

A response to Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway's Paper

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Introduction

First of all I would like to thank the Studium Biblicum Franciscum of the Flagellation, who, from time to time, gives us this beautiful and fruitful occasion to meet, study, learn and discuss one of the common topics between the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Today, my response will concentrate on Dr. Sway's paper on "Revelation in Islam". I thank Dr. Mustafa for his paper, and for his open mind, in giving me the opportunity to present some of my remarks on his paper. And I hope that he will so patient to hear me and support my remarks and embarrassing questions.

My response can be divided into four points, with some questions to Dr. Mustafa::

- 1 – The natural religious feelings.
- 2 – Revelation and the human reason.
- 3 – Revealed religions.
- 4 – Falsification of the revelation.

Some questions.

1 - The natural religious feelings.

In a famous hadith, Prophet Muhammad states that human beings are born into this state of "fitrah", which is the equivalent of being a Muslim. It is one's parents, the hadith explains, that provide their children with alternative religions.

If Dr. Mustafa understands by the word "Muslim", that all people are born with the feelings of submission to Almighty God, which is equal to all religions, and specially to the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and not only Islam, then I agree with him.

But it seems to me that, this assertion of Dr. Mustafa, should be understood that all people are born in the Islamic religion, while the parents' interference makes them change their original and natural religion into another one. In other words, if we have people who are not Muslims, it is then the fault of their parents who educated them in this way.

In this case I disagree with Dr. Mustafa, because, philosophically speaking, everybody is born with a natural feeling for worshipping God, the Creator of everything, including human beings, and not that all of us were born Muslims, because worshipping God, can be achieved in many ways, not only through Islam.

I think that it is more convenient, and more reasonable, to say that all human beings are born into a state of religious feelings, which means that human

beings, by "fitrah", naturally speaking, believe in God with His divine attributes, like: Creator, Omnipotent, Remunerator etc.; and not "that human beings are born into a state of "fitrah, which is the equivalent of being a Muslim" at birth, and that the interference of the parents makes the children profess another religion, different from their natural one, Islam. For that, I believe that it will be better to say that "man is, by nature and vocation, a religious human being", as the New Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms.

2 - Revelation and human reason.

"Humanity cannot unveil the metaphysical world through intellectual endeavor. Reason, in itself, is not equipped to answer questions pertaining to that realm. Humanity relies totally on revelation for its knowledge about the world of the unseen".

If I understood Dr. Mustafa well, he wants to say that the human reason doesn't and cannot have any knowledge about God, and every thing that we know about God is by revelation. I don't agree with this affirmation of Dr. Mustafa either.

Again, we read in the New Catechism of the Catholic Church, that "God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason".

The ordinary and daily experience tells us that the human reason has the capacity to have some knowledge of God. If not, how can those who don't have revelation know God, and how can they worship Him, since they don't have revelation and consequently they cannot know God and cannot be responsible for what they do? As in St. Paul's letter to the Romans, where he declares that "what can be known about God is plain to the pagans. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made"¹. And consequently, those who don't have revelation cannot be condemned by God, since it is not their fault if they didn't receive revelation by God. Also, claiming that anyone who is not Muslim, or who doesn't have revelation, cannot be saved is contrary to what Islam, or at least some of his theologians, affirm that there is salvation also for those who are not Muslims, as Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) declared that "every body, who is not Muslim can be saved if he is sincere and naturally virtuous", and in those days Mahmoud Ayyoub declared that "worshipping God is enough to be saved in the eternal life"².

Accepting what Dr. Mustafa says, we have to accept that none of those who are not Muslims, or who doesn't have divine revelation, can be saved. And I think that this was the basic problem of conflict between the Arab philosophers and the Islamic theologians in the middle ages, (like Ibn Rushd = Averoes).

¹ - Rom. 1: 19-20

² - "دراسات في العلاقات المسيحية الإسلامية"، جامعة البلنند، لبنان 2000، صفحة 206

In this affirmation I don't mean that the human mind can understand everything about God, because God is Unlimited, while our mind is limited and has a limited capacity, and therefore, it cannot contain the Unlimited God. However, the human mind can reach *some* knowledge of God, and it is where it cannot arrive that we are in need of God's revelation.

3 - Revealed Religions

Dr. Mustafa affirms: "There is only one monotheistic belief confirming the oneness of Allah (tawhid)... and continues saying that "the message... revealed to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad... was the same", and "that all the prophets and messengers had the same monotheistic message".

I wonder how Dr. Mustafa says in the following page that "the original message of all **revealed religions** emerges from the **same source**"... I think that he wants to speak about what we call in Arabic (الديانات السماوية), "**revealed religions**", since the origin of the revelation is God, who doesn't reveal different or contradictory messages.

For that, theroretically speaking, it is a mistake to say "**revealed religions**", instead, it should be "**Monotheistic Religions**", because since the revelation has "the same source", as Dr. Mustafa confirms, this source is God himself, who cannot reveal one dogma to one prophet, and later on abolish it, or replace it with a contradictory one to another. For that we should speak about one revelation, and one heavenly religion only, however, we can have more than one montheistic religion.

Later on, Dr. Mustafa speaks about one revelation, which was renewed with Moses, Jesus and, finally, with Muhammad due to the development, elaboration and changes made to the original revelation. Therefore, according to the Islamic mentality, I think that we should speak about "**one revealed religion**", not religions, which was revealed to Moses, Jesus and, finally, to Muhammad.

4 - Falsification or modification of revelation.

"The Islamic worldview maintains that the previous revealed messages suffered from human editing....the Qur'an, in this respect, could be considered as a critique of the modified messages. While non changes to text happened to the Qur'an itself..."

This is an unfounded accusation against the Christians, because we possess reasonable proofs that the Bible we use today, is the same as that which was used at the beginning of Christianity, and the Bible that we use in Arabic is the same of that in other languages, both in the modern and old languages. Therefore, the claim that, due to the falsification of the Bible, there was a need to have a new revelation, another copy of "Um al Kitab", the Qur'an, cannot be proved.

Questions to Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

NB: I hope that Dr. Mustafa, will accept my following questions, with open mind, with charity and comprehension, and will excuse my curiosity and interference.

- 1 - What is the perception of revelation in Islam; while Islam perceives the Quran as being literally dictated from "Um Al-Kitab", Munzal. What is the difference between Revelation (وحي), and Inzal (إنزال)? What is the difference saying that the Qur'an is a revealed book (كتاب موحى) and that the Qur'an is a dictated book (كتاب منزل) ?
- 2 - What is the specific role of the human reason, and of the revelation, in the knowledge of God in Islam, and what is the attitude of Islam towards those who do not have revelation? Can they, or cannot they be saved?
- 3 - What convincing justifications, and reasons, can be given for the claim that the previous revelation had been modified, thus having the need for yet, another new revelation? Instead the Qur'an should be the last revelation or the last Revealed Book? Finally why the Gospel and the Torah were modified and the Qur'an is not and cannot be modified?
- 4 - Since all three monotheistic religions had the same source of revelation, why do you talk about "**revealed religions**", and not about one **revealed religion only**, with three different manifestations of the same revelation?

Nazareth 22 April 2003