



## Scriptural Reasoning and the Anglican-Muslim Encounter

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### ABSTRACT

The process of scriptural reasoning promises to facilitate dialogue and understanding across religious divides. In this paper, the author reflects on the experience of scriptural reasoning with Anglicans and Muslims; describing the phenomenon of 'fellowship, not consensus' with reference to key points of doctrinal difference between the two religious traditions.

**KEYWORDS:** Anglican, Bible, Christian, interfaith, Islam, Muslim, Qur'an, reasoning, Scripture

Over the last 10 years, I have had the privilege of studying the Qur'an and the Bible with Jews, Christians, and Muslims through the process of scriptural reasoning. These encounters have been incredibly edifying, but only after being incredibly alienating and frustrating. Scriptural reasoning allows one to enter into conversation with another faith community through their sacred text in a way that is somewhat comfortable and familiar. At the same time, it allows people from other faith communities to engage one's own text in a way that will surely be uncomfortable and unfamiliar. In the case of Anglican-Muslim scriptural reasoning, that discomfort and unfamiliarity is heightened in both content and language.

Content-wise, Anglican readings of the Qur'an tend to have, in my experience, a heavy emphasis on theology and soteriology. These concepts are an important part of historical Muslim discourse, but

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Muslims tend not to focus on them in the same way. Rather, Muslim historical and contemporary approaches to the Qur'an privilege creed and law to the exclusion of most other sciences. These creedal approaches are not so much theological as they are doctrinal; there is a concern to maintain interpretations that fall within the realm of doctrinal acceptability, which sometimes shuts down interesting theological inquiries into the text. The Muslim participants with whom I have studied are much less comfortable in the world of systematic theology, and much more comfortable with creedal doctrine.<sup>2</sup> This results in Anglicans having fascinating theological conversations about Qur'anic texts amongst themselves, with the Muslims and Jews often observing with academic interest. The Muslim focus on law results in an almost opposite reaction. Muslims and Jews are comfortable reading the Qur'an in a legalistic way; debating the finer legal implications of Qur'anic verses such that Anglicans become detached observers.<sup>3</sup>

The language that Muslims and Anglicans use to interpret texts adds to the unfamiliarity and discomfort caused by the difference in focus. Muslims engage in a language of radical monotheism that rubs up against the Trinitarian language that Anglicans use to describe God's unity. Further, Anglicans and Muslims call upon a set of terms that are so deeply entrenched in tradition that they resist unpacking for fear that the conversation will break down in favour of pedagogy. Muslims regularly deploy terms like 'innovation', 'consensus', and 'God's speech' that have political, legal and theological implications, and continue to be the subject of great debate.<sup>4</sup> From Anglicans, I hear terms like 'apophatic', 'catechism' and 'logos', which do not have precise cognates in the Islamic tradition, and are themselves heavily contested in Christian traditions. They are alien to Muslim ears; making clear that the Anglican internal discourse is significantly unique, and that Muslims might never fully enter into it.

2. For a study of Muslim participation in scriptural reasoning, see N. Mouftah, 'Muslim Students in Scriptural Reasoning', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 11.1 (2012), available at: [http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume11/number1/ssr11\\_01\\_e03.html](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume11/number1/ssr11_01_e03.html)

3. T. Winter, 'Qur'anic Reasoning as an Academic Practice', *Modern Theology* 22.3 (2006), p. 456.

4. See, for example, A. Sachedina, 'The Nature of Scriptural Reasoning in Islam', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 5.1 (2005), available at: [http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number1/ssr05\\_01\\_e01.html](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number1/ssr05_01_e01.html)

These mutual alienations in content and language are, I believe, at the heart of scriptural reasoning, and it is what makes the process mutually enlightening. The alien discourses result in questions that would not arise except in the presence of the other. Especially with Anglicans and Muslims, there is a special kind of distance due to the difference in focus and speech. This difference might otherwise be a barrier, except that in the context of scriptural reasoning, the difference leads to each side expanding their understanding of themselves and the other. I will provide two examples below; the first will examine the role of liturgy in Anglican-Muslim scriptural reasoning, and the other will examine the Muslim reception of the Anglican conception of justification. Both of these examples will demonstrate how scriptural reasoning between Anglicans and Muslims can utilize points of distinction to create an atmosphere of appreciation and growth.

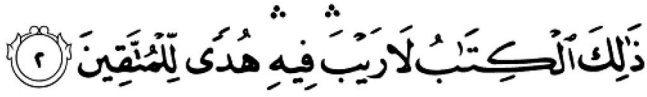
#### *The Qur'an in Prayer and Liturgy*

Before engaging in scriptural reasoning on a particular text, it is common practice for a person from that text's tradition to provide a few introductory words. When providing background for a Qur'anic text from within the Islamic tradition, I am regularly asked by Anglican reasoners, 'when would this be read?' I am always taken aback by this question, as it is not indigenous to Muslim discourse. The Qur'an is recited in prescribed and supererogatory prayers multiple times a day, and at certain events and occasions, yet recitation of individual verses is not assigned to a particular time of day or day of the year. Other than the opening chapter, which is prescribed for every prayer, one could read or recite any verse from the Qur'an at any time and during any prayer.<sup>5</sup> These recitations might be long or short, in a cadence or in a monotone, and one might recite the same or different verses for every cycle of prayer. And so the immediate response to the question, 'when is this recited?' is the rather unsatisfying, 'whenever'.

Yet, the Qur'an does conform to certain rules of recitation, and the question forces the Muslim reader to reconsider recitation's import,

5. There are certain chapters and verses that are associated with days and times; for example, Q. 18 is recited on Fridays, Q. 67 is recited at day's end, and Q. 3:173 is recited when there is a calamity. However, these recommendations are exceptional; they do not apply to the majority of the Qur'an. More importantly, they are not prescribed recitations. A believer might or might not recite these verses at the recommended times, based on individual discretion.

and to perhaps interpret a text in light of its social praxis. Consider, for instance, the following verse:



Literally, 'That is the book no doubt in it [is] guidance for the God-fearing' (Q. 2:2)

The original Arabic Qur'anic text contains no punctuation marks, which explains the somewhat awkward English translation. To deal with the resulting ambiguity, scribes added some signs to guide readers toward certain readings soon after the Qur'an was redacted. In the above Arabic text, you will notice a pair of three dots hovering above the middle portion of the sentence. Qur'an scribes inserted these markers, known as 'mu'āniqa' (embracing), about a century after Muḥammad's death to symbolize two acceptable ways of reading the verse. In the first reading, the reader may pause after the 'no doubt', and then continue, such that the verse reads, 'That is the book no doubt, in it is guidance for the God-fearing.' In the second acceptable reading, the reader may pause after the 'in it', such that the verse reads 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it; guidance for the God-fearing.' The difference between the readings seems minor; in the former, the book is an indubitable text that has guidance within it, and in the latter the book's indubitability makes it a guide for the God-fearing.

Whereas the semantic difference in meaning may be minimal, the difference in terms of the illocutionary act of recitation is quite significant.<sup>6</sup> Q. 2:2 appears at the beginning of the Qur'an, immediately following Q. 2:1, which is composed of only three letters - *alif*, *lām*, and *mīm* -, and Q. 1:1-7, which is something of a preamble. Thus, Q. 2:2 is the first complete thought of the Qur'an, and its wording lends a kind of gloss to all that follows. In that spirit, reciting 'That is the book no doubt' is a declaration of fact, a kind of prolegomenon that establishes the coherence and completeness of the rest of the book.<sup>7</sup> The central term is 'the book', and identifying it is

6. On illocutionary acts, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

7. There are several interesting possibilities for scriptural reasoning in Q. 2:2 that I will not address, but which were addressed by classical exegetes. Al-Qurṭubī and al-Ṭabarī relate one interpretation, with which they most likely disagreed, that the 'book' in question might actually refer to the Torah and Gospels. In that sense, the Qur'an represents the culmination of a series of books in which there is no

the function of the proposition. The use of the preposition 'that' as opposed to 'this' in 'That is the book', suggests that the proposition might be in response to certain questions, such as 'is that a book?', or, 'is that *the* book?' The statement of fact establishes the existence of the text, and the following phrase – 'in it is guidance for the God-fearing' – describes the content of the text contained therein.

By contrast, reciting Q. 2:2 as 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it' is itself an argument, and is a response to a different kind of question. The question might be, 'What kind of a book is this?', or 'Does this book warrant doubt?' As an answer to these kinds of questions, the argument is much more than a mere statement of fact. It is, rather, a sort of challenge in a triumphalist mode.

Pre-modern Muslim exegetes noted that the phrase 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it' seems to be an answer to an inquiry rather than a blanket statement of fact, which, on its own, would seem somewhat random.<sup>8</sup> They argued that Q. 2:2 responds to a primordial need for indubitable guidance, so that whether or not the search was fully and consciously articulated, Q. 2:2 nevertheless serves to answer and reassure.<sup>9</sup> Some exegetes pointed to the preceding sentence, Q. 2:1, which is composed of the three letters 'alif', 'lām' and 'mīm', as proof that Q. 2:2 responds either to aporia or to a fully formed question. The majority of exegetes believe that the fact that Q. 2:1 is composed only of letters causes an aporia to which the phrase 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it' responds.<sup>10</sup> That is, the letters confound understanding and point out the inadequacy of the reader's understanding, so the reader's ignorance precludes any hope for guidance unless there were

(Footnote continued)

doubt; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' al-Aḥkām* (Beirut: Al-Risalah Publishers, 2006) p. 1:244; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān* (Giza: Markaz al-Buhuth, 2001) p. 1:231. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī suggested that Q. 2:2 might actually be addressed to Jews, given the repeated reference to Jews and Judaism in the rest of the chapter; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), p. 14. What I have provided in the main text is but one interpretation of Q. 2:2.

8. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathīr, 1994) p. 1:54; Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr* (al-Mansura: Dar al-Ghadd al-Jadīd, 2003), p. 1:36.

9. al-Rāzī also pointed out that the first reading makes it sound as though the Qur'an has guidance within it, whereas the second suggests the Qur'an is guidance in itself (*fi nafsihi*). The latter is a more accurate depiction of the Qur'an in al-Rāzī's opinion; *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (n 6) p. 2:22.

10. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar Iḥya al-Turath al-Arabi, n.d), p. 1:35.

some book that is beyond doubt on which to rely. A minority of exegetes held that the letters actually formed the question ‘*a lam*’ which means, ‘Is it not?’<sup>11</sup> In this reading, the two verses are linked, so that the full rhetorical question/challenge is, ‘Is that not the book with no doubt in it?’

What is of interest in this debate is the fact that almost all Muslim scholars, despite noting the permissibility of reading the verse as ‘That is the book no doubt, in it is guidance for the God-fearing’, nevertheless presumed that the best way to read the verse is ‘That is the book [with] no doubt in it; guidance for the God-fearing.’<sup>12</sup> Further, whenever this verse is recited in prayer, it is almost always recited in that second way. But for reasons long forgotten and much debated, the verse is still written with two sets of three dots, a rare marker that makes clear for the reader that both ways of reading are permissible.

It is here that the Anglican focus on liturgy is helpful, as it calls our attention to the act of recitation as a reflection of belief. What does it mean that the verse can be recited both ways? Why is it that in practice the verse is only recited in one way? These questions are not found in classical Muslim exegeses, perhaps because they would not be asked without the Anglican framing question that is alien to most Muslim exegetical conversations: ‘when is this recited?’

Upon reflection, one finds that Q. 2:2 is recited during significant events marking beginnings and ending. Coming as it does at the beginning of the Qur’an, the verse marks a child’s venture into the meritorious project of reciting the entire Qur’an from start to finish.<sup>13</sup> Once the child has recited the entirety of the Qur’an over a period of years, there is often a public celebration in which she recites this verse

11. Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ‘Arabī [misattributed] *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Arabī* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 2002), p. 1:10; Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Calcutta: W. Nassau Lees, 1856), p. 1:18. al-Rāzī stated that the second reading was widespread (*mashhūr*); *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (n 6), p. 2: 21.

12. In fact, many do not even mention the first reading, including: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr Jalālayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, n.d.), p. 3; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Aḥkām* (n 6), pp. 1:228–240; Abī Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dar Iḥya al-Turath al-‘Arabī, 2002), pp. 1:140–142.

13. For more on Qur’an recitation in communal life, see W. Graham and N. Kermani, ‘Recitation and Aesthetic Reception’, in J. McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 121–23). I am grateful to my niece and nephew, Zainab and Abdullah Chaudhry, for drawing my attention to the celebration for completing a full recitation of the Qur’an, and to the central role that Q. 2:2 plays therein.

and several that follow to an assembly. This public recitation symbolizes the fact that the child has recited one iteration of the Qur'an, in what promises to be a lifelong process of reciting the Qur'an over and over again.

Q. 2:2 is also recited on the first day of Ramadan in a supererogatory nightly prayer. These special prayers continue throughout the month, and the Qur'an is recited in its entirety, meaning that a little over 1/30th of the Qur'an is recited in each nightly prayer. The verse therefore commences a month of fasting and devotional prayer; it generates a feeling of excitement, and some anxiety, about the month to come. The verse is again recited on the final night of this special prayer, symbolizing the completion of the Qur'an and the desire to complete it again. As a beginning, the verse represents potential; as an ending, it engenders pride. In this context, the content of 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it' may serve as a justification for the hard work ahead, or as a comfort for the hard work that has been completed.

The feelings attached to Q. 2:2 are so strong and its contexts of recitation are so obvious that it is striking that they are not discussed in any works of Qur'anic exegesis that I have come across. The exegetes are preoccupied with the semantic content of the verse and its proper recitation, and do not consider its performative context. This is not surprising; the attention to performance only makes sense in light of the question, 'when is this recited?' The question is not endemic to Muslim conversations and tends to evoke a confused reaction, even when the answer is abundantly clear. Yet the question is incredibly illuminating in that it sheds light on the relationship that Muslims have with the text in their daily lives.

More importantly for our purposes, it helps answer the question posed above, 'why is it that in practice the verse is only recited one way?' The answer might be that the phrase, 'That is the book, no doubt' does not capture the feeling of beginning and ending in the same way as 'That is the book [with] no doubt in it.' The first is a statement of fact, the second is a proposition that justifies, challenges, and comforts. The second reading is more appropriate to the grand events of recitation with which it is associated, and it is no wonder that it is the one witnessed in Muslim contexts the world over. There is no wonder to be had about the phenomenon at all, however, without the precipitating Anglican question.

To answer the question requires one to take it seriously, and to spend significant time probing its answer. The standard response to 'when is this recited?' of 'whenever' not only misses the potential that lies in the question, it is a much easier answer. When time is a factor,

'whenever' seems a much more straightforward response. By providing a space through scriptural reasoning in which time and pre-meditated conclusions are not a limiting factor, Anglicans and Muslims can pose alien questions to one another, and provoke a level of exegetical inquiry that might have no precedent in traditional texts and contexts.

### *Justification through Faith/Gift*

Scriptural reasoning alongside Anglicans has its particular edifying prospects, as in the above example, and it also has unique challenges. One of those challenges is a regular insistence by Anglicans that one is justified through faith alone. This doctrine has led to several intense disagreements in scriptural reasoning groups over the reading of texts, particularly given the Qur'an's emphasis on works as necessary for salvation in addition to faith. In a characteristic formulation, the Qur'an asserts:

By the quickly fleeing time, man is certainly lost. Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to truth, and enjoin one another to perseverance. (Qur'an 103)

Interestingly, Anglicans tend to read this verse sequentially. That is, one must first have faith to not be 'lost', and the expression of that faith is found in enacting righteous deeds in the form of enjoining to truth and perseverance. In this reading, the 'and' is read as 'and therefore'.

While this reading is certainly plausible, it runs up against the Qur'anic character of the 'hypocrite' that appears throughout the Qur'an and operates in the background of Muslim readings concerning faith and works. The hypocrite takes many forms; sometimes as a person who feigns belief in order to infiltrate and sow dissension amongst Muslims, and sometimes as one who professes belief yet mocks the devoted. The most pernicious hypocrisy is that in which the hypocrite is unaware of her own hypocrisy. The Qur'an states,

When it is said to them, do not commit corruption in the land, they say 'We are only trying to set things aright!' They are without a doubt corrupt, yet they do not perceive it. (Qur'an 2:11-12)

Such individuals may profess faith, and may believe that they are doing good, but they have deluded themselves. The common Muslim reading of this verse is that faith and good intentions alone do not lead one to salvation. Rather, one must engage in specific actions that are authoritatively sanctioned as 'righteous' in order to be saved.

Such an approach to salvation comes into direct conflict with certain Anglican beliefs, and the tension becomes palpable when text-study



centers on particular passages. Take, for example, the following passage from the New Testament:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds a foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor. 3.11–15)

Technically, the idea that Jesus had exclusive rights to a strong foundation is not problematic for the majority of Muslims. One can simply reason that during Jesus' time, he was the ultimate authority and all were bound to follow him. Once Muhammad received revelation, he in turn became the authority who could provide a firm foundation. The more problematic part of the story is that both the builder who built a house of gold and the builder who built a house of straw are equally saved. According to the dominant Muslim reading of Q. 103 cited above, those who fail to engage in 'righteous deeds' do not merely 'suffer loss' but are themselves 'lost'.

The Qur'anic ethos forces a conversation around what it means to 'suffer loss' and what it means to be 'saved'. For the Muslim reader, 'suffering loss' might mean being punished in the fires of hell, and being 'saved' might mean eventually entering into paradise after being punished. But such an interpretation is anathema to Anglican conceptions of salvation, for the penalty of sin is removed through faith in Christ's sacrifice. Moreover, the wayward builder is not only forgiven, but is declared righteous through her faith. What, then, is the 'loss'?

There are, of course, multiple Anglican conceptions of loss suffered by the builder, but what is of interest here is the dynamic conversation that occurs between Anglicans and Muslims in scriptural reasoning around the ideas of 'loss' and being 'lost'. When scriptural reasoning works well, the different and differing commitments of the participants contribute to nuanced understandings of one's own tradition. If we were to assume for a moment that the 'lost' of the Qur'an should be understood as being more akin to the 'suffering loss' of 1 Corinthians – and the Arabic does indeed allow for this – a slightly different conception of Q. 103 emerges. In this new conception, one is not irrevocably lost if she does not do righteous deeds and enjoin to truth and perseverance. Rather, humans suffer loss by failing to engage in these actions as a result of their faith, much as the builder who builds a house out of straw. The chapter is not,

then, about the necessary ingredients for salvation, but about the need to build a firm structure upon a firm foundation.

In the same spirit, what if we read 1 Corinthians in light of the Qur'anic idea of being 'lost'? In that case, when the work is burned up, the builder is lost. To make sense, the reader must have a slightly different notion of the following verse, 'the builder will be saved, but only as through fire'. To make the passage make sense, the reader will need to reinterpret the phrase 'will be saved' to conform to its more literal progressive future tense. The exercise unearths the assumption that 'will be saved' is commonly read as 'will have been saved' in the Anglican tradition, as though the fire were merely a demonstration that exposed the flaws in the building, as opposed to damning the builder. The more literal reading of 'will be saved' suggests that the fire, in fact, threatens the salvation of the builder, but that after the fact of the fire, the builder will nevertheless be saved out of some measure of grace.

These two new readings of Q. 103 and 1 Cor. 3.11–15 demonstrate the import and potential of scriptural reasoning between Anglicans and Muslims. The emphasis on practice that Muslim readings bring to the Christian text contributes an added element that reads grace such that it functions in the aftermath of action, so that the forgiveness is granted rather than assumed. Jewish readings might also have an emphasis on action and lead to a similar result, but the Muslim reading has the advantage of being unencumbered by the potential supersessionism in the passage that might otherwise require the attention of a Jewish reader. The Anglican emphasis on justification through faith changes the dominant reading of the Muslim text so that suffering loss is not the same as being lost, creating more space for personal shortcomings and for God's grace. This reading also allows for a reconception of the hypocrite mentioned in Q. 2:11–12 above. This hypocrite might be working corruption, but the new reading highlights God's grace rather than the hypocrite's mischief. It is a sign of God's mercy that, despite doing reprehensible deeds, the hypocrite, having good intentions, is nonetheless worthy of God's forgiveness and salvation in the hereafter, though in this world and the next they might suffer loss. Thus, the Anglican reading has repercussions for much of the Qur'an, resulting in multiple new readings that might otherwise go unconsidered.

The authority of such new readings in the lived community is something of a side issue. What is most significant about the interaction is the way in which scriptural reasoning between Anglicans and Muslims allows each to move about within the other's tradition. Justification through faith alone is anathema to popular Muslim

conceptions of the Qur'an. Yet, when Anglicans and Muslims are willing to read the text together through one another's lenses, a new reading emerges that allows the other to enter into internal religious conversations without leaving convictions at the door. This fosters a dialogue that forgoes any pretension to consensus. The dialogue itself, however, creates a fellowship that breeds understanding and respect.

### *After Scriptural Reasoning*

The insights gleaned from scriptural reasoning with Anglicans take me back to my research and my community with fresh intuitions and new approaches. The liturgical question, for instance, raises a host of issues and questions that might otherwise never be considered. For instance, there is a great deal of exegetical material on Q. 4:1:

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah from whom you claim [your rights] over one another, and toward the wombs [that bore you]. Indeed, God ever watches over you.

Traditional commentaries focus on the historicity of the verse, describing how, exactly, two persons were created from one soul, and what happened thereafter. They also speak about how one should fulfil duties to the Lord, and what is meant by 'the wombs'. However, these commentaries almost never mention that Q. 4:1 is regularly recited at weddings. It is a beautiful sentiment about the oneness of humanity regardless of gender, and that in a marriage one should be mindful of each spouse's duty to the other, as one is mindful of duties to one's parents and to God.

At my own wedding, however, the Imam chose to recite Q. 75 in the prayer immediately following the marriage ceremony. That chapter of the Qur'an, entitled 'The Resurrection', includes such choice verses as:

Nay, but you love the fleeting life, and leave alone the Hereafter. Some faces, that Day, will beam – looking towards their Lord; and some faces, that Day, will be sad and dismal, in the thought that some back-breaking calamity was about to be inflicted on them. Yes, when [the soul] reaches to the collar-bone [in its exit] and there will be a cry: 'Who is a magician [that can save him]?' And he will conclude that it is [the Time] of Parting; and one leg will be joined with another: that Day the drive will be to your Lord! Indeed he gave nothing in charity nor did he pray! But on the contrary, he rejected Truth and turned away! Then did he stalk to his family in full conceit! Woe to you; yes, woe! Again woe to you; yes, woe! (Q. 75:20–35)

Now, technically, the Imam was free to recite from any verse of the Qur'an in his prayer; after all, the answer to the question of 'when is this recited?' is 'whenever'. Nevertheless, context and conscience should lead one to answer the question 'when is Q. 75 recited?' with 'not during a wedding'. But this raises a series of related issues about Qur'an recitation: are there contexts in which it is inappropriate to recite certain parts of the Qur'an? Who decides what is appropriate and what is not? What are theological and legal implications of saying that God's speech might not always be welcome in a particular circumstance? These are all intriguing questions that are sometimes obliquely addressed in legal texts,<sup>14</sup> but almost never in exegesis. It is the Anglican question that invites such reflection and which opens up new avenues of inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Just as Anglican questions shed light on the Islamic tradition and invite new modes of thinking, so do Muslim questions expose new ways of thinking about traditional Anglican doctrines and texts. While these new insights and avenues are a great boon that results from scriptural reasoning between Anglicans and Muslims, to my mind the greatest gift is the atmosphere of fellowship that develops from shared time discussing texts through genuine difference. Ultimately, it is a transformative experience to understand difference through texts, and one that creates an atmosphere of trust and respect. So long as each participant is agreed that the goal of the study is to understand, not necessarily to agree, such transformation is within reach.

This is a particularly salient point with regard to relations between Anglicans and Muslims because, in reality, much more is being discussed than difference in texts and traditions. There are several points of difference that are being bridged in the exchange, as evidenced by markers both physical and situational. Anglican participants tend to be white and educated, and they speak in a language that many Muslims associate with colonialism. Muslim participants tend to come from backgrounds in which the experience of colonialism is still palpable, if not fresh, and they are sensitive to a popular rhetoric – often associated with 'the West' – that suggests that Islam is a foreign, backward and malicious religion. Thus, the

14. For a brief summary of such discussions, see C. Melchert, 'When Not to Recite the Qur'an', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 11.1 (2008), pp. 141–51.

15. In the same vein, the Jewish focus on liturgy invites inquiries into Muslim liturgical practices; see for instance D. Talmon-Heller, 'Reciting the Qur'ān and Reading the Torah: Muslim and Jewish Attitudes and Practices in a Comparative Historical Perspective', *Religion Compass*, 6.8 (2012), pp. 369–80.

transformation that occurs when fellowship is created through scriptural reasoning goes beyond the bounds of religious identity. Scriptural reasoning becomes, in fact, a site of healing rifts that have been centuries in the making and continue to colour religious and extra-religious rhetoric.

All of this, of course, is when scriptural reasoning works at its best; when all the participants give their time and energy to the process for the sake of the process, rather than for any ulterior motive. In the absence of such fellowship, interesting inroads can still be made with regard to new interpretations of the texts and understanding the other. But the promise of scriptural reasoning that lies in bringing together Anglicans and Muslims in shared fellowship is so great that the academic gains seem almost marginal. This fellowship cannot be captured in written form, it must be experienced; requiring time, energy, and openness from all participants. My experience studying alongside Anglicans has been that the process, once started, generates its own energy, pushing us all into deeper interrogations of our traditional texts, and into closer fellowship through our shared study. It is a process that I dearly hope is replicated for the sake of academic inquiry and for human healing.