

COLLECTIVE SOCIAL AWARENESS OF COVID-19 AND THE CHALLENGES IN FACING IT FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE¹

Ali bin Al-Ajmi Euchi

Department of Aqidah and Da'wah. College of Sharia and Islamic Studies. Qatar University. Doha. Qatar.

Email: aeuchi@qu.edu.qa

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Abstract

This study explores key questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Islamic position on it. The significance of this research lies not only in the different answers it provides regarding this issue, but also in the questions it coins to win the bet of waking the collective social consciousness and convincing it of the necessity of Islam in such circumstances as a guide and guard of human stability. This research pursues an analytical methodology that is partly deconstructive and partly historical as it traces the positions Islam took in response to epidemics based on the collective consciousness of the society in its specific historical context. It is the goal of this study to develop an understanding of the way religion responds to pandemics and its ability to help overcome its negative impact through unique intellectual and creedal powers that lie in its foundational fundamentals. The main result of the research is that Islamic jurisprudence and its purposes are strongly present and are some of the most important factors of intellectual advancement in facing the most important developments in the reality of the human being.

¹ This article has been translated into English by Latifa Aziza, English Lecturer at Al Zeituna University, Tunisia.

Keywords: Collective social awareness; COVID-19 pandemic; religion; epidemics; an Islamic perspective.

Khulasaah

Kajian ini meneroka persoalan penting berkaitan pandemik COVID-19 dan pandangan Islam mengenainya. Kepentingan penyelidikan ini bukan sahaja terletak pada jawapan berbeza yang diberikan mengenai isu tersebut, tetapi juga pada persoalan yang dikemukakan untuk membangunkan kesedaran sosial secara kolektif tentang keperluan ajaran Islam sebagai panduan untuk menjaga kestabilan manusia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah analisis yang melibatkan metode dekonstruktif dan pensejarahan bagi mengenalpasti pandangan Islam sebagai respons terhadap wabak berdasarkan kesedaran kolektif masyarakat dalam konteks sejarahnya yang khusus. Adalah menjadi matlamat kajian ini untuk membangunkan pemahaman tentang cara agama bertindak balas terhadap pandemik dan keupayaannya untuk membantu mengatasi kesan negatif melalui kuasa intelek dan kepercayaan unik yang terletak pada asas-asasnya. Hasil utama kajian adalah bahawa perundangan Islam dan matlamatnya ketara wujud dan merupakan antara faktor utama kemajuan intelek dalam menghadapi perkembangan terpenting realiti manusia ini.

Kata kunci: Kesedaran sosial kolektif; pandemik COVID-19; agama; wabak; perspektif Islam.

Introduction

COVID-19 surprised the world at a time when most people were away from religion. Even, many of those who are described as 'religious' long thought that religion no longer satisfies the needs of the modern era, a view that seems to reflect an involuntary submission to globalization. Then Covid-19 hit and changed all existing balances.

The exceptional unity of the world that we notice today as an outcome of the pandemic revealed at the same time extreme images of selfishness on the part of leading societies that ascribe to colonial modernity. The idea of globalization then seems to have turned against its propagators as a result of the illusion of communication and a narrowing of national borders. Some countries such as Italy found themselves in isolation, lonely counting they are dying alone, while Europe has turned its back on them and left them to face their fate all by themselves. Other leading powers such as the United States reel under the horror of surprise and pain caused by the pandemic that made it torn between its internal powerlessness and accusing external opponents such as China of betrayal.

This has exposed the illusion of solidarity slogans and the weakness and falsity of international institutions, thereby sounding a warning to the disintegration of a cobweb that is based on morality. As a result, the reasoning lagged behind trying to rein in the pandemic. The reality of political morality was painfully exposed, and the only hope left for people is in some faithful researchers and god's mercy.

The present research explores the relationship between religion and pandemics. The current pandemic marked a turning point in the history of religions. The beliefs of religious adherents, Muslims in the context of this study, have been weakened by the globalization of cultures and the primacy given to science over other sources of knowledge. The occurrence of COVID-19 may have deepened the situation but also made the belief of many rising from their slumber.

So, in a difficult time where one takes a moment to contemplate the course of their life and the goal of their existence two things have happened. On the one hand, for some, there was a further separation between the mind and the soul. For others, this new circumstance made them

more united than before. Therefore, it is important to investigate the extent to which and the ability of religion to sustain and support people through difficult times.

This research does not only focus on the religion's response to the pandemic from a sheer theoretical position, but it also explores it as practical historical reactions to the weakness of Muslims in similar situations. As for the significance of this study, it lies in stirring discussion about problematic concepts that are key to understanding the relationship between epidemics and religion in Muslim society. For it paves the way for further pondering over the potential of Islamic thought and the ability of Islamic belief to help its community members manage health crises more efficiently.

The main questions that the present study seeks to answer include: How can we reel the pandemic so that such a tribulation plays a role in moving the Muslim community to advance at all levels and overcome its ongoing state of decline? What are the expressions of such reeling? What results should we expect from it? This research aims at accomplishing four main goals: advance the way religion has dealt historically with pandemics and health crises; outline the main factors that help society recover from decline; show the ability of Muslims in dealing with health crises by linking it to returning to faith; and demonstrating the latter's capability in containing situations of calamities and ordeal. In this study, I use the historical approach, especially where I deal historically with pandemics and health crises. I also pursue the analytical method where I engage analytically with facts by way of analysis and synthesis.

Ethics of Calamities and Argument of Necessities

Despite the difference among those who are preoccupied with this disease, Muslims should not lack etiquette of relating the challenge to great trials. The noble Qur'an

expresses these difficult stages of human life in two concepts, namely misfortune and adversity.

The verses that mention these two concepts deal with the notion of belief and its etiquettes during difficult times, for maintaining one's belief in Allah in difficult times is a return to Allah, filled with great hope. It spreads a feeling of hope and pleasure in man, and not that of despair. Therefore, it is not appropriate for a believer in these difficult days to feel despair and despondency.

The Qur'an has equated in these verses between pride in prosperity, and despair and despondency in distress²." Accordingly, all eyes are on the religious institution, not only in its capacity as a scholarly reference but also in its emotional discourse that excludes no one. Questions arose after the decision of most authorities to close public institutions, including houses of worship. The feelings of Muslims in all parts of the world were shaken when the media reported that the mosques were deserted from their visitors.

Perhaps the most severe of these impacts was the closing of the two Sacred Mosques. It was, therefore, not surprising that many writings surfaced on social media questioning this action. The opinions of the scholars differed, not to mention the opinions of the common people. Perhaps the religious segment was a concern of the relevant authorities, who realize that an important part of them may fail to realize the causes that fall under the authority of divine predestination and decree; or lump up the branches together with the fundamentals relying on the principle that acts of worship must be performed and publicized without having consideration for the consequences of events that may disrupt, or even, threatens the overall goals of the *Shari'ah*, perhaps by

² Muḥammad Ghūrmāz, "Akhḷāq al-Azminah al-Ṣa'bah fī al-Islām," Mawqī' Hay'ah 'Ulamā' Filasṭīn fī al-Khārij, accessed March 31, 2020, <http://palscholars.com/post/6361>.

returning to a simple approach between existence and religion. We will find that the latter is based on the first since it is not possible to talk about religion except with the realization of existence, but this existence also necessitates a Creator who is Almighty Allah, who is the absolute origin of religion. He is the Giver of the *Shari'ah* and to him, the entire creation is indebted, as al-Ghazālī said in *al-Ihyā'*:

“And be sure of what they were sure of that pronouncing the statement (there is no Allah but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) has no benefit or fruit if the understanding of what this testimony revolves around in terms of meanings and principles is not actualized. And know that the two words of testimony, as brief as they are, include affirming the essence of Allah, affirming His attributes, affirming His actions, and affirming the sincerity of the Messenger, may Allah’s prayers and peace be upon him.”³

The separation between the two universalities is difficult except if we look at both as we look at the priority between essence and existence. Religion is based on existence, just as existence is based on the Creator of religion.

It remains that we look at the issue from the point of prioritizing the preservation of life over that of the religion, considering the individuals who we cannot address with the *Shari'ah* before the existence. However, the universality of preserving the religion is prioritized from the point of view of the general principle if we look at the second consideration, i.e., that Allah is the origin of existence. That means, it is possible to look at the issue

³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣrīyah, 2013), 1/147.

with another justification, even if we assume the priority of preserving religion over other things. It is that prayer is fundamental in the religion, but the congregation (prayers in groups) is a complementary issue, given that it is an emphasized Sunnah according to the Mālikis, for example, and that its absence does not invalidate the prayer. Imam Al-Shāṭibī mentioned this when he writes: "Each of these ranks is joined by what is complementary, which if we assume its missing, such would not lead to the loss of its original rationale⁴". He also said: "Every compliment ... has a condition, which is that its consideration does not lead to the invalidation of the original."⁵ The congregation, in this sense, complemented the prayer.

In the light of the danger of this creeping epidemic and threatens the universality of preservation of life and the purpose of existence, and what it represents of attachment to the universality of preservation of religion, as if they are, in the social understanding and traditional religiosity, a conflict of necessity in which the existence of one cannot be achieved except by the abolition of the other.

To what extent than can the cover be lifted from the truth through which the integration between the two fundamentals is achieved, by way of updating the religious discourse based on an internal movement that maintains its effectiveness between the constants of the Law-Giver and the changes of the times? Although, in the words of Muḥammad al-Muṣliḥ:

"Islamic culture first arose in response to the revelation, although Islamic culture as a term is considered modern, but as a reality, it arose in response to revelation in the era of revelation. The Islamic culture movement has

⁴ Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 4th. ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1999), 2/327.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2/329.

ranged for centuries between leadership or dominance and resistance to any (foreign intellectual invasion). During this long history, there was a correlation between the state of culture and the civilized progress of the nation..."⁶ But, to what extent has Islamic culture kept pace with the civilization movement of the Ummah?

The Challenges of the Doctrinal Discourse Between Established Fundamentals and Variables in Confronting the Covid-19 Pandemic

The pandemic has restored people's awareness of the ethics of Islam and imposed on the world a careful pause that besieges the disorder of the mind through a discourse that seems balanced between the static and the variables holding on to the most complex and most serious topics for Muslims which have been a deep subject of debate throughout the age of Islamic enlightenment: the issue of divine actions, which is directly related to the issue of fate and destiny. The Muslims found them in a state of acute recovery from a verbal issue they thought had been forgotten with the departure of glorified beautiful days, and that what remained of its shadows was nothing but obligations wrapped in sterile doctrinal ideology.

Perhaps this topic was historically distributed by several doctrinal trends in the Islamic arena, the most important of which is al-Jabariyah. They are those who believe that mankind is forced by destiny to do what they do, and they denied all capabilities of the individual in front of Allah's wish (a person is like a feather in the wind that has no power, will, or choice.). Thus, all actions

⁶ Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Muṣliḥ, "Naḥw Tawzīf Ma'āyīr al-Fā'īlyyah fī Taṭawwur Muqarrar al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmīyyah fī Jāmi'at Qaṭar," *The Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 34(2) (2016), 283.

belong to Allah and that actions are only attributed to creatures, metaphorically.⁷

On the other hand, we find those who attribute the creation of the action to man, such as the Mu'tazila who attributed the destiny to themselves, not to the Creator.⁸ Their believe in absolute attribution of actions to man and claim that Allah has no intervention in the acts of the worshipers, and He does not know about any actions until after their occurrence. They are also named as the Qadarites who say: There is no destiny, but the matter is only known after its occurrence, or the Mu'tazilites who, although they acknowledged the prior knowledge of Allah of the actions of the servants before their occurrence, they insisted on saying that man creates his own actions⁹.

As for the Murji'ah, they differed from the two previous opinions, meanwhile the Sunnis took a middle course between compulsion and choice. The summary of Ash'arī school on this issue is what al-Bayhaqī reported on the authority of Abū al-Ṭayyib Sahl al-Sa'lūkī,¹⁰ the reformer of the fourth century: "The action of the old Capable is creation, and the verb of the new capabilities is gain, so the old one transcends earning and He is glorified. The one who is newly capable is small and humiliated).¹¹

⁷ 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ḥafnī, *Mawsū'at al-Firaq wa al-Jamā'āt wa al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Rashād, 1993), 135.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁹ Alī bin al-'Ajamī al-'Ishshī, *Mabāḥith fī al-Firaq al-Islāmīyah: al-Rū'ā wa al-Marja'iyāt* (Qirtaj: Maṭb'at Tūnis, 2015), 309-310.

¹⁰ He is Abū al-Ṭayyib Sahl bin Muḥammad bin Sulaymān, the *muftī* of Nishapur and the Shafī'ī jurist. Al-Suyūṭī counted him as the reviver of the fourth century AH. He has wonderful words, including, "He who issued before his time has confronted his humiliation." His father revered him and said about him "Sahel Walad." He died in the year 404 AH. See Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin 'Uthmān, *Sīyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1984), 17/207-209.

¹¹ Abū Bakr Aḥmad bin al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'b al-Īmān*, ed. Abī Hājar Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 1/210; al-

Abū Iṣḥāq al-Isfarāyīnī presented a new thesis for the theory of earning in the context of its development in the Ash‘arī thought when he said: “The voluntary actions of the servants happen by the sum of the two powers, the power of Allah Almighty, and the power of the servants that occur, that they are all related to the action.”¹²

His student, al-Bayhāqī, explained his words when he asked about the action of a servant; is it possible for those who are able? Then he answered by saying: “Yes, one of them creates it and invents it and brings it out of nothingness, which is Allah Almighty. And the second earns it and does not create it, and that is the servant.... The eternal power affects invention, and the present power affects the earning”¹³.

As for the second school, it is Islamic philosophy represented by Ibn Rushd, and before him Ibn Sīnā, where the conception of evil for them was based on a compatibility between divine power and realistic causes, meaning that Allah may decree evil for a wisdom that leads to the good of man. Allah wisdom necessitated the creation of a little evil alongside a lot of good, and a little evil, even if it was a cause of disruption for a few people, then it is a cause of guidance for most of them, and therefore it is necessary to look at the issue from different angles, not direct representation between the witnessed and what is absent.

This rationalistic conception is not absent from Ibn Sīnā’s theory of evil, which is his conception that what flows from the Creator is absolute good, and what we see of evil is only a willingness to accept a flaw in the world of the universe and corruption, meaning that the

Bayhaqī, *al-I‘tiqād wa al-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), 92-93.

¹² ‘Iḍ al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān bin Aḥmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 312.

¹³ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘b al-Īmān*, 1/210-211.

deficiency is not in the action itself, but the deficiency has its causes. The special nature of our world necessitates the acceptance of this evil.”¹⁴

Through this direction, the Muslim philosophers attach the issue of fate and destiny to the subjective preparedness of man concerning the external causes on which Allah has arranged the existents so that the assignment is established between two wills, oneself and one external, meaning that the actions of people are linked to internal and external causes, so the internal causes are the will of man. It is the one that makes him feel free, and the external causes are the will of Allah represented in the laws of nature, and it is the necessity and it is what the person thinks directs his action and deludes him that he is forced.

According to Ibn Rushd, the decree and predestination take place by the internal and external causes, which he says: “The actions attributed to us are done by our will and the agreement of the actions from outside, which are represented by the power of Allah”.¹⁵ While we find al-Ghazālī from the Ash‘arīs invoking the issue of earning as a justification for the assignment, which is the vital center in the burden of responsibility as he represents Allah on earth, as it is the assignment alone that qualifies the person to assume his responsibility, and to play his full role in the reconstruction and righteousness of the land.¹⁶

Allah Almighty has given humankind the means of knowledge that enable them to perceive the events that

¹⁴ Muḥammad al-Rashīd Dhībī, *al-Ma‘rifah wa al-Tawḥīd bayn al-Ghazālī wa Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd: Muqārabah Ta’sīsiyyah li Khilāfat al-Insān* (Tunisia: Majma‘ Ifrīqiyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Tawḥīq wa al-Nashr, 2020), 369.

¹⁵ Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adillah fī ‘Aqā’id al-Millah* (Tunisia: Sirās li al-Nashr, 2009), 67.

¹⁶ Dhībī, *al-Ma‘rifah wa al-Tawḥīd*, 358-359.

occur in the world. Therefore, misfortunes that have befallen us are nothing but *āyat* (sign, indication), and the lexical meaning of the *āyah*, every believer draws from this sign or the indication different lessons, and the signs are not read in the light of phrases, but in the light of lessons, and this meaning is supported by the Almighty's saying: "So reflect, O men of sight."¹⁷ Ibn 'Āshūr interpreted the expression "of sight" as "pondering over the signification of things by way of their requirements, ends, and causes, which is an act of contemplation, and that is the act of giving advice."¹⁸ According to Gormaz,¹⁹ this verse can be a material for consideration that enriches our faith dimension if we look at the level of deviations that have dragged man into loss, whether at the level of individuals, societies or even regimes. Also, what we see today of military tyranny, economic exploitation and moral decline that extends almost all aspects of human existence.

That man is no longer able to define terms of his responsibility before himself and before others, and to the level of unreasonable limits – have all made man lose a sense of responsibility before his Creator. The Almighty said: "Corruption has appeared on land and sea for what people's hands have earned, to make them taste some of what they did, so that they may come back."²⁰ According to Ibn 'Āshūr, the corruption that appears in the world is a result of what people had earned and so it had been good, their situation would have been good.²¹

¹⁷ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Ḥashr: 2.

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah, 1984), vol. 29, 29-72.

¹⁹ Muḥammad Ghūrmāz, *Uṣūl Qirā'at al-Maṣ'ā'b wa al-Āfāt fī al-Islām fī Zill Nāzilāt Fayrūs Kūrūnā*, <http://palscholars.com/post/6361>.

²⁰ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Rūm: 41.

²¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 2, 110.

Another lesson that may become evident to us through this calamity is that this pandemic did not exclude an individual or any group so that a person would not be biased towards himself and neglect his responsibility by relying on the mistakes of others. Rather, all of humanity today is concerned with this pandemic, so that everyone can look inwardly, have self-introspection, and contemplate the standard of existence that almost falls into the illusion of loss without having any guarantee of any kind of certainty. Allah addressed his greatest Prophet thus: "And it has been revealed to you and to those before you. If you make an association, your work will be null and void, and you will be among the losers."²² Ibn 'Āshūr said that whatever the situation is, the intended meaning is to expose the people of the one to who He had revealed the message since the obligation of invoking the prophet is unexpected.²³

Among the great benefits are also those that can restore our behavior towards ourselves and others in our relationship with our Creator, which is direct and vertical communication between the power of the unseen and individuals one by one. This epidemic dissolved that historical mediation between Allah and his creation through religious institutions. We have seen this in a Christian clergyman, expressing that there is "a happy and spontaneous harmony between God and Caesar."²⁴

Even though Covid-19 has referred many urgent and necessary questions to the clergy, this represents a case of disengagement from the complexity of preventing direct communication with Allah, which has complicated the

²² The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Zūmar: 65.

²³ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol 25, 58.

²⁴ Shūfālīh, Jān Jāk, *Tārīkh al-Fīkr al-Siyāsī min al-Madīnah al-Dawlah ilā Dawlah al-Qawmīyah*, trans. Muḥammad 'Arab Ṣāṣīlā (Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-Jam'iyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1998), 148.

task of scholars, as it became their duty to provide a convincing explanation of the phenomenon from a religious angle, and at the same time, giving the individual the opportunity to rebuild self-reconciliation with Allah. Thus, everyone re-reads the intellectual templates that were presented in the form of ready propaganda accusing religion of failing to understand calamities and developments that occur in the societies and trying to forcibly accuse it of backwardness and inability to unable human necessities and explain such ethical justification through *Shari'ah* principles.

Perhaps what appeared on the social media pages and web articles, research, speeches and television series on many satellite channels are serious attempts to justify a balanced discourse that tries to reconcile the established principles and variables. The first is related to Allah's decree and judgment, a matter related to His absolute knowledge. Allah, the Almighty says: "Does he not know who He created, and He is the All-Subtle, the All-Knowing?"²⁵ The intended sense according to Ibn 'Āshūr is as if God says, "Does He who created you not know what you show and what you keep secret and he is the Knowing and Subtle?" Subtle is One who knows the inners of things and One who manages them with his wisdom. Knowing means One who knows everything and no tacit incidents remain unknown to Him.²⁶ It is the knowledge that must lead him to the purpose of worship and its requirements. The closer he gets to his Creator, the more he ascends to perfection. And by realizing the purpose of worship, man is liberated from all servitude to other than his Creator.²⁷

²⁵ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Mūlk: 14

²⁶ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 29, 31.

²⁷ Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Muṣliḥ, "Maqāṣid al-Khalq wa Jawhar al-Tarbīyyah al-Aṣīl: Dirāsah fī Ḍaw' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *The*

The second is related to the law of Allah that He revealed in consideration of people's interests and needs. It has been proven by the Qur'an that the legal causes are the subject of the judgment of Allah and His Messenger, and with their occurrence through their causes, are regarded as Allah's decree. This is the Lord's law and that is His decree, just as the law of the Almighty is not contravened by predestination causes, rather He makes pass through their causes and what they were created for, so the legal causes do not deviate from their cause and what they are legislated for.²⁸

Challenges of the Legal Discourse between Jurisprudence and its Purposes

The pandemic has undoubtedly raised questions for many scholars. Questions ranging from mutual greetings to bathing those who died of the virus. In between these two are many rulings with multiple descriptions, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Of the most eminent of these questions is the legality of suspending congregational daily prayers and Jumu'ah prayers in mosques.

All of these issues are directly related to the impact of the pandemic on individuals and societies. It has transcended all political, economic and security structures and religion has had strong negative or positive effects on the extent of the epidemic or its decline.

The most important shock that faced the Muslims was how to deal with the new reality, which brought out religious assumptions into the circle of research with its effects that relate to the goals of *Shari'ah*. In other words, there has been a process of revival and a very vibrant

Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies 38(2) (1442AH), 186.

²⁸ 'Alī al-Ṣallābī, "Fiqh al-Muwāzanah bayn al-Akhdh bi al-Asbāb wa al-Tawakkal 'alā Allāh fī Zill Wabā' al-'Aṣr Kūrūnā," *al-Jazīrah*, accessed March 26, 2020.

spirit in religious thought, which has been blacked out for centuries. Accordingly, scholars turned to the argumentation of *Shari'ah*, through which they routed the devotional behavior of Muslims in the time of coexistence with this epidemic.

The *Shari'ah* would not have neglected a matter of people's affairs of this importance, as the Almighty said: "We have not neglected anything in the Book."²⁹ Ibn 'Āshūr says that negligence here means to abandon and ignore, and the sentence functions as a confirmation of God's encompassing of all things and the infinite scope of His knowledge and Power.³⁰ The Qur'an clearly indicates that Allah Almighty has removed hardship from the believers in his religion. Allah says: "And He has not placed upon you in religion any hardship"³¹. This comes, as Ibn 'Āshūr says, in the sense that it is easier to work with it when the higher objective of the sharia is fulfilled, and the same meaning appears in several other Qur'anic verses.³² Allah also says: "Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity."³³ The expression "beyond capacity" here and according to Ibn 'Āshūr, means beyond one's own ability of they have had been accustomed to do.³⁴

Perhaps the most important hardship faced by people is the issue of quarantine which brought out the issue of reliance and patience on the one hand, and precaution in observance of the purpose of *Shari'ah* on the other. The response to that was that there is no conflict at all between the consideration for the infectiousness of diseases and the faith of trust in Allah, for no disease is transmissible by itself. Rather, it is by the power of Allah, the Exalted, the

²⁹ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-An'ām: 38

³⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 7, 217.

³¹ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Hajj: 78.

³² Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 18, 350.

³³ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Baqarah: 286.

³⁴ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 3, 135.

Majestic, and it is from complete trust and affirmed belief in Allah that a person takes the means to guard against infectious diseases.³⁵ The scholars did recognize this in the Sunnah.

The Prophet (PBUH), said to ‘A’ishah, when she asked him about the plague: “It was a punishment that Allah sends to whomever He wills, so Allah made it a mercy for the believers. There is no servant who will be afflicted with plague and he patiently remains in his country, knowing that nothing will happen to him but only what Allah has written for him, except that he will have the same reward as a martyr.” And he (PBUH), said: “A sick person [with the contagious disease] should not enter upon a healthy person.” These are incontrovertible proofs indicating the legality of quarantine, not as purely a matter of worldly interaction; but as an act of worship that could earn one the reward of a martyr. which is what the nature of the discourse refers to, for it is exhortation as in the first hadith, and legislative as in the second hadith, and we know that this is required of the *Shari’ah* in its origins as the Almighty said: “Whatever the prophet has brought to you; take it, and whatever he forbids you to do; abstain from it”.³⁶ This verse, for Ibn ‘Āshūr, is comprehensive as it indicates all that comes from the Prophet peace be with him by way of what he says or does and so it includes all that is part of his tradition, the Sunna.³⁷

Due to the *Shari’ah* justifications and the painful events that have been caused by epidemics throughout history, Muslim scholars tried to confront the emotional state that wanted to take the lead in a fatwa. As a result, many voices of intellectual weight arose, contributed a large share of awareness and pointed to the logical bases

³⁵ Muḥammad ‘Alī Balā‘ū, *Nawāzil al-Awbi’ah* (Birmingham: n.p, 2020), 16.

³⁶ The Qur’an, Sūrah al-Ḥashr: 7.

³⁷ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 28, 87.

of social issues in the fundamental texts of *Shari'ah*. One of these contributions was represented in topics raised by Ibrahim bin Abdullah Al-Ansari on the Noble Quran Radio in Qatar that directly related to the current disaster, and how to deal with Covid 19 pandemic such as mockery, indifference, fright, panic buying, and how to deal with conflicting information and rumors.

Perhaps the most important element addressed in this radio program is the difference in fatwas and understanding the reality, and what he mentioned about the need to differentiate between individual fatwas that are given to an individual on a specific religious issue relating to that individual and the general fatwas that a relevant authority directs to its people, warning that such should be handled emotionally. For, fatwas require abstention from emotions and subjectivity.³⁸

In the same context, scholars are trying to respond to urgent questions so that they do not slip into individual opinions in which the public takes the scholarly religious issues into its hand as it happens in politics. Politicians then began showing their positions under the influence of these social media pages, in a purely populist manner. But *Shari'ah* is extremely sensitive to emotional interference, as the matter is related to the religion, and religion has its principles and requires a specialization that qualifies those who work with it to base that upon evidence, taking into account the principles and purposes.

From here, my interpretation of Fatwa No. 3 of the Specialized Committee of the International Union of Muslim Scholars issued on 24/ 03/2020, corresponding to Rajab 28, 1441, which ruled that it is not permissible to perform Friday prayers, emulating the imam via radio or

³⁸ Ibrāhīm bin ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, “Barnāmij Qaḍāyā Shabābīyyah,” al-Ḥalaqah 57, Iḍā‘at al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, Doha, Qatar, <http://youtu.be/m6fZdAjcAys>

television broadcasts and that it should rather be performed Zuhr prayer. This indicates an advanced mind that understands the goals of *Shari'ah*, and that the reason for the fatwa that it is impermissible to pray remotely behind an imam via television or radio or the Internet is to avoid a great evil represented in the possibility of neglecting the attendance of congregational prayers and belittling these rites if these fatwas are spread. Consequently, the people continue to do so even after the epidemic is gone. It then becomes a habit, breaking the religious rule so everyone opens his television and stays at home and prays his Friday prayer, which is not far from happening after the fatwa becomes established.

Therefore, the suspension of congregational prayers can be enforced for months, and perhaps more, for do not know when this epidemic will go. Perhaps closing a door like this preserves the position of acts *of worship*, and *their* place among Muslims, and closes the doors of tampering with such.

In the same context related to this pandemic, i.e., the subject of suspending daily congregational and Friday prayers and closing mosques from legitimate institutions, we find those who tried to address the issue among scholars, with the help of specialists among doctors and issued *fatwās* related to the outbreak of this epidemic.

A *fatwā* was issued by the European Council for Fatwa and Research in its thirtieth session on the following question: "Is there anything in the Shariah that states that physical health should be prioritized over performing acts of worship? What is the evidence from the noble Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet for suspending prayers in mosques in these circumstances?"³⁹

³⁹ "Al-Mustajiddāt al-Fiqhīyyah li Fayrūs Kūrūnā Kūfid 19," *Fatwā 30/3*, al-Bayān al-Khitāmī lil Dawrah al-Tāri'ah al-Thalāthīn li al-Majlis al-Ūrubbī li al-Ifā' wa al-Buḥūth al-Mun'aqidah min 01 ilā 04 Sha'bān 1441AH, 25-28 March 2020.

The committee's response was: "The Islamic teachings calling for the preservation of human life and the protection of man against all harms, and considered this matter among the supreme values that religion came to inculcate.

The religion's concern with protecting human life has reached the extent that the Holy Qur'an has permitted the Muslims in the case of compulsion; he utters the word disbelief in order to protect themselves. Allah Almighty said: "Whoever disbelieves after his belief, except for one who is forced and his heart is at peace with faith, but whoever opens his heart to disbelief, then they will have wrath from Allah, and they will have a great punishment."⁴⁰ Coercion, according to Ibn 'Āshūr, means to force one to do that which they do not want to do, and so it part of burdening them with more than what they can bear and take.⁴¹

Hence, it is correct, as a matter of priority, to suspend prayers in mosques in order to preserve lives. Prayers are therefore to be performed at home. There are *Shari'ah* principles as proof of the permissibility of not establishing congregational prayers in mosques under these circumstances like "harm must be removed", "there should be no harm or reciprocation of harm", "necessities allow prohibitions", "hardship brings facilitation", and others. The Hadith recorded by Al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurairah said: The Prophet, said "A sick person [with contagious disease] should not enter upon a healthy person."⁴²

Medical doctors have asserted that the carrier of the virus may not show any symptoms for a long time, so he transmits the infection to everyone who meets him.⁴³ The

⁴⁰ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Naḥl: 106.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 14, 294.

⁴² Muslim fī Ṣaḥīḥih, Ḥadīth Raqam 2221

⁴³ Al-Bayān al-Khitāmī, Fatwa: 30/3.

Council also mentioned in its answer the permissibility of Friday prayers from a distance by watching television or radio "Friday prayers in homes behind the radio or television, direct broadcasting, or any other means of network communication is not permissible and does not substitute for the Friday prayer, and the Zuhr prayer is not waived for the one who prayed it in this way."⁴⁴ Although these fatwas contradict the desires of people, which are often consistent with social residues and emotional reactions that may be caused by a person's attachment to worship or opposition to opponents of religiosity, or a loose whim, and no matter how people's conditions change. It is necessary to adhere to the principles of *Shari'ah* to achieve its general purposes.

Where we find that the *Shari'ah* came to expel those responsible for the motives of their whims so that they may be servants of Allah, and this meaning, if proven, does not meet with the supposition that laying down the *Shari'ah* according to the whims of souls and seeking their immediate benefits, how they were, and our Lord Almighty said: "And if the creation had followed their desires, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been corrupted."^{45,46} This is conditioned on the expression, "most of them do not like the truth," according to Ibn 'Ashūr, which is a way of further abominating them for submitting to their desires and whims.⁴⁷ Rather, the principle is the general intent of repelling the evils, bringing the benefits and weighing them according to the principles of the *Shari'ah*, and the benefit is achieved in reality.

The search for the ruling to be free of all impurities so that the intent of the legislator is achieved; What is

⁴⁴ Al-Bayān al-Khitāmī, Fatwa: 30/4.

⁴⁵ The Qur'an, Sūrah al-Mū'minūn: 71.

⁴⁶ Al-Shātibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 2/351.

⁴⁷ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 18, 91.

considered according to *Shari'ah* or the corruptions that are considered according to *Shari'ah* is pure and not tainted by any evil whatsoever.⁴⁸

We see these huge jurisprudential outputs that surrounded the most important inconvenience caused by the emergence of the virus (Covid 19), whether from the legal aspect or *concerning* direct real-world transactions, because in their entirety and detail they are intended by the Law Giver, as human existence itself is meant to be successive – a goal that is only achievable through mankind's habitation of the earth and building of civilizations. The Almighty said: "He created you from the earth and mandated you to populate it."⁴⁹ "Creation" here means origination, and "populate" means parts of the purpose of developing and inhabiting the hearth.⁵⁰

Accordingly, we find that these fatwas and opinions that have tried to direct people to escape from this imminent epidemic are, in their entirety, means by which interests are achieved, which the *Shari'ah* meant. These same means transcend their value as much as the value of the purposes that it aims to achieve, and since the goal is to preserve souls and the order for their preservation is restricted, it means human souls enjoy rank was more honorable status. For, "enjoining good is a means to achieve the benefits of that good. If that good is of extended time, then the order to achieve would also have extended time, and if it is time-restrained, then the order would also be time restrained so that the benefit does not get lost."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2/341.

⁴⁹ The Qur'an, Sūrah Hūd: 61.

⁵⁰ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr*, vol. 12, 108.

⁵¹ 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz bin 'Abd al-Salām, *al-Qawā'id al-Kubrā al-Mawsūm bi Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Iṣlāḥ al-Anām*, ed. Nazīh Kamāl Ḥammād & 'Uthmān Jum'ah Ḍamīrīyyah (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), 1/177.

In this great crisis, Islamic thought took a decisive position in dealing with it, following a moderate approach open to the legitimate purposes and human interests in general, heading to its origins and examining its evidence, balancing the interests that can be brought about and the evils that it strives to push away and ward off. It thereby mirrors a just Ummah "in thinking and feeling – an Ummah that is not rigid on what it knows and does not close against itself outlets of experience and knowledge, neither does it follow every croaker, or imitate in a funny monkey-like manner. It holds on to its perceptions, approaches and fundamentals, and looks at every product of thought and experimentation with its enduring motto: the truth is a lost property of the believer. Wherever he finds it, he takes it with steadfastness and certainty."⁵²

And one of the most beautiful narrations recorded in this regard is that on the authority of Ali bin Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him: "People are three, an Allah-fearing scholar, a learner seeking a path of salvation, a rabble of a mob, the followers of every squawk, who lean with every wind, do not seek enlightenment by the light of knowledge, and do not resort to a close corner).

Conclusion

Islamic jurisprudence through its branch of the high objectives of the *Sharī'ah* (*maqāsid*), has played a tremendous active role in inspiring people to face all sorts of renewed challenges, whether those that are practically related to their lived circumstances or various other concerns. Creed in this context has in place a wide range of incentives to motivate society members to exert effort

⁵² Alī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qarah Dāghī, *Mabādī' 'Āmmah li al-Ta'āyush wa Taṣḥīḥ wa Ta'sīl li Ba'd al-Mafāhīm* (Tunisia: al-Ittiḥād al-'Ālamī li 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn & al-Sharikah al-Tūnisīyyah li al-Nashr wa Tanmiyah Funūn al-Rasm, 2018), 23.

to face their challenges and to become aware of the true value of their human existence.

Today, at a more abstract intellectual level, there is a serious challenge in the Islamic discourse. This challenge is to be able to establish an epistemological bridge that connects the fundamentals and universals with the particulars in this field of studying emerging epidemics. Some aspects which I have tried to articulate through the dialectic of originality and contemporariness in this article are based on the consideration of the high objectives of the *Shari'ah*. We find that the presence of Islamic discourse was not typical, but was vital due to the necessity imposed by the emerging facts and the sharp decline of the thought of the others, whose material foundations seemed to be weak and incoherent in the face of the force of the pandemic and its sweeping effects on all levels of life. It is a great opportunity to find in this vitality and vigilance of Islamic thought at a difficult stage of human life the objective justification to spur the mind of the Ummah and drive it to active participation in resolving issues affecting humanity that suffers the dilemma of materialism and the failure of the ethics of globalization to solve the complex problems and establish peace.

To sum up, we may invoke three main conclusions at the closure of this study. Firstly, Islamic thought has historically kept up with the recurrent changes and changing reality of Muslims and has never been absent at the intellectual level from contributing discussion to the question of health crises and pandemics. Its contributions have been made both at the level of creed, law and jurisprudence. Secondly, Muslim scholars have always found in Islamic thought the legal justifications that enabled them to contain tribulations and deal with them in more positive and balanced ways despite the many material and social obstacles. Thirdly, the world needs Islam which has a creedal, intellectual and moral reservoir

for contributing to world peace and correcting the view of material civilization and the flow of negative globalization.

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