

GRACE MIGHT REIGN:
UNDERSTANDINGS OF SIN AND GRACE AS MEANS
OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE

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“Nomocracy” possesses a wide range of categorical application, but it would be difficult to find any body of religious thought that it describes more sagaciously than Islam. Through the application of the Qur’an, its holy scripture (believed to be the plenary and direct revelation of Allah), the *hadith* (written and approved traditions which record the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad), and the law which is derived from them (*shari’a*, the governing body of jurisprudence that directs Muslim legality), Islam organizes itself around a powerful series of commands, precepts, and duties. It is difficult, in light of this prevalent emphasis, to see Islam as a “relational” faith, one that strives after an *actual relationship* between the adherent and Allah himself. Islam certainly proffers instructions for obeying Allah, but does it provide ways of *relating* to Allah? In exploring this question, we would do well to note famed Muslim theologian Isma’il Al-Faruqi’s point: “Allah does not reveal *himself* to anyone in any way. God reveals only his *will*.”³ This sentiment is confirmed also by perhaps the most eminent of Muslim thinkers, al-Ghazali.⁴ Thus, in studying Islam from a Christian

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³ Isma’il Al-Faruqi, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da’wah: Proceedings from the Chambesy Dialogue Consultation* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1982), 47-48, quoted in Geisler, *Answering Islam*, p. 142 (emphasis mine). Note also John Esposito: “In Islam, God does not reveal Himself, for God is transcendent, but rather His will or guidance” (*Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford, 1991), p. 22; see further pp. 19-23).

⁴ See Fadlou Shehadi, *Ghazali’s Unique Unknowable God* (Leiden: Brill,

theological viewpoint, a natural question arises, even near the very outset of intellectual and devotional engagement: what is the understanding of “sin” in Islam, and is there a corresponding notion of “grace”? Both of these questions entail implications for *relating to the divine*, for if the understanding of sin is legalistic and not balanced with a notion of Allah’s grace, it is difficult to see how Allah can be related to in any way other than as Lawgiver and Judge.⁵

Indeed, in the classical tradition, Islam seems to be defined solely in terms of human action in line with Allah’s commands, and not in any kind of relational language involving the gifts or grace of Allah: “Islam consists of the service of God, the refusal to associate anything with Him [a repudiation of polytheism, or *shirk*, the unforgivable sin in Islam], prayer, almsgiving, and fasting during the month of Ramadan.”⁶ In dealing with a faith so inundated with legal standards, Christians must come to grips with a precise understanding of sin in the Muslim tradition as well as the idea of grace. This paper will seek to investigate the notion of sin and grace⁷ in the orthodox

1964), e.g. p. 37.

⁵ In his magisterial *Islam: Past Present & Future* (Oxford: One-World Publishing, 2007), liberal Catholic thinker Hans Kung tries to make space for understanding Islam apart from a “religion of law,” instead claiming that it focuses on relationships between Allah and people by way of set ethical principles (pp. 149-152). This attempted softening, however, is confounded pages later: “Thus all individuals stand in a personal relationship to God, who has created them, sustains them and *will judge them, indeed who keeps a precise account of all their deeds, good and evil. This book will be opened at the Day of Judgment. All individuals are responsible for their own salvation*” (p. 153, emphasis mine). Despite Kung’s hopeful denunciation of a strictly legalistic picture of Allah, he cannot sustain that vision even over the course of a few pages of commentary.

⁶ Muslim, iman, 1; quoted in *Islam from Within: Anthology of a Religion*, eds. Kenneth Cragg & Marston Speight (Wadsworth, 1980), p. 80.

⁷ “Grace” should be briefly defined so that what I am after is clear. I am speaking of grace in terms of an unearned mediating mercy rooted in the love of God, which reaches out to sinful creatures with no correspondence to whether they merit it or not. This is in line with

tradition of Islam (focusing especially on Sunni interpretations) and then the reaction to legalism in the mystical Sufi tradition, noting their strengths and weaknesses before suggesting some related lines of dialogue which Christians can pursue with Muslims. What is set out in this thesis, then, is an (admittedly cursory) journey into the heart of the Muslim doctrine of God and God's relationship to humanity.

Islamic Orthodoxy: Grace Found Where?

There are perhaps few better barometers for detecting a theological perspective on sin than examining the corresponding conception of the afterlife, especially as it involves the fate of "sinners." In Islam, hell is the place where sinners, in particular those who have committed the sin of "unbelief," are sent in their condemnation.⁸ Though parallels between the Christian and Muslim conception of Hell could be drawn,⁹ the overtly different approach to Hell in the scriptures

more classical philosophical elucidations of grace, e.g. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Harvard, 1988), pp. 106-110, and more contemporary, systematic statements concerning it, e.g. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 1998), pp. 318-323.

⁸ The Qur'anic references are numerous, as will be discussed, but Surah 22:19-20 is representative: "Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. They shall be lashed with rods of iron. Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: 'Taste the torment of the Conflagration!'"

⁹ Christian hell is detailed primarily in the sayings of Jesus; the strongest references being Matthew 13.42, Matt 25.41, Mark 9.43-48. These deal with hell in terms of punishment for sin and incorrect relationship to God and are have little metaphorical weight to them. Luke 16 and several references in Revelations also refer to hell as a kind of punishment for those who have not acknowledged God as gracious nor expressed that graciousness in their life to others, but they have a much heavier weight on metaphorical language (being (a) a parabolic discourse and (b) apocalyptic discourse.

of these two traditions (New Testament vs. Qur'an) is quite striking. Hell and its cognates (mostly "the Fire," "the Scourge," etc.) are referenced roughly five-hundred times in the text of the Qur'an,¹⁰ a text that is only about four-fifths the length of the New Testament¹¹ (wherein, by various counts, hell and its cognates appear fewer than 40 times). While "number of references" does not conclusively demonstrate a particular theological understanding of sin as such, it does display an explicit and pervasive emphasis on unremitting punishment and judgment in the primary holy writ of Islam. In fact, punishment for unbelief and for unfulfilled religious duties occupies vast space in the Muslim tradition. For example, one *hadith* depicts Muhammad as a taskmaster enforcing the call to prayer; whoever did not turn out to pray, it is said that Muhammad commanded that their house be burned.¹² This emphasis on legalistic commands, bulwarked by the perennial threat of an agonizing afterlife,¹³ has manifested itself in the lives of Muslim believers in several noteworthy ways. Though fundamentalist acts of violence can scarcely be depicted as the fault of *all* Muslims, Phil Parshall argues that the legalistic nature of the Qur'an, as well as the severity of the (earthly and eternal) punishments it designates, has provided volatile fodder for the acts of extremists, including public stoning and the assassination of political figures.¹⁴ Moreover, a recent sociological study reviewed the attitudes toward forgiveness among French Christians, Lebanese Christians, and Lebanese Muslims (the diversification of the sample group was meant to isolate religious and cultural factors) and discovered that, across the board, "unconditional forgiveness" was a trait expounded by a good portion of Christians yet severely under-represented

¹⁰ Einer Thomassen, "Islamic Hell," in *Numen* Vol. 56 (2009), p. 402.

¹¹ See Esposito, p. 19.

¹² See Phil Parshall, *Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions* (Baker, 1994), p. 116.

¹³ See Thomassen, "Islamic Hell," pp. 402-409.

¹⁴ Parshall, pp. 22-23.

in the Muslim population. Indeed, if someone was to offend a Muslim:

[they] must be aware that the offended Muslim will probably attribute a specific status to the offender's apologies and demonstrations of repentance. For having some chance of being forgiven, this offender will probably be required to explicitly beg for forgiveness.... [But if someone offends a Christian, they] must be aware that an offended Christian will probably consider the offender's behavior more or less on the same level as other circumstances... In addition, despite not offering apologies or having committed herself not to recidivate, this offender may be granted forgiveness.... unconditional forgiveness theoretically exists among Christians....¹⁵

The point being propounded by Parshall, this writer, and the study just cited is not that Islam is a savage and violent faith, for Islam has traditionally been possessed of charity and tolerance in many of its manifestations.¹⁶ Rather, the point is that Islam appears to cast a theological canopy under which sin and punishment are emphasized at the expense of notions like forgiveness and grace.

Critics of the viewpoint that Islam is not a grace-filled religion may reply: Does not the Qur'an promote notions like mercy and compassion? In fact, the *bismallah* (the opening of each Qur'anic Surah) proclaims that Allah is "the Merciful" and "the Compassionate"! While it is true that there are references to compassion for others and the mercy of Allah throughout the Qur'an, this mercy manifests notable limitations and qualifications. As exemplified above in the study on Muslim-Christian conceptions of forgiveness, unconditionality is not present in the nomocratic worldview of Islam. Allah does not "intervene" on behalf of people in the midst of their sin. The

¹⁵ Etienne Mullet and Fabiola Azar, "Apologies, Repentance, and Forgiveness: A Muslim-Christian Comparison," in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 19, pp. 283-284.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the discussion in Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: One World, 1999), pp. 5-11.

chief divine mercy is simply the revelation of Allah, the Qur'an,¹⁷ but this mercifulness has no overlap in the realm of sin and demanded obedience. The responsibility for these things "lies squarely on each individual's shoulders, since no one can bear another's responsibility or suffer for another."¹⁸ There is no vicarious service in Islam, no gracious help, even among parent-child relationships, as Surah 2.233 makes abundantly clear: "A mother should not be allowed to suffer on account of her child, nor should a father on account of his child." In fact, salvation itself is portrayed as a resultant conglomerate of good works,¹⁹ especially in particular schools of Islamic thought: "For the Mu'tazili [a major school of medieval Muslim theology, several of whose doctrines are prevalent today] theologians, forgiveness is inextricably linked to a believer's obedience and repentance after disobedience....God's forgiveness is limited to minor sins; any major sin *must* be punished....Therefore, the salvation of believers is their due as a reward for their good works."²⁰

These perspectives on forgiveness, mercy, sacrificial aid, and works-based salvation, though they have had to be painted in broad strokes here, all lend credence to the notion that the traditional Qur'anic outlook lacks an idea of grace that is even tangentially consonant with the Christian perspective of God's freely-given love, the grace for the undeserving in the mist of their sin. While Islam is certainly well-endowed with a conception of divine justice, and that justice can serve as a linchpin for much Islamic societal cohesion,²¹ it appears to tend toward an imbalance wherein the political dimensions of Islamic thought and practice trammel conceptions of interpersonal and even divine graciousness: "The Muslim community is conceived as a political entity as well as a religious community...elevating forgiveness to the level of a categorical

¹⁷ Espositio, p. 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁹ See Surah 2.276-282.

²⁰ Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam and Christianity* (IVP, 2001), pp. 103-104.

²¹ See, e.g., Cragg and Speight, pp. 114-117.

imperative would be unworkable.”²² Though Chawkat Moucarray has tried to emphasize the notion of forgiveness and pardon that *is* present in Islam,²³ the clear weight that is placed on sin and punishment, personal striving after the “grace” of Allah,²⁴ and the modern Muslim propensity against unconditional forgiveness,²⁵ indicate that traditional Islamic orthodoxy has, at the very least, no prevalent understanding of graciousness on the part of the divine, flowing out of the divinity’s goodness and love for the sake of entering into relationship with humanity. Grace is absent.²⁶

The Sufi Reaction: The Disappearance of Sin

Sufism, in general, is understood as a reaction against these tendencies in the orthodox bodies of Islam. Though Shari’a law and the commandments of the Qur’an provided plenty of “exoteric” (outward) commands and regulations, an impetus arose in the Muslim mind to not only obey Allah, but to *know*

²² Mullet and Azar, p. 277.

²³ *The Search for Forgiveness: Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity* (Leicester: IVP, 2004).

²⁴ E.g. Tayob, p. 101, where the struggle and striving of Hagar is “crowned” with God’s providential “grace.” However, again, a working theological definition of grace is confounded by the notion of having to strive for it. If you do something for it, then it is not given in grace, but worked for.

²⁵ Mullet and Azar, pp. 281-284.

²⁶ Some Christian theologians have tried to diminish this point against Islamic theology by noting that because Islam lacks a doctrine of “original sin,” grace is not necessary. An emphasis in this current study is not that Islam and Christianity diverge on internal doctrinal matters—of course they do—but rather that grace should not be understood merely as a “way of dealing with original sin,” but rather as a key detail of the way in which God relates to the world and to the sin of humanity. The doctrine of God, without grace and *a love that gives*, ceases to be have important relational elements and can easily (and often does) slip into legalism. It should be noted, likewise, that when grace goes under-emphasized in certain Christian traditions, an unhealthy legalism likewise develops.

him.²⁷ Indeed: “While the traditional Islamic way of life was expressed officially and formally in Islamic law, there developed within the Islamic community individuals for whom mere following or obedience to the will of God was not totally satisfying.”²⁸ Sufism arose as a mystical movement that stressed the inner life of the believer and their personal union with Allah. This union was based on an understanding of theological anthropology which took the animating “breath of Allah” as grounds for some aspect of divinity within every person, which needed to be acknowledged and cultivated on an interpersonal journey back to its source, Allah.²⁹ Clearly, this flies in the face of traditional Islamic belief, which sees Allah as utterly transcendent and above the material matters of the world. Sufistic mysticism became well-known for its esoteric readings of Qur’anic passages, finding hidden meanings in even the most seemingly straightforward passages.³⁰ History-of-religions scholar Joachim Wach emphasizes that a relational and loving perspective on Allah emerges with force in Sufism:

The notion of love so familiar to the Christian from the teachings of his Master and those

of great Christian teachers from St. Augustine down through the ages, and to the Hindu through the doctrine of the masters of *bhakti* is equally fundamental in Sufism...

al-Hujwiri [a great Sufi master, who occupies the bulk of Wach’s study] regards it as a central tenet of Sufism... [one understanding of love is] God’s beneficence, by which he imparts the gifts of his grace....³¹

²⁷ This, of course, flies in the face of orthodoxy, which essentially dictates that Allah, as such, cannot be known. See p.1 of this study.

²⁸ Esposito, p. 101. See also Joachim Wach, “Spiritual Teachings in Islam: A Study,” in *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 28.4 (Oct 1948), p. 265.

²⁹ See Caesar Farrah, *Islam* (Barron’s, 2003), p. 214.

³⁰ Sufis often took their cue from Surah 24:35-36, which seems to imply the need for an esoteric level of knowledge in order to attain the Qur’an’s true meanings.

³¹ Wach, pp. 272-273. Note also Farrah: “The whole underlying

Jalal al-Din Rumi, a well-known Sufi master who lived in the 11th century, gives a representative look at Sufi sentiment toward the divine: “Tis the flame of Love that fired me / Tis the wine of Love inspired me. / Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed, / Hearken, hearken to the Reed.”³²

While this dimension is certainly commendable, Sufi devotion goes still further. Beyond a mere personal knowledge of Allah, in-and-of-itself an affront to Islamic orthodoxy, Sufism stridently advocates the attainable perfection of man. Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, “[Sufism’s] aim is to make man whole again as he was in the Edenic state....The end of Sufism is the attainment of this state of purity and wholeness.”³³ This high view of human potentiality draws on not just the notion of mankind being imbued with an inherent divine quality, but also on the general notion of the “oneness” of reality. Sufism is thus, at least in its more philosophically attenuated accounts, a monistic system, in which all of reality is essentially the same, once correctly perceived. In this way, many Sufi mystics share elements with other mystical systems across history, even with those who tried to find themselves within the Christian tradition, such as Meister Eckhart.³⁴ Both Eckhart and the Sufi mystic Ibn al-Arabi taught some version of perfectibility; Eckhart’s notion took the form of his doctrine of the Nobleman (also Good Man, Just Man), which he derived—in a manner that would be considered heretical by most traditional bodies of Christian faith—from 2 Corinthians 3:18,³⁵ which he

philosophy of Sufism was to interject a *personal* element in the otherwise impersonal legalistic approach to the fulfillment of religious devotions” (p. 216).

³² Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mathnawi*; quoted in Farrah, p. 219.

³³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Sufism and the Integration of Man,” in *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Charles Malik (American University of Beirut, 1972), pp. 144-145.

³⁴ See James E. Royster, “Personal Transformation in Ibn al-Arabi and Meister Eckhart,” in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad & Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1995), pp. 158-179.

³⁵“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory,

interpreted as, “We shall be completely transformed and changed into God.”³⁶ Al-Arabi’s notion took the corresponding form of the more explicitly stated “Perfect Man,” which Al-Arabi describes *himself* attaining when he realizes the Entity behind all the holy names of Allah, and even more so when he in fact realizes that “that Entity was my being.”³⁷

Though aspects of Sufism have sometimes been rejected as heretical by the larger bodies of Muslim traditionalism, it is interesting and informative for our purposes to note the change that takes place as a reaction to the legalism and grace-deprivation of early Islamic thought. In Sufism, an earnest searching after personal knowledge of Allah seems to be present, as noted in the citations from venerable Sufi mystics in the previous paragraph. There is much claim in Sufism to knowing Allah and even of loving Allah in a seemingly personal way, characterized by intense devotion. Note the words of female mystic Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. 801): “O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in hell, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty.”³⁸

However, the question driving this study’s thesis remains: Does Sufism provide any understanding of divine grace? The answer, once again, appears to be “no”, although for an entirely different reason than was the case with Islamic orthodoxy. Sufism lacks a conception of grace not because it does not view God personally and relationally—it certainly does—but because it has no robust understanding of *sin*. Ironically, then, it has the precise opposite problem of more mainstream Muslim belief. Sin (if the term can even hold in the mystical discourse of the Sufis) is characterized more by

are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (NIV)

³⁶ Royster, p. 168.

³⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 165.

³⁸ Margaret Smith, *Rabia the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 30. Quoted in Esposito, p. 102.

ignorance than disobedience. Once a Muslim realizes that they are in fact “one with Allah” through whatever devotional and mystical techniques are available,³⁹ then “salvation” has occurred. This mystical salvation-by-knowledge is summed up well in some devotional verses from Sufi Mahmud Shabastari (1250-1325):

The saying ‘I am the Truth’ was lawful for the bush /
 Why is it not lawful in the mouth of a good man? /
 Every man whose heart is pure from doubt / Knows
 for a surety that there is no being but One. / Saying: ‘I
 am’ belongs only to the Truth... / The glory of the
 truth admits no duality. / In that glory is no ‘I’ or ‘We’
 or ‘Thou.’ / ‘I,’ ‘we,’ ‘Thou,’ ‘He’ are all one thing. / For
 in unity there is no distinction of persons. / Every man
 who as a void is empty of self / Re-echoes within him
 the cry: ‘I am the Truth.’⁴⁰

When personal relationship with Allah becomes literal metaphysical union, and sin is reduced to only an ignorance of both that oneness and man’s perfectibility, what room is there for grace? Sufis admire Allah for attributes like his beauty and wisdom and love, but how does this love manifest itself if not through graciousness in the face of sin which humans struggle with? In light of these hanging questions over the relational system of the Sufis, it would appear as though the reaction to legalism, while welcome, erred too far on the side of knowing Allah, to the point where obedience becomes a virtual non-category, subsumed beneath that holy knowing.⁴¹

Conclusion:

³⁹ Joachim Wach’s lengthy article on the thought of Sufi master al-Hujwiri (cited above, see n.26) is perhaps the best survey of a whole system of attaining this perfection in Sufism that I have read.

⁴⁰ Mahmud Shabastari, *Gulshan-i-Ruḥ* [*Mystic Rose Garden*], trans. E.H. Whinfield (London: Trubner’s Oriental Series, 1880), pp. 45-46. Quoted in Cragg and Speight.

⁴¹ The pervasive Sufi emphasis on these things is well-distilled in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill), 1975), pp. 187-193.

Christianity as a Way Through – Sin, Grace, Knowledge

In approaching the table of dialogue with Muslim believers, Christians must always bear in mind some core principles of hospitable interfaith engagement. The point of the exchange is not to decimate opposing viewpoints, but to demonstrate where the Christian faith can fill in devotional, theological, and existential questions and difficulties which the other religious systems are not adequate for. It is a matter of acknowledging what is helpful in other faiths, but also noting what is not, and then providing Christian means as an alternative. In this way “compulsion in religion” is avoided, and the religious other is respected.⁴²

As was stated at the beginning of this paper, it is hoped that a Christian perspective on God’s grace can provide a helpful path of dialogue among aspects of both traditional Islam and mystical Sufism. John Esposito unveils the highly detached nature of relating to Allah in traditional Islam: “God ordains; humankind is to implement his will.”⁴³ With such a detached relationship to the divine, and such a strong view of sin and punishment (recall the five-hundred-plus Hell references in the Qur’an alone), Muslims are in a position to be devotionally and existentially shocked by the power of the Christian gospel, a gospel founded on God’s graceful gifting to mankind, most beautifully in the gift of Jesus Christ for our salvation.⁴⁴ For in Islam “the unearned blessing of any man or people, the Qur’an utterly rejects as not consonant with God’s

⁴² My approach to interreligious dialogue is highly consonant with that of Timothy Tennent, see his *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* (Baker, 2002), pp. 9-33, esp. 31-33.

⁴³ Esposition, p. 28.

⁴⁴ For a fantastic and accessible recent study on the gracious gifting of God in Christian theology, see Kelly Kopic, *For God So Loved, He Gave: Entering the Movement of Divine Generosity* (Zondervan, 2010); for a look at some of the great points made by Kopic as well as a few inconsistencies, see Samuel & Anna Youngs, “Review of *For God So Loved: He Gave*” in *American Theological Inquiry*, Vol. 4.1, October 2010, pp. 72-74.

nature and His justice.”⁴⁵ Hence, the notion of vicarious sacrifice, of taking on penalty that someone else deserves, is completely alien to the Qur’anic worldview. In contrast, God’s grace, manifested in Christ’s death for the sake of sinful humanity, demonstrates a God of far deeper and self-giving love than anything a Muslim has access to in their own tradition.⁴⁶

Likewise, Sufism brings knowledge of the divine, but no concept of sin, nothing toxic and insurmountable that is beyond human capacity to rectify. As a result their pursuit and love of Allah becomes merely knowledge-based; they have only to shed their ignorance to participate in the divine life. But this denigrates our humanity, making it merely an obstacle to be sloughed off. It also minimizes the reality of powerful and damaging evil in the world, much of it grounded in sinful human decisions and weakness. This impoverishment in Sufi thought, itself an overreaction to the grace-deprived legalism of traditional Islam, can also be edified and expanded through the Christian gospel.

For the Christian, the reason why God’s love is so blessed, and why our relationship to Him and His mission in the world is to be so treasured, is because our sin was so great and such a gulf was bridged by the gracious sacrifice of Christ.⁴⁷ It is along these lines—the depth of human sin and true distance from God’s holiness that must be bridged by Christ—that Christians may be able to effectively dialogue with more mystically slanted Muslims.

Some might object that if the traditional Muslim mindset has no apparent space for divine grace, and if the mystical Muslim mindset has no real space for sin, then is not the Christian view of salvation going to be simply incomprehensible to them? This is not a small point, and since

⁴⁵ Isma’il Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1998), p. 126 n.20

⁴⁶ See Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, pp. 105-109.

⁴⁷ See Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Baker, 2008), esp. pp. 187-193.

Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb have already taken pains to address it, I will quote them at some length:

On the surface it would seem that salvation by grace through faith in the death and in the resurrection of Christ is totally incomprehensible to the Muslim mind. This, we believe, is not the case. While the unbeliever does not *receive* God's truth (1 Cor. 2:14), nevertheless, he can *perceive* it...The Muslim mind should not have any more difficulty with [the concept of salvation by grace] than any other mind...Warriors are hailed for dying for their tribe. Soldiers are honored for dying for their country. Parents are called compassionate when they die for their children. This is precisely what Jesus did.⁴⁸

The grace of God's love, manifested in Jesus Christ, is one of the most beautiful aspects of the Christian narrative, made all the more beautiful by the stark reality of sin and how damaging it can be to ourselves and to our relationship with God. If we have a God who is willing to reach out of Himself and give of Himself for our sake, then we should do our best to display that truth wherever we can. To those overridden with thoughts of human perfection and oneness with God, we can dialogue about the true weight and significance of sin. And to those overridden with thoughts of sin and eternal punishment, we can dialogue about the reality of grace, and the God who gives it. And to both we can attest to the power of a Savior who proclaims: "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 192.

⁴⁹ John 15.13.