins and survival-taqiyah.

So, we've seen the brute force model, the exemplar model and a hybrid of the two. One might argue the Fatimids could have put the screws to non-Ismaelis and not gotten over-taken by Salahudin, and one can also argue that the Mughals should have been less violent and followed the Sufi Dawah model, though admittedly Emperor Ackbar did try that for his reign.

Then in the post-colonial, oil fueled binge of 20th century and early 21st century spam marketing, the Salafi dawah proposes its radical repudiation of the languid powerlessness that their jihad concept finds itself in.

It's clear that the dawah model for promoting Islam has a geopolitical context. Our context is broadly globalized freedom of religion and radical freedom of information. The limitation on that can be seen by a prominent Salafi YouTuber losing a series of debates whereby the Tammiyan Athari theology is made to look silly; consider how Scientology's ability to spread peaked around the time that South Park parodied Xenu. You're supposed to lose your family and friend connections and spend 100k USD before learning that your religion is based on a giant alien blowing up political prisoners with nuclear bombs thrown into volcanoes, or that the form of Islam you thought was original is actually breaking the rules of the Hanbali madhab by taking the haram step of philosophizing about God having literal hands and feet that are unlike created hands and feet. Also, if your understanding of Islamic jihad is violently or at least loudly repudiating the modern world order in favor of a neo-Ottoman Caliphate with sex slaves and stoning, it's extra uncool to be a taxpaying incel wagie getting stuck in traffic.

Whereas, the Quranic Dawah can deliver a satisfying theology based on a combination of freedom to interpret, refreshed Mutazila ideas like God being fundamentally just and bypassing the trinity-debate-losing problems around uncreated Qur'an, verbatim textual interpretation, occasionalism or uncreated-yet-distinct-yet-not-separable attributes. It can leverage the appreciation of the world we live in today, vindicating everything good about the West as being due to the dialectic between Islam and Christianity over the last 1000 years, and everything bad is due to them not being just enough per the Quranic guidance. It can explain away all the problematic stuff in the Qur'an as being context-based or mistranslated, and the extremely problematic stuff in the Hadith as being in contradiction to the Qur'an, lies fueled by sectarianism, or contextually abrogated, *without* rejecting hadith entirely or even repudiating Sunnism at large. It can highlight jihad as the improvement of the self leading to the improvement of the community leading to the reformation of an unjust society. It can give people

the meaning of having their lives mean something, every little act, every day they waste or use wisely, without demanding totalization of compliance in a sprawling mess. It can give people simple things to believe in: there is One God who is Just and Merciful (and these are the same thing), who will hold us accountable on the Last Day, as revealed in the scriptures sent by prophets, and there are angels, why not.

To critique Christianity in a polite way: Catholic and Protestant strands we're used to all are influenced by liberalism which is ultimately the result of the dialectic between Islam and the West. Orthodox Christianity holds to the tradition that tribal morality within the concept of a Church Body, rejecting universal morality, and rejecting the concept of good manners as ordained by God, these things are actually divinely ordained specifically in Islam. The trinity is a misunderstanding of the 1st commandment and out of compliance with it, only Orthodoxy holds strongly to it being in the Torah, the other traditions hold to an idea of progressive revelation, this is all post-hoc rationalization of imperial religion, the Arians should have won, and God ultimately favored the Muslims until they too screwed things up, then went to the plan of dialectic learning over the last 1000 years.

To answer atheism: atheists and agnostics in the west actually believe in divine simplicity, a God who is Nothing, unfathomable, with only one apophatic attribute, Not Alive, yet they believe this Nothing burped up a quantum vacuum leading to the universe, either through luck or an extremely energy-intensive redundancy per the Anthropic Principle. Universal Morality systems like Leftism, Nationalism or Secular Liberalism cannot navigate the undecidable propositions of their finite base rules per Godel's Theorem, hence why people are always arguing ideology online and men and women struggle to trust each other and form families in post-post-modernity. Get the best of atheism by worshiping the One God who created everything including the real Universal Morality, who judges everyone predominantly on actions (though belief is foundational for asking forgiveness, knowing what rules to follow etc.) and who guided us to the best of modernity. Skeptical agnosticism and atheism are great skill-building periods of one's life to worship the God of Absolute Truth because it helps to cut through all the nonsense and power plays that accrue in religious tradition, including in Islam.

We don't have to demand that people come into the full rigor of the Qur'anic covenant, we just need to encourage them to tighten up on the theology if they're Christian, abandon idolatry, and stop believing in the taghut of corrupt authorities. This can actually make people at ease enough to try praying more and easing into a more pious life prior to making the commitment to follow this covenant, and get rid of the psychotic fear of family members all going to hell if they don't convert. However we shouldn't water down the Qur'an's general guidance for everyone not following its covenant, these bright red lines are in there, no mis-representing that, God is One and demands service, serving corrupt hierarchies, your own desires or unseen spirits is unacceptable.

Did the prophet that brought this marry a child? No that's a lie. Same goes for authorizing killing of apostates, offensive warfare, wife beating, killing of non-combatants in war and all the other ills associated with Islam.

Don't Muslims fight online all the time calling each other kafir? Yes, that's sectarianism, the Qur'an is very against it, it's actually very Zen, just believe in God, the Last Day, the revelations and follow their guidance to do good deeds, don't get caught up on the fine print that theologians made up to divide us. This is the common sense approach to religion that young people today are craving as they are totally burned out on religious sectarianism in other religions, Islam taking that hellfiery intensity up to 11 can be framed as just more illustration of why God sent us this guidance to simply do righteous works in God's name.

One aspect that is a major void in Islamic scholarship is investigating the Injil, what is concordant with the Qur'an from the canonical and apocryphal gospels? Likewise how is the Qur'an a sequel to the Torah and resonant with the Psalms? How does the Quranic, Rationalist or Modernist approaches to Islam address problems people may have had with Christianity? There's more work to be done here but it can pay huge dividends when it comes to appealing to people with a Christian background.

As far as catering to the other metrics, we can bootstrap off the existing network effect of physical masjids and marriage apps to facilitate people's integration into the Ummah, combined with the more agile online networks of support groups. We should consider emulating the model of tariqa in creating mentorship clusters, senior people training young-middle-aged people to mentor young adults and/or new converts.

Conservative Islam tends to be obsessed about playing defense, complying with myriad minute rulings of fiqh, prayer formalism, and self-censorship in thoughts and speech. While there's value in that to some extent, the Qur'an says that good deeds are rewarded at 10 times their value and sins are punished to the extent of them, and avoiding major sins incurs forgiveness for all minor sins, this merciful frame is often lost in the fiqh sauce. We can emphasize to people that not only is following the Quranic covenant the safest way to enter heaven, but there are 6 higher levels of heaven where spiritual bliss in excess of mere wine-river drunken orgies and feasts of super-fruit await. One can be a hero, doing good deeds, interceding for those who are suffering or lost in their immorality, and enough people rolling up into this guidance can dramatically improve society. We should be able to get people excited about being a superogatory servant of God.

The current state of media reach for this movement is relatively limited compared to traditionalist media, and what we do have, such as the YouTube channels of people cited in this book, tends to be both fairly dense and top-out at under 50k subscribers. A lot of the content veers into the polemical, which can undermine the strong smiling confidence of pure dawah, and confuse people with a seeming sectarian tinge. Even this book is not an entry-level brochure for a shining new vision of Islam but rather something to read for people engaging with the process of converting, early in their journey and seeking to consolidate >1000 hours of learning into a short read, or for non-Muslims trying to learn more about the complexities and developing history from an outside perspective.

We need more short video content that cleanly hits on some of the key points cited in this chapter. Additionally the Qur'an is an intimidating read and the mistranslation of it by the establishment scholars makes that harder. While I fear violating a sacred taboo by making an abridged version of the text, I'd like to do a "Blue Qur'an" that highlights 9 key types of passage:

- Hell Descriptions (Red)
- Heaven Descriptions (White)
- Judgement Day Descriptions (Black)
- Disobedient Destroyed Civilizations (Grey)
- Prophetic Stories (Yellow)
- Parables and reframed Syriac storytelling (Orange)
- Political Tensions (Brown)
- Rules (Green)
- Wisdom (Blue)

By highlighting it this way I suspect people will have a better emotional legend to understanding how to read Qur'an and focus on the tidbits that really frame up the next 1400 years of social development for humanity and why shirk is the root of injustice.

One of my favorite films is the documentary "The Fog of War" with the former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who helped the airforce systematically destroy most structures in Japan, helped Ford to develop seatbelts and systematically save lives, and presided over the Pentagon during the war in Vietnam. He describes the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the US and Soviet Russia nearly engaged in a cataclysmic nuclear war that would have practically ended the world. They received a message from Khrushchev:

We and you ought not to pull on the ends of a rope which you have tied the knots of war. Because the more the two of us pull, the tighter the knot will be tied. And then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you. I have participated in two wars and know that war ends when it has rolled through cities and villages, everywhere sowing death and destruction. For such is the logic of war. If people do not display wisdom, they will clash like blind moles and then mutual annihilation will commence.

This sounds vaguely similar to the kind of foreboding poetic flourish that embeds much of the Qur'an's rhetoric about punishment for injustice and impiety. Then a hardline Russian general or consortium of them, a ulemachatnik if you will, followed up with a simpler colder message, if you don't pull out then we will have no choice but to unleash everything we have and you will be completely destroyed.

The first message had heart, lament, sincere appeal to humanity, a rhetorical allusion to wisdom even if uncertain if wisdom would prevail, a sorrowful pathos that humanity has made terrible decisions before can may again. The second message is cold, threatening, angry, unfettered even, but it clarifies that the foreboding of the first message is not an empty rhetoric.

The Qur'an, as Angelica Nuewirth points out, is a miracle of rhetoric in an age of rhetorical competition, hence we see Muslims trying to urge each other towards truth by reusing similar rhetorical patterns, May Allah Guide You as passive aggressive borderline insult. The Qur'an asks, will they not reason? Ya Allah, I'm a fraid knot. Modern people who are 3rd or 5th generation children of advertising, scam coins, phishing emails, online cults and troll-baiting are so inured to rhetoric that we inherently find it empty, like brandishing a scimitar in a world full of shotguns. It's therefore important to marketing Islam that the literary context of the Qur'an is calibrated to modern understanding.

Kennedy did not know whether to respond to the hard message or the soft message, we was leaning hard, the kafir response you might say, with fire as its reply. Tommy Thompson said, Mr. President you're wrong, I've spent time with Kruschev, he's willing to hear reason, we need to reply to the soft message.

And so the world was saved... for a little while. The Horn of Israfil did not yet blow us all into an ashen swoon, leaving us helpless but to be resurrected by the creator of all worlds and judged for our iniquity. We still have time to show our Lord that we can indeed reason, that we can be people of contemplation. We can fix a lot of problems in our society through Islam and we can fix a lot of the problems in the Ummah through the purification of our practice of Islam.

It requires a better pitch.

So, Who *Are* The Quranists Exactly?

Maybe there are no Quranists, people who would tend to be most likely to accept the label shy away from it because it's become polemicized, preferring to be called Quran Only Muslims as that is descriptive of their usool. People who are early-Hanafi or early-Maliki in usool, neo-Mutazilas, modernists, Quran-centric non-sectarians, or even hadith-skeptical Ibadis and Imam-lite Shia can easily dodge the Quranist label while still being broadly aligned with putting the Qur'an first and seeing past the politically-enabled falsehoods that defined the Ummah for so many centuries.

Maybe every Muslim is a Quranist, it's just a question of degree. Some are primarily people of Hadith and pay a nod of respect to the Qur'an while relegating it to the background, most of the world's approximately two billion Muslims are somewhere closer to the Qur'an Only side of the spectrum, making it the priority in their approach to understanding God's will for us.

Maybe "The Quranists" are like "The Matrix".

<A bustling mideival bazaar in front of the Bayt Al Hikmah in Baghdad>

"This is Islamic Civilization as it existed at its peak, it exists now only as part of a social-interactive simulation, that we call "The Caliphate". You've been living in a dream world Akhi, this is the Ummah as it exists today:"

<Shifts to a badly planned slum sprawl, bombed cities, refugee camps, a Dragon Ball theme park>

"Welcome... to the Desert of the Morally Anti-Real. We have only bits and pieces of information, but what we know for certain is that sometime in the 4th century Hijra the Iqta land-rent system solidified and the doors of Ijtihad were closed."

Akhi: "Ijtihad, mental effort?"

"Thinking became haram, spawning an entire race of imperialists. Throughout Islamic history we have been dependent on innovations from the west to survive, Qadr it seems, is not without a sense of irony. For the longest time I wouldn't believe it, and then I saw the Muslim world with my own eyes, watched them raise GoFundMe's for Gazans so they could pay bribes to Egyptian border guards. And standing there, facing the pure, horrifying precision, I came to realize the obviousness of the truth."

Who are The Quranists? Control. The Quranists are a phantasm of scholarly authority designed to turn a believer in the True God, into this: <holds up an idol of Hubal with two right hands>

Akhi: "No... I don't believe it, it's not possible. Let me out of here! I want out!"

"Just breath Akhi"

Akhi: "You're not real Muslims, it's a lie, I don't believe in you, you're all kuffar, I don't believe in you."

Textual Cypher Al-Munafiqun: He's gonna pop.

Akhi: <puke emoji in the comments>

The Quranists are like Emmanuel Goldstein in 1984, a fictional prop character, a controlled opposition designed to elicit the 15 minutes of hate after Salah and Zikr. Emmanuel means "God is with you" and Goldstein is a stereotypical Jewish name, recalling the gold-smithing profession and its lamentable development into fractional reserve banking, a convenient scape-goat. Hating other Muslims is a big part of online Muslim identity, if you're not a Shia you're a Quranist, if you're not a Quranist you're a perennialist, if you're not a perennialist you're a modernist, if you're not a modernist you're a Deobandi - not quite fundamentalist enough! Division has become a facet of the ummah, and hatred for everyone but people in your special sub-sect has become a pillar of the Din. This is an outgrowth of a theology in which Power is the unifying thematic attribute of God and malicious compliance is the logical response.

In this environment, another reformation is not only desperately longed for, but inevitable, God's deliverance for the faithful.

In the Qur'an, Allah says that if one turns away from the faith then He will replace that one with those who love Allah and who Allah loves. However if those who love Allah come to decry the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men, can they verge on sectarianism, dividing their new religion? Yeah probably. So then what's the right approach? It's to transcend the dialectic of one usool vs. another with more education, and to lead by example.

Insha'Allah.

Post-script: May Allah forgive me if I have made errors, backbitten anyone or told lies against the Lord of the Worlds and His Prophets, my intentions were constructive and I will continue to pray for guidance receptively, and if I find signs of error on my part I will correct those errors in subsequent editions. All Praise to The Most Majestic, The Most Generous, who has facilitated my time in learning and writing, and who answered my duas of refuge from the accursed Shaytan and the Partisanship of Shaytan, from takfir, the hardening of the heart and all manner of sectarianism. Thank God for guiding me to a profound monotheism and keeping my heart tender in the face of His infinite might.

Interviews