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PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMIC SOTERIOLOGY AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS

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Abstract: Understanding of the afterlife significantly determines life of members of individual religions and this article defines how Muslims understand the last realities, which paths lead to *Jannat* (heaven) and which to *Jahannam* (hell), and how these afterlife dwellings are presented in Qur'an. Demonstration of Islamic soteriology includes a description of differences between the *Sunni* and the *Shia* interpretation of salvation, because the differences between them are often overlooked or remain in the background due to the generally widespread *Sunni* interpretation of Islam. Finally, the article opens the question of who is, according to the Islamic teaching, the recipient of salvation and shows why it is difficult to give a one-dimensional answer to the question whether only the righteous Muslims will be saved or if the salvation is also intended to be achievable to adherents of other religions or even to non-religious.

Key Words: Islam, redemption, Islamic soteriology, The afterlife, *Sunni*, *Shia*, *Barzakh*, *Jannat*, *Jahannam*, martyrdom, sin, repentance

Introduction

The last judgement, along with belief in the absolute unity of God, angels, the holy book, Messengers of God and the destiny, is the fundamental teaching of Islam, which could be summarised in three truths: *Tawhid* (faith in God), *ResAllah* (belief in the truths of intermediaries between God and human beings) and *Akirah* (belief in the truths on the afterlife). As we read in Qur'an, those who believe in these realities and live a righteous life will be rewarded with delights of paradise (Qur'an 2:62).

The first thing for a person, who wishes to enter in paradise gardens, must unconditionally fulfil the basic requirement: to accept the existence of God and to believe in him. The one who is directed toward the religion and inclining to truth (Qur'an 10:105, 30:30) and who fulfils its requirements, will live under the loving God's auspices. Allah will save those who feared Him and no evil will touch them. (Qur'an 39:61)

Return to the source

Islamic eschatology or the so-called *ma'ād* - return to the origin, is part of Islamic belief. If we take a look at the human destiny immediately after death, then the image, offered by Islamic teaching, is the following: when a man dies, the angel of death, Israel, separates a soul from a body. Since the death person is aware of their own body, they can observe the ritual of own funeral, and during the first night in the grave, two angels, Munkar and Nakir, question them about personal religion and life.¹

The reality between the time of individual's death and the time of resurrection, which will appear at the end of the world, is called *Barzakh*.² The term, meaning a barrier is mentioned in this context only once in Qur'an 23:99-100, but Chittick explains it as the time and place, which simultaneously separates and connects the two worlds – earthly and otherworldly or to say physical and spiritual. According to him a person in *Barzakh* exists in an imaginary body, and not in the body that a person had before the death. The substance of this new, imaginary body is the result of person's deeds and therefore in some way an individual is a creator of his or her own body in *Barzakh*. Nevertheless, that imaginativeness is not in the fact that *Barzakh* is untrue, because as Chittick points out, in Islamic eschatology it is conceived to be quite the opposite: since it is a higher level of existence, it is much more real than this world.³

The way of existence in *Barzakh* depends primarily on what the man's this-world life was like: if a person believed, carried out good acts and fulfilled talents that have been given to him by God, his stay in *Barzakh* will also be pleasant.⁴ „For the wicked, terrifying angels extract the souls after

death and sinners suffer tortures. In contrast, those who perform good deeds and prayed regularly during their lifetimes experience a foretaste of Paradise before returning to the grave to await final judgement.”⁵

In order to help people on this way to good life in *Barzakh* and later haven, God has sent the messenger Mohamed to the world, and him, by divine inspiration, taught people and showed them the path (Qur'an 5:19) through his life and through the Holy Qur'an. The *clear word of the Book* helps to direct people on the path of salvation and to guide them.⁶

Given the fact that salvation involves many aspects, not just the afterlife, the benefits of the good and just life may be enjoyed already in this world. Anthropologist Hazizan Md. Noon⁷ points out different perspectives from which we can look at salvation: it can be a salvation from hazard, whether physical or non-physical, it can be redemption from the God's disapproval, anger and punishment, for the committed sins, or it can be a salvation as a form of success in this life and/or in hereafter. When Allah created the world, he promised the man not to be neither hungry nor naked in paradise, and not to be thirsty or exposed to burning heat (Qur'an 20:118–20), but under one condition: a human should not approach the forbidden tree.⁸ Thus, the man has been warned to stay away of wrongdoing and to not let him to be seduced by Iblis (*Saytan* or Satan). These two warnings can also be viewed beyond restrictions, since they are also reflecting the God's concern for a human and human's freedom to independently act and decide. This freedom is precisely what has led Adam and Eve to trust more to Satan than to God's admonition (Qur'an 7:21–22). But still, after consuming the forbidden fruit, the first two people realized that they strayed from the right path and immediately admitted their guilt to God and asked for forgiveness.⁹ Since they showed remorse immediately after they committed the sin, God forgave them, but Qur'an also states that remorse of those, who have been committing crimes all their lives and show penitence only before their death, is vain: such people shall face painful suffering (Qur'an 4:18).

Since Christianity and Islam developed similar „a moral code and ethical principles based on fundamental distinctions between good and evil,”¹⁰ we can see that although the stories about disobedience of first humans in both religious traditions are related, because they have a similar purpose and concepts,¹¹ but the essential differences between the texts found in the Bible and between those found in Qur'an give a basis to different theologies.

While Christians believe that all people are marked by original sin and therefore all need salvation, which is offered through Christ, Muslims on the other hand believe that humanity is not marked by original sin and that people are born innocent. Explained with the words of Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub Adam is the first prophet of Islam but not the (first) sinner, as he is for Christians. By Islamic understanding Adam did not bring the sin into this world, but started the history of salvation.¹² Even more:

Muslims believe that people are fundamentally oriented to good and to God and they call this the *Fitra*. Those who succumb to Satan's temptations and surrender to the sin do not do so because of their sinful nature, but because they have a free will. The fact that Islam knows no fall of humanity or original sin is also the reason that Muslims do not expect a saviour, who would assume their sins upon him in order to redeem them.

Islamic soteriology

Francois Facchini defines Islam as a monotheistic religion of salvation because Muslims believe in the Judgement Day, redemption and punishment, but when talking about Islam, the understanding of the concept of salvation is somewhat controversial if we look at it from the Christian perspective.¹³ The first controversy lies in the fact that the Prophet Mohamed is not understood as a saviour but as a God's prophet and intermediary, who has transmitted the Holy Qur'an to people, while the second derives from the heterogeneity of Islam.

While *Sunni* believe that God, through Mohamed with Qur'an and *Hadith*, said everything people need to know, the belief that dominates in *Shia* Islam suggests that Imams are God's representatives on earth. Only they can unmistakably interpret the sacred sources of Islam, and thus, to some extent, also change the doctrine. In the first religious communities Imams were Mohamed's descendants and according to the *Shia* doctrine they were the only ones that had power, knowledge and the right to interpret Qur'an and give directions to believers. This had a considerable impact on understanding of the concept and application of *Ijtihad*, as it will be presented.

Difference between Sunni and Shia

The very concept of *Ijtihad* means an explanation of Qur'an and *Sunna*, and finding the right path through rational argument. Although different Muslim authors disagree on the question whether some of the provisions from Qur'an or *Sunna* were actually abrogated (*Naskh*) at any time, the possibility of abolishment of Qur'an or *Sunna* guidelines was possible only when the fundamental norms of Islamic law were just created and not at any later time.¹⁴ Revocation of the given laws by introducing new ones is namely contrary to the belief that Qur'an is fully, literally and directly God-revealed word and is also incompatible with the belief that what was said and done by Prophet Mohamed, is in accordance with the revelation, which cannot be and is not allowed to be changed. Therefore, the representatives of the traditional Islam reject the idea that Qur'an is influenced by time and place where it was transmitted to people. Rather than of *Ijtihad* they stress the importance of imitation (*Taqlid*): the practice that means to follow a *mujtahid* and to accept his legal decisions without knowing or/and questioning the basis of his decisions,¹⁵ and some

commentators say that with *Taqlid* Muslims went from the dynamically developmental to the stoic and passive understanding of history and in that this way opened a space for non-critical and ahistorical development of consciousness.¹⁶ But, as we shall see, the *Sunni* and the *Shia* fundamentally differ in understanding and applying of *Ijtihad*.

Different understanding of leadership

When Islamic law has been forming and developing the members of the (young) Islamic community realized that some questions are not answered in Qur'an or in the *Sunna*. Therefore, many different interpretations of original sources appeared at that time and different methods of obtaining answers were formed (*Ijma* and *Qiyas* or *Akl*). After Mohamed's death the task of interpreting revelation and the role of a judge changed. *Shia* believe that the authority of religious leaders – *Imams* – derives from Qur'an and his power which comes from God, is understood as the main and supreme executive power which nothing can change. *Sunni* position is different, as *Sunni* do not understand the *Caliphs* – religious leaders, as set by God. For *Sunni* *Caliphs* are no different from other believers and they are perceived (just) as messengers who were given power by people, and consequently they can also be removed by people.¹⁷

Ijtihad and irreversibility of regulations

Although various authors disagree on whether some regulations have actually been abrogated (*Naskh*), there is somewhat accepted that because of the abundance of different interpretations and in order to protect the doctrine *Sunni* abolished *Ijtihad* around the 11th and 12th century. (The exact time of cancellation of *Ijtihad* cannot be determined, as this decision was more consensual than formal and this event is not confirmed by any document, to which we could refer to.) Thus, from more than one hundred law schools, as many as they existed during the first centuries of Islam, only a few of them outlasted. Today *Sunni* recognize four main branches or so-called schools (*Madhabs*) of *Sunni* Islam: *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*, which were unanimously adopted (*Ijma*). Unlike *Sunni*, *Shia* had never froze *Ijtihad*, since they believe that *Mujahad's* are obliged to lead humanity according to their understanding and explanation of God's laws.

Messianic dimension of Islam

The key idea of *Shia* Islam is the idea of the hidden *Imam*. This secret *Imam* has messianic characteristics and differs completely to *Sunni* believe in Saviour. The idea of the redemptive *Imam* arose in Samara in Iraq, where „(around) the year 874 the twelfth imam ‚disappeared’ when he was eight years old. Instead of choosing the thirteenth *Imam*, *Sunni* asserted that the missing *Imam* would return at the end of times. And the dogma of a hidden *Mahdi* was born.”¹⁸ *Twelvers* are therefore oriented

eschatologically and their belief can be defined as messianic, since they are waiting for the return of the hidden *imam* (*Mahdi*), who will redeem and reward them.¹⁹ But the messianic dimension of *Shia* belief is not necessarily positive, since it can be misused in subversive activities of individuals and groups, as was the case in the event of Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, when many *Shia* considered Homeini as a hidden *imam*.²⁰

Realization of human potentials

William Chittick in analysis of Islamic eschatology in the volume on Islamic spirituality, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, presents different views on human death. *Shia* Mula Sadra (1572–1640) says that death occurs when a person has realized all potentials of his soul,²¹ since the purpose of this-worldly life is realization of potentials. Mula Sadra has certainly been aware of the theory of prominent *Sunni* representative, Sufi Abu Hamid Al Gazali (1058–1111), who vibrantly defined four types of human characteristics: animality, greed, devilishness and dignity. He connected those features with animals (pig, dog and devil) and with the wise man. The later is defined by dignity, most clearly reflected in the human mind (*aql*), and it has to control all other characteristics. The theory of four natures served to Al Gazali to develop the soteriological doctrine, according to which the person maintains those characteristics even after death.²² Al Gazali successor, Sufi Al-Qunawi (d. 1274) for example sustained that a greedy person in hereafter will adopt the image of a pig, and a person who had a bad temper in this life will have an image of a dog in the afterlife,²³ since residents of *Jannat* and *Jahannam* shall be physical beings and their souls shall have a body in order to be more or less close to God²⁴ depending on the characteristics and potentials that they fulfilled in this-worldly life.

But not only human characteristics, also God's characteristics are decisive for human-God relationship. *Hadith* says that Allah has ninety-nine names, which define his features. Thus we are able to find the following among God's names: The most Merciful, The most Gracious, The Beneficent, The Ruler, The most Holy, The Superior, The Creator, The Judge, The Omniscient, and so on. William Chittick emphasizes that according to the *Sharia* law, a person must connect with certain God's names, but in order to truly benefit from them, it's necessary to submit to God's order and step on the way towards God. There are many ways, but it is necessary to choose the right one, as only those will be rewarded, who will exercise their God-like talents and potentials.²⁵

Even Ibn Sina (Avicenna) wrote that soul, which fulfils its potentials, after the death is associated with God and immersed in pure pleasure. Souls, which have failed to reach that goal, will experience different degrees of pleasure and pain, depending on how much they have diverged from the body or remained immersed into this world.²⁶ Sufis Ibn 'Arabi stressed that on the last day God will show himself to people in many

forms, and individuals will recognize him only in a form that will match their beliefs.

The Qur'an story of a sin, which occurred in the Garden of Eden, puts a great emphasis on free will: just as the first two humans, their successors also fall into sin because of their free will. In Islam the sin is not a result of the human sinful nature: „a factor causing chaos and disaster (*fasād*) is always a human, and it never originates directly from God. God rejects *fasād* and is on the side of those who maintain or restore balance, order and peace (*'islāh*).”²⁷

As highlighted by Noon, individual's freedom is based on his intellect and spiritual abilities, and in addition, with ability of distinguishing between good and bad²⁸ and with this God gave the power to people to decide and to choose the right path without burdening them beyond their abilities (Qur'an 23:62; 6:152). Paradise tree, whose fruit was forbidden to a human, was not placed there because of some kind of God's whim and because God had wanted to test the human; instead it was placed there so that the human would have a choice and to be able to develop and to realize their talents and potentials. Otherwise, even the (potential) obedience of Adam and Eve would be nothing else than determinism. Imam Ja'far says that on judgement day, God will ask people about their approach toward realities that had been entrusted to them and not about the things that were predetermined.²⁹ Hence, according to this theory, there is no predestination in Islam, so that an individual can decide which path to take and on the aim that one wishes to reach.

Afterlife living places

After the death, and after the period of *Barzakh*, a time of judgement will come and then human actions will be put on the scale.³⁰ This will happen on the Judgement Day, when the most equitable scale – *mizan* (pl. *mevazin*) will be placed before the throne of Allah. This scale measures so accurately that no one will be wronged (Qur'an 21:47). This is possible because this scale, according to Al Gazali, is completely different to everything we know (405-406). It is a symbol of Allah's perfection and provides believers with an immeasurable God's righteousness and order. Even if something weighs only as much as a mustard seed, it shall be punished or awarded and no action will go unnoticed (Qur'an 21:47). Imam Ja'far says that at the Judgement Day the dead will remember everything they have done so clearly as if it happened in that moment.³¹

When that day will come, when the people will be judged and when a heavenly or hellish shelter will be set for them, nobody knows, except God. Then,³² the God will call people to assume responsibility for their actions. On Judgement Day every person will have its actions tied around his neck (Qur'an 17:13) and everyone will be judged righteously according to their actions.³³

According to this scale the *Jahannam* will be on the left and the *Jannat* on the right side. Also, bad actions shall be placed on the left and good ones on the right side of the scale (Qur'an 7:8-9). In Qur'an the haven is described as incredibly beautiful garden (*al-Jannah*) or as Gardens of Eden (*Jannat*).³⁴ There are rivers of water, milk, wine and honey and God's forgiveness lives there (Qur'an 47:15). Those are gardens of enjoyment (Qur'an 2:25; 5:65) where inhabitants can enjoy in fountains (Qur'an 44:52; 51:15), castles and rivers (Qur'an 4:13; 9:72; 14:23; 22:14; 47:12; 61:12; 64:9). At the new creation, God will also remake women: They will become virgins (Qur'an 2:25), who shall be appealing to their husbands and of the same age as them (Qur'an 56:35-36).

Instead, those, who were condemned and destined to an eternal punishment, shall live in burning fire and boiling water (Qur'an 56:42-44). The fuel of the hellfire are namely people, who did not believe (enough), who just enjoyed and ate like animals (Qur'an 47:12), those, who did not pray and did not feed the poor, but who rather chatted with idlers, and those who denied the coming of the Judgement Day (Qur'an 74:40-46). And finally there are also those who opposed the Qur'an verses (Qur'an 64:10). Those shall live in sickness and poverty after their death (Qur'an 2:214). Habitants of *Jahannam* will drink boiling water, which will cook their intestines so hard to make them fall apart (Qur'an 47:15) and the sinners heads will burn in the fire (Qur'an 33:66).

Repentance

„Islam also teaches that the human person has an elevated nature above all other created beings. In Islam, human beings are believed as created by God in order to represent him on earth, and hence Islam requires human responsibility in all earthly endeavours.”³⁵ A person who is indulging in sin and who risks to never cross the threshold of paradise gardens is harming mostly himself. Decision to submit to God's rules and eventually to example of Mohamed, is a person's free choice. During a lifetime an individual can choose the way of life and the amount of the enjoyments. But individual's afterlife depends on his choices in this life, and it is precisely because of freedom and responsibility, which are conferred on him, that a man is capable to move toward or away from the Grace and Light, which fills the universe.³⁶ In the earthly life, a man can neglect the values and instructions of Qur'an, and live in stark contrast to the example of Muhammad and his community, but after his death and on the Judgement Day, all of the freely chosen works will be placed on the scale that will show what kind of eternal destiny the man actually chose.

Nevertheless, a man has the chance of repentance until the Judgement Day: if a sinner recognizes his sins to Allah and sincerely repents and decides never to repeat the sin again, there is a possibility that the grace of God will be in his favour. Christine Schirrmacher summarized the requirements for forgiveness of sins:³⁷

1. is necessary to repent of own sin and not because of fear of eternal damnation or because of fear of the divine judgement,
2. is necessary to adopt a conclusion that the sin will not be repeated and
3. is necessary to avoid every possible situation, which could lead to a recurrence of a sinful act.

Furthermore, it also applies that a man shall additionally make up for those sinful acts that were committed against people. Popular Islam teaches that is possible to make up for them with fast (*Sawm*) or grace, one of the ways (among others) is also to die as a martyr. Such death would mean a direct access to *Jannat*. Thus, for example Hisham's *Sira* states that the Prophet, before the battle of Badr, promised *Eden* to everyone, who gave a life for it.³⁸ Martyrs therefore go directly to *Jannat* without having to wait for the ruling on the Judgement Day.

The tradition says that martyrs who sacrificed themselves for God, will be rewarded in paradise with seventy-two *houries* (Qur'an 44, 54; 52, 20; 55, 72 and 56, 22) and in addition to being forgiven for their sins, they will also be able to intervene for the seventy ones of their relatives.³⁹

Sins can also be forgiven by going on a pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca.⁴⁰

How to get the afterlife reward?

Despite the fact that we repeatedly read in Qur'an that with the paradise gardens will be awarded those who will avoid sins, believe and perform good deeds (Qur'an 14:23; 22:14), nothing of this is a definitive guarantee. As Islamic exegesis's emphasises, at the end of times, exclusively Allah will decide if one deserves the award or a punishment.⁴¹ Human actions by themselves are not enough and a human can never be sure, what kind of the afterlife fate one will have: „There is, however, no personal certainty, since a personal promise of salvation for the individual believer is found neither in Koran nor in the texts handed down as tradition.”⁴²

This decision is in the hands of God and shall be based on His absolute justice. The best thing that an individual can do is to be as consistent as possible in subordination to God's will.⁴³ The Qur'an states: „Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.” (Qur'an 17:15).

According to Islamic teaching the fact that freedom is double-edged and that it may also take a person away from God,⁴⁴ is better for the one to freely submit to God, than to surrender to the risky freedom, which can lead to perish in his own weaknesses and even Satan's temptations. To help people on their way of righteous life, Allah has sent his messengers „with clear evidence” and revealed them „Scripture and the balance” (Qur'an 57:25). Everyone, to whom Islam has been revealed and is familiar

with Qur'an, is not just privileged but in some way also obliged to choose to submit to God or not.

Sunni believe that there is no intermediary between a man and a God and also the prophet Muhammad is only human for them. On the opposite the *Shia* believe in the concept of redemptive suffering. Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub highlighted the belief that people can be redeemed through a suffering of the Hussein's mother, who is still crying in heaven because of the death of her son and death of his successors. Those, who join this suffering, will be redeemed themselves: anyone who will shed at least one tear for the suffering of *imams* will be rewarded in paradise. At the end, redemption will be accomplished through intervention of the headless Hussein who will stand before God as an intercessor of his own people.⁴⁵

Sunni and *Shia* both believe in the Prophet Muhammad as a human, who is the highest example to all Muslims, as his whole life, everything he did and said, was in accordance with Qur'an. His exemplar behaviour, after which people must comply, is called *Sunna*.

In addition to the sacred text of the Qur'an, Muslims are able to draw upon another major source of guidance in faith and conduct: the example and verbal teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. His words and deeds, his customary behavior, his responses to a variety of problems and questions, even his tacit approval of others' behavior in his presence, became the standard to emulate. The *sunna* (SOON-nah) of the Prophet is his exemplary behavior or precedent. The classic source of information about the *sunna* of the Prophet is the body of tradition known as *hadith* (hah-DEETH), a corpus of literature composed of brief narrative accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet and other spiritual authorities.⁴⁶

Hadith Among the most famous *Hadith* are the Buhari, Muslim and Maliki's collection, which are considered to be genuine (*Sahih*). Finally, we have also the *Sharia* law as the guide of Muslims lives. Since Qur'an contains only about two hundred regulations that can be read as legislative, among the Muslims arise the need for some more concrete definitions and therefore *Sharia* law was created. Today, *Sharia* is the foundation of the legal organisation of the state of approximately one half (almost thirty) members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Despite these differences between *Sunni* and *Shia* in both branches the guidelines of Islamic life – Qur'an, *sunna* (with *hadith*) and the *Sharia* law – lead to the ultimate arbitrator – God. Allah is namely the one, who gave

Qur'an through Muhammad and the one, who will be the ultimate arbiter at the time, known only to him.

Means of salvation

In Qur'an, the earthly life is often described as a brief and fleeting pleasure⁴⁷ and the Islamic theology emphasises that the goal of every occurrence in nature and society is a salvation and eternal life with God.

Stepping on the way toward God includes another important aspect: when a person acts ethically, he realizes his talents and fulfils his duties, and recognizes certain universal rights to himself and to others, says Azhar Ibrahim Alwee. In the debate on ethical dimensions of Islam, he emphasises that the objective of ethical dimension is also in the fact that a man with an ethical attitude changes for the better himself as well as other people.⁴⁸

As a religion, which emphasises vertical dimension of human life, Islam has offered detailed and specific instructions for life, summarized in the five pillars of Islam: a person who wishes to submit to Allah must firstly express their faith. *Shahada* or confession of faith is the first of the five pillars of Islam and is followed by: *Salat* – prayer, *Zakat* – charity, *Sawm* – fast (named also *Ramadan*) and *Hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca. Each Muslim is obliged to daily profess its faith and pray, to give charity, to fast and to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime, if one has the possibility to do so.

As written in Qur'an the reward for the fulfillment of obligations is the most beautiful abode – Eden Gardens (Qur'an 13:22-23). Furthermore, a man must also consider the other instructions, prescribed by Qur'an and *Sunna* with *Hadith*.

Finally, there is hope even for those, who have sinned. In many Qur'an versions an emphasis is put on the grace of Allah, who is forgiving and merciful. As already mentioned people can be redeemed if they regret the wrongdoings, but they can also be redeemed by acts of penance, such as feast or giving of charity and with good deeds (Qur'an 25:70-71). In *Shia* branch we have also seen that the redemption can be reached by martyrdom.

But there are also the unforgivable sins, due to which people will surely end up in the flames of hellfire, and among those the most outstanding one is worship of other Gods: *Allah* is a jealous God and he does not forgive, if you worship another God beside *Allah*. This is the only sin that Allah does not forgive regardless of all the rest. The analogy can also lead us to the conclusion that is not possible to forgive Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man.

Fate of non-Muslims

We often read in Qur'an that those, who die as unbelievers, will end up in hell and in a painful punishment (Qur'an 4:18). Fire and fiendish heat are synonyms for *Jahannam*, since those who disbelieved will burn in fire and the boiling water will be poured on their heads (Qur'an 22:19-21).

But what happens to those who lived a just life, but are not Muslims asks Mohammad Fadel: Can non-Muslims get into *Jannat*, despite the fact that they did not embrace Islam? And will God reward non-Muslims for the good works, which have contributed to the welfare of humanity, despite the fact that they were not Muslims?⁴⁹

One of the possible answers to these questions is that the one, to whom religion has not been presented in the right way, is not to blame. But, if a person rejects Islam without a reason after being properly invited, then the moral responsibility is on him.⁵⁰

While Sufi scholar such as al-Gazali, al-'Arabi and Rashid Rida all believe that God will not punish the good non-Muslims just because they are not Muslims, they also differ „when it comes to explaining how such non-Muslims would indeed be ‘tested’: Al Gazali seems to avoid the issue as he states that God’s mercy will be upon them and that most of humanity will enter Heaven; Ibn al-'Arabi speaks not only of Divine mercy, but also of a Messenger-of-Resurrection being sent to those who did not ‘properly’ receive the Message; and Rashid Rida argues that such individuals will be taken to task according to their own deductions and moral standards.”⁵¹ This was also argued by Ko Nakate, who says that salvation in the Ashary school is not possible, if people did not come into contact with Islam or if they lived in an environment where Islam has not been (properly) presented to them.⁵²

Among *Sunni* from the *Hanbali* school, we can find Ibn Taymiyyaha (1263–1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyaha (1292–1350) who believe that majority of mankind will end up in Hell anyway, otherwise Muhammad’s message would not have a real meaning.⁵³ Such position is according to the Mohammad Hassan Khalil’s opinion more consistent with Qur'an which includes a lot more of those verses which state that non-believers will be damned and that they will end up in hell, than those which emphasise mercy. Khalil namely believes that Islamic point of view on the endless punishment in hell is more a norm than an exception.⁵⁴

When he explored the question of salvation, Khalil also opened an interesting question of whether living in hell will be equally endlessly long as living in paradise. On the basis of theological and legal studies he came to the conclusion that believers will be punished with hell only for a fixed period and that they will, if so wanted by God, leave *Jahannam* after some time. Those, who will die as unbelievers will suffer eternal damnation.⁵⁵ However, he also points out the issue of different interpretations, which

occur due to problems with translations and so, some of them lead to both conclusions – that living in hell will last forever and also that is only temporary.⁵⁶ In this context is also worth to mention the thesis of Ibn al-‘Arabi, who argues that some will stay in *Jahannam* for ever, while claiming that the place itself will change with time and that hell shall be transformed from a place of torture into a place of pleasure, and that ultimately people of *Jahannam* will be separated from the God only by veil.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Heterogeneity of Islam and a small number of studies in the field of Islamic soteriology significantly complicates the study of issues related to human afterlife destiny, but consequently this is the reason why these questions have to be discussed to get better familiarity with Islam.

As often highlighted, Islam is not an unambiguous religion and therefore it also should not be regarded as such, not even then, when the topic is the salvation. The fact is, namely, that Qur’an, as a fundamental and holy book of Muslims, offers specific answers to questions about what is happening with a man after death and why something is happening and not something else. Some of these answers are generally valid and as such they represent the basis of belief of all Muslims, while others differ significantly among themselves depending on the branch of Islam and community, which interprets the issue. Even in this short contribution, we have seen that there are different views on salvation through Messiah, different understandings of martyrdom and even different views on the authority.

Nevertheless, we can finally admit, that there is at least one common denominator for all Muslims, regardless of the branch of Islam that one belongs to: a person is always personally responsible, albeit the fact that Muslims believe in fate (*qisma*) and that everything is written down (*maktub*). The latter means in the first place that everyone will surely stand before Allah and that everyone will be judged according to their actions, which will be written in the Book by which the judgement will take place. „Death marks the end of the period of man's testing on earth, to whom God turns in mercy and pity.”⁵⁸ Therefore, believers must strive to regularly profess their faith, to pray and to consider religious obligations. Those who succeed in this are more likely to enjoy the advantages and benefits of *Jannat* after death, while others and non-Muslims can (only) hope for the grace of Allah.

Notes:

¹ William C. Chittick, "Eschatology", *Islamic Spirituality. Manifestations*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. (London: SCM Press, 1989), 378-409. Qur'an 32:11 states: "The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned."

² Chittick, 380.

³ Chittick, 391.

⁴ Farnaz Ma'sumian, *Life After Death; a Study of the Afterlife in World Religions*, (Rockport, MA: Oneword, 1995), 74-77.

⁵ Janet Starkey, "Death, paradise and the Arabian Nights," *Mortality*, 14, 3 (2009): 297-298.

⁶ "Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And never would We punish until We sent a messenger." (Qur'an 17:15)

⁷ Hazizan Md. Noon, "The Nucleus of Islamic Religion and Its Bearing Upon the Islamic Concept of Salvation and The Practice of Multiculturalism in Contemporary Malaysia," (paper presented at the Conference Salvation and Pluralism in Monotheistic Religions Kyoto Joint Symposium of Cismor and Kirkhs, May 12, 2007)

http://www.cismor.jp/en/coe/coe_publication/joint/documents/Joint_Sympo_2007.pdf (accessed February 29, 2012)

⁸ "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat from wherever you will but do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." (Qur'an 7:19)

⁹ "They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.'" (Qur'an 7:23)

¹⁰ George Cristian Maior, "Human Rights: Political Tool or Universal Ethics?", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 12 issue 36 (2013): 10.

¹¹ Maior, 10.

¹² Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub, "The Idea of Redemption in Christianity and Islam," in *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestation*, ed. by Spencer J. Palmer. Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1983, 105-116. <http://rsctest.byu.edu/archived/selected-articles/ayoub-mahmoud-mustafa-idea-redemption-christianity-and-islam> (accessed February 29, 2012)

¹³ Francois Facchini, "Religion, law and development: Islam and Christianity – Why is it in Occident and not in the Orient that man invented the institutions of freedom?" *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 29 (2010): 103-129.

¹⁴ Mustafa Busuladžić, *Muslimani u Evropi*. (Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 1997): 125.

¹⁵ Frank E. Vogel, "Islamic Law and the Legal System of Saudi Arabia: Studies of Saudi Arabia." (Leiden, Brill 2000): 57.

¹⁶ Andan Silajdžić and Orhan Bajraktarević, "Sunnet i hadis Muhammeda Alejhisselam u suvremenosti," *Buharijina zbirka hadisa*. 1. book, ed. by Hasan Škapur, I-XII. Tuzla: Islamska zajednica u Republici BiH & Izdavačko prometno poduzeće »R&R«, 1994, IX.

¹⁷ Halih Buljina, *Islamska država (Od početka do kraja hilafeta)*. (Sarajevo: Rijaset islamske zajednice u Republici Bosni i Hercegovini, 1997): 28-32.

- ¹⁸ Karl Drago Ocvirk, "Različne izvedbe islama," *Vere in običaji na območjih izvajanja mirovnih operacij*, ed. by Bojan Pipenbaher, 97-156. Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za obrambo Republike Slovenije, Direktorat za obrambne zadeve, Urad za civilno obrambo, Sektor za civilno obrambo, 2009. 124.
- ¹⁹ Ocvirk, 2009, 132.
- ²⁰ Ocvirk, 2009, 132.
- ²¹ Chittick, 389.
- ²² Chittick, 392-397.
- ²³ Quoted by Chittick, 403.
- ²⁴ Quoted by Chittick, 405.
- ²⁵ Chittick, 384 - 387.
- ²⁶ Chittick, 403.
- ²⁷ Marko Kerševan in Nina Svetlič, *Koran o Koranu, Bogu, islamu*, (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2003): 65.
- ²⁸ Noon, 17.
- ²⁹ Chittick, 1989, 381.
- ³⁰ Chittick, 1989, 380.
- ³¹ Chittick, 1989, 381.
- ³² "When the earth is shaken with convulsion and the mountains are broken down, crumbling and become dust dispersing." (Qur'an 56:4-6)
- ³³ Noon, 17.
- ³⁴ Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others'", (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 2007): 28-30.
- ³⁵ Wilson Muoha Maina, "Public Ethical Discourses and the Diversity of Cultures, Religions and Subjectivity in History: Can We Agree on Anything?", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 11 issue 32 (2012): 31.
- ³⁶ Chittick, 406.
- ³⁷ Christine Schirrmacher, *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings*, (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft Culture and Science Publications, 2008): 49.
- ³⁸ Karl Drago Ocvirk, "Krščansko in islamsko mučenstvo", *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 70(4): 468.
- ³⁹ Marjana Hrcet, "Ženske, ki umirajo za Allaha", *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 70(4): 477.
- ⁴⁰ Schirrmacher, 2008, 50.
- ⁴¹ Hassan Ko Nakata, "The Border of Salvation. The Salvation of Non-Muslims in Islam", *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions*, (2) (2006): 59 - 60.
- ⁴² Christine Schirrmacher, "They are not all Martyrs Islam on the Topics of Dying, Death, and Salvation in the Afterlife", *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 36, 3 (2012): 250-265.
- ⁴³ Noon, 17-18.
- ⁴⁴ Abdulah R. I. Doi, *Shari'ah. The Islamic Law*, (London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1984): 9.
- ⁴⁵ Ayoub, "The Idea of Redemption in Christianity and Islam." *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestation*, ed. by Spencer J. Palmer, 105-116, (Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1983). <http://rsctest.byu.edu/archived/selected-articles/ayoub-mahmoud-mustafa-idea-redemption-christianity-and-islam> (accessed February 29, 2012)
- ⁴⁶ Paula Youngman Skreslet, "Basic Primary Sources in Islamic Religion." *Theological Librarianship*, 1, 1 (June 2008): 49-53.

⁴⁷ Kerševan and Svetlič, 64.

⁴⁸ Azhar Ibrahim Alwee, "Ethical Dimension of Islam" (paper presented at the Conference Young AMP's Focus Group Discussion Series No. 1. National University of Singapore, National Institute of Education, August 27, 2005): 3-5. <http://www.thereadinggroup.sg/Articles/Ethical%20Dimension%20of%20Islam.pdf> (accessed February 29, 2012)

⁴⁹ Mohammad Fadel, "'No Salvation Outside Islam': Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism," (21. November 2010): 16. Accessed February 29, 2012, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1712972>. (accessed February 29, 2012)

⁵⁰ Fadel, 16-18.

⁵¹ Khalil, 221.

⁵² Ko Nakate, 58-73.

⁵³ Khalil, 221.

⁵⁴ Khalil, 223.

⁵⁵ Khalil, 16.

⁵⁶ Khalil, 16-18.

⁵⁷ Khalil, 222.

⁵⁸ Schirrmacher, 225.

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