

Koch, Thorsten
 TRDL7080
 26 November 2017

The authority of the prophet is only limited to doctrinal affairs and the matters of worship, as far as the worldly affairs are concerned; they are not governed by the prophetic authority. Critically discuss.

(References based on MLA format; transliteration style: Oxford Islamic Studies Online;
 c. 1059 words; neither footnotes nor bibliography are part of the core text.)

1) Introduction

This essay examines in how far inter-personal and communal relations (*mu'amalat*), pertaining to the socio-political sphere, have been subject to Islamic prophetic authority as have religious creed (*'aqīda*) and religious rituals (*'ibādāt*)¹. We will, departing from a post-modernist standpoint, use secondary literature on various Islamic sources: the *Qur'an*, the prophet Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh's (570-632 CE) normative words and actions (*sunnah*), legal (*fiqh*) as well as historiographical texts.

2) Prophetic Authority Relating to the Qur'an

The *Qur'an* does not lay out all-inclusive rules for the domain of the non-sacred but largely highlights the relationship between Allah and creation². There are some 500 verses with legal rules to be found in the *Qur'an*³. These hardly cover all aspects of legal requirements, much less politics and state organisation⁴. However, the 'orthodox' Islamic doctrine holds that the Islamic faith is universal and "does not differentiate between religion (*dīn*) and state (*dawlah*)"⁵.

From a modernist standpoint, the prophet Muḥammad (ca. 570CE–632 CE) was, foremost, to serve as a messenger of Revelation, which is an essentially religious role⁶. His

¹ see Mavani, 2012, 34

² Saeed, 2008, 162, 171

³ see Hallaq, 1997, 3

⁴ see idem, 5

⁵ Mavani, 2012, 34

⁶ ibid

personal opinion (*ra'y*) was that of a human being⁷. The two roles are to be set apart, considering *Qur'anic* injunctions. The *Qur'an's* recurring command that believers are to obey Allah “and his messenger” may, then, appear contradictory. However, the connector ‘and’ implies, linguistically, that Muḥammad must concur with God, not that he is alike. Accordingly, from a *Qur'anist* stance, Muslims are to consciously follow (*ittiba'*) Muḥammad's authority only in predominantly religious matters, explicitly relating to the *Qur'an*⁸. Admittedly, this line of thought is held by a minority of scholars, behind traditionalists and others.

3) Sunnah: Reflecting Muḥammad or Social Reality?

The *Qur'an's* legal teachings, as was felt during Islam's classical period, were to be supplemented by oral instructions attributed to Muḥammad, so to clarify their meaning and application⁹. This includes worldly regulations. According to the classical doctrine represented by *Sunnī* jurist Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (767-820 CE), the *sunnah*, comprising Muḥammad's statements and deeds, is a binding legal source, complementing the *Qur'an* without contradiction¹⁰.

As pointed out by contemporary scholar Wael Hallaq (b. 1955 CE), however, prophetic authority emerged out of “social consensus and the model behaviour ... of the tribal and garrison societies”, intertwined with prophetic *sunnah*¹¹. Many *sunan* (pl.) were recursively ascribed to Muḥammad “through both fabrications of subject matter [(*matn*)] and chains of transmission” (*asānīd*)^{12 13}. On the other hand, a host of falsified sayings (*hadīth*) were later isolated and expunged by critics who supervised the major *hadīth* collections. The question arises whether the *sunnah* more considerably reflects prophetic authority or the precedents of historical Islamic communities.

⁷ Rochmat, 2015, 1-2; see Moten, 2013, 37; see Saeed, 2008, 31

⁸ see Abdel Haleem, 2008, 20. The Medinan verses (*surāt*) contain more legal prescriptions than earlier verses, revealed in Mecca, which often refer to matters of *'aqīda*.

⁹ Knysh, 2006, 215

¹⁰ see Saeed, 2006, 50

¹¹ Hallaq, 2005, 4-5; idem, 70

¹² idem, 101-102

¹³ idem, 73

4) Sunnī Legal Views and Development

In the orthodox view, prophetic words of the *sunnah* “were generally held to bind the community”, but formally, they were considered subsidiary to the *Qur’an*¹⁴. A modernist would arguably defend a differing opinion: despite the legal doctrine of prophetic infallibility (*iṣmah*), prophets are not safeguarded against “errors or even minor sins”¹⁵. Therefore, as concerns Muḥammad’s everyday life, his precedent can be considered, “at best, recommended (*mandūb*)” and legally non-binding”, which lessens his overall authority^{16 17}.

From the classical period onwards, clerics “recognized the existing political system, namely the state, as a tool for supervising public order”; on the other hand, they claimed religious authority for themselves¹⁸. Thereby, they separated the worldly from religion in terms of agency and institution, continuing to assert overarching moral and legal authority. Historically, then, most legal aspects of Islam were shaped “within civil society and ... beyond the sphere of the state”¹⁹.

5) Historiographical Perspectives on Prophetic Authority

Without considering historiography, one would overlook crucial perspectives on Islamic sources. Based on Muḥammad’s biography (*sīra*) e.a., orientalist Stanislav M. Prozorov (b. 1938 CE) portrays Muḥammad post-Mecca as a “theocratic-authoritarian” ruler: he was “also a military commander, arbiter, treasurer, etc.”²⁰. By a similar token, Ira M. Lapidus (b. 1937 CE) sees “no differentiation between Muḥammad’s prophetic teaching, his authority in moral and spiritual matters, and his role as a tribal mediator”²¹. In the eyes of Dietrich Jung (b. 1959 CE), on the other hand, the ruling function adopted by Muḥammad in Medina was “not that of a statesman” but that of an intermediary “uniting the enemy

¹⁴ Wild, 2006, 273

¹⁵ Brown, D., 1996, 62

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Yet, practically (*‘amālī*), “prophetic ... and human capacity were melded in a single person (*ibid*). Modernists often even diminish the status of Muḥammad’s non-prophetic “actions from recommended (*mandūb*) to indifferent (*mubah*)”, while strict traditionalists class those deemed ‘authentic’ most highly, as revealed (*wahy*), to be imitated (*idem*, 64).

¹⁸ Rochmat, 2015, 3; see Hallaq, 2005, 4-5

¹⁹ Alshammari, 2015, 12

²⁰ Prozorov, 2003, 176

²¹ Lapidus, 1996, 8-9

tribes ... in a relatively loose confederation in pre-state patterns of Arabic tribal societies”²². Accordingly, Muḥammad held no genuine worldly authority. This is only partly convincing.

After his relocation (*hijra*) north, to the oasis of Yathrib (later Medina) in 622 CE, as Islamic historical sources tell, Muḥammad did take on a pronounced “political and administrative” role ²³. But he had essentially formed a political alliance²⁴. Rāshid Ghannūshī (b. 1941 CE) shows how there has been a “distinction between the state and religion in Islam” early on²⁵: namely, the second oath of commitment (*bay’a*) of Medinans “was a contract of mutual defence” around Muḥammad, rather than a religious agreement.

During the reign of the first Sunnī caliphs (*khilāfa*), prophetic authority was projected onto the successors of Muḥammad. Increasingly, and culminating in the Abbasid period (1261–1517 CE), a separation between the political and the religious took place through the rise of a class of religious scholars and jurists (*‘ulamā’*)²⁶. By the middle of the tenth century CE, then, “the caliphs had lost all effective political power” and their formal seconds, the sultans, were merely politically legitimised “by the need for public order”^{27 28}. “The caliph retained [but] an aura of religious authority”²⁹. Profane power was thus in the hands of the sultans, while the *‘ulamā’* dominated the religious realm.

Shī‘ī Islam, until today, accepts *imams* or their clerical representatives alone as legitimate leaders, both in religious and worldly respects; genuine authority is held by imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (c. 597–660 CE) and his successors, members of Muḥammad’s family³⁰.

²² Jung, 2003, 207

²³ He took additional decisions not specified by the Qur’an, not least to overcome political frictions (see Saeed, 2006, 123; see Donner, 2006, 27; see Saeed, 2008, 10). Some contemporary scholars emphasise that Muḥammad’s leadership of the political *umma* was a functional necessity to disseminate the Islamic creed (Hasanov, 2003, 171; Hatina, 2000, 45).

²⁴ Donner, 2006, 26

²⁵ Ghannouchi, 2013, 164 & 166

²⁶ Saeed, 2006, 124; Rochmat, 2015, 4

²⁷ Lapidus, 1975, 364

²⁸ A clear separation between the religious caliphate and the political sultanate was a reality under the “Buwayhis (945-1055), Seljuk Turks (1055-1258), and Mamluks (1261-1517)” (Sisman, 2015, 67).

²⁹ Saeed, 2006, 121

³⁰ Wild, 2006, 275; Brown, D., 1996, 9

6) Conclusion

Islamists often promote the slogans '*dīn wa-dawla*' or '*dīn wa-siyasa*' ('religion and the state/and politics')³¹. Such is an imaginary claim³². In a nutshell, historiography about early Islam (contrary to later Sunnī developments) makes some point for the actuality of worldly prophetic authority, while *Qur'anist* interpretations of Revelation emphasise religious aspects. The case of the *sunnah* is indefinite, in light of Sunnī norms, on the one and anthropological considerations, on the other hand. We thus subscribe to what Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (b. 1946 CE) has called a "clear distinction", though no full separation, between "Islam and the state", or else religion and worldly affairs³³.

Bibliography

- Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. "Qur'an and hadith." *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, edited by Tim Winter, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Alshammari, Zeyad Suwailem M. "Islam and Democracy." *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 20, no. 1, ver. 5, <http://bit.ly/2gpbAHg>, January 2015. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Islam and the Secular State - Negotiating the Future of Shari'a*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. "Islam, State and Politics: Separate but Interactive." *brookings.edu*, <http://brook.gs/2yuSiGF>, 2000. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Brown, Jonathan A.C. *Hadith: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. Oneworld Publications, 2009.
- Brown, Daniel. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Donner, Fred M. "The Historical Context". *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Ghannūshī, Rāshed. "The State and Religion in the Fundamentals of Islam and Contemporary Interpretation." *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, v. 6, no. 2, <http://bit.ly/2zfG820>, 2013. Accessed 15 October 2017.

³¹ referring to a marginal book by Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari (d. 870 CE)

³² Krämer, 2003, 191; Alshammari, 2015, 12; Jung, 2003, 298

³³ see An-Na'im, 2000, 5-6; idem, 2008, 4, 7

- Hallaq, Wael B. "*The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*." Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Hasanov, Ahadjan. "The First Muslim Community: the Transition from Religiosity to Secularity." *Islam and the Secular State*, edited by Z.I. Munavvarov and W. Schneider-Deters, International Fund of al-Imam al-Bukhari/Friedrich Ebert Foundation, <http://bit.ly/2kWHMDp>, 2003. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Hatina, Meir. "On the Margins of Consensus: The Call to Separate Religion and State in Modern Egypt." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, <http://bit.ly/2ghLemZ>, January 2000. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Jung, Dietrich. "Staat und Islam im Mittleren Osten." *Politik und Religion*, edited by Michael Minkenberg and Ulrich Willems, Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003.
- Knysh, Alexander. "Multiple areas of influence." *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Krämer, Gudrun. "'Islam is religion and state': On the Relationship Among Religion, Law and Politics in Islam." *Islam and the Secular State*, edited by Z.I. Munavvarov and W. Schneider-Deters, International Fund of al-Imam al-Bukhari/Friedrich Ebert Foundation, <http://bit.ly/2kWHMDp>, 2003. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Lapidus, Ira M. "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, <http://bit.ly/2x3kFsh>, October 1975. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Mavani, Hamid. "The case for secularity in Islam." *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, <http://bit.ly/2ynYQYl>, 24 July 2012. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Moten, Abdul Rashid. "Politics: An Islamic Perspective." *Intellectual Discourse*, vol. 1, no. 1, <http://bit.ly/2x2wpLN>, October 2013. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Prozorov, Stanislav. "On the Issue of Supreme Authority in Islam." *Islam and the Secular State*, edited by Z.I. Munavvarov and W. Schneider-Deters, International Fund of al-Imam al-Bukhari/Friedrich Ebert Foundation, <http://bit.ly/2kWHMDp>, 2003. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Rochmat, Saefur. "The Fiqh Paradigm and the Religious Justification for the Secular State: The Traditionalist Muslims and the Dutch Colonial Rulers." *Monash University*, <http://bit.ly/2hN0gkT>, April 2015. Accessed 15 October 2017.
- Saeed, Abdullah. "*Islamic Thought - An Introduction*." Routledge, 2006.
- Saeed, Abdullah. "*The Qur'an - An Introduction*." Routledge, 2008.
- Sisman, Cengiz. Review of "Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century", by Nurullah Ardiç. *Journal of International and Global Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, <http://bit.ly/2yRkRzs>, April 2015. Accessed 15 October 2017.

Wild, Stefan. "Political interpretation of the Qur'an." *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2006.