

# ILLUMINATION AND NON-DELIMITATION

## LESSONS FOR INTER AND INTRA FAITH DIALOGUE FROM THE WISDOM OF THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

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The starting point for the reflections presented in this paper is the monastery of St Catherine at Sinai. This monastery has the distinction of being the oldest continually inhabited monastic establishment in Christendom. It not only exists as a witness to the continuing dynamism of the contemplative ideal in our days in the sister faith/wisdom tradition of Christianity but also offers a concrete evidence of the inter-religious co-existence— indeed harmony— that has permitted it to remain unmolested in its overwhelmingly Muslim environment for close to fourteen centuries.

Two vivid symbols of this harmony are to be found within the walls of the monastery: the first is a mosque, built by the monks for the Bedouins; and the second is the famous charter of protection granted by the Prophet to the monastery. The monks themselves are convinced that this charter, sealed with an imprint of the Prophet's own hand, was instrumental in maintaining the safety and security of the monastery. The original document was written in Kufic script by Sayyidina 'Ali, and taken by the Ottoman Sultan Selim back to Istanbul in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman copy of the original is on display at the monastery.

It is indeed a precious and remarkable document. Historians are somewhat divided over its authenticity, some claiming that it was in fact composed by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (ruled 996-1021). For our part, we agree with the opinion of the Greek historian, Amantos, who writes, "The monastery of Sinai could not possibly have survived without the protection afforded by Mohammed and his successors ... Moreover, the great number of decrees which the Mohammedan [sic.] rulers of Egypt issued confirming the protected status of the monastery must have resulted from the fact that

Mohammed himself had granted protection to Sinai.”<sup>69</sup>

The document itself goes beyond merely granting formal protection. It states that wherever monks or hermits are to be found, on any mountain, hill, village, or other habitable place, on the sea or in the deserts or in any convent, church or house of prayer, I shall be watching over them as their protector, with all my soul, together with all my *ummah*; because they [the monks and hermits] are a part of my own people, and part of those protected by me.’

It goes on to state their exemption from taxes and warns of stern retribution if the injunctions of the charter are broken by Muslims. Also, most significantly, it makes it incumbent on the Muslims not only to protect the monks, but also, in regard to Christians generally, to ‘consolidate their worship at Church’.

This points to the deeper significance of the document, and can be seen as a direct expression of the Qur’anic verse which is also cited in the charter: *Discourse not with them* [the people of the Book] *except in that which is finest*<sup>70</sup>—this last word translating *absan*, that which is most excellent, indeed, most ‘beautiful’, taking into account the root of the word, *hasuna*, to be beautiful.

All of us are no doubt aware that the legal protection of the People of the Book is enshrined in the Islamic revelation itself, and it is based on the unity of the Abrahamic message. This unity of essence transcends the differences between the faith-communities making up the Abrahamic family. But the question to be posed here is this: how much diversity can this family tolerate before it begins to disintegrate? One resoundingly positive answer to this question takes its inspiration from the Prophet’s Charter to St Catherine’s monastery. For this charter can be read as an eloquent symbol of the Muslim

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<sup>69</sup> Cited by Athanasios Paliouras, *St Catherine’s Monastery* (Sinai: Hiera Mani Sina, E. Tzaferi, 1985), p. 16. Kurt Weizmann points out that the Muslim protection of the monastery is one among many examples of the tradition of tolerance manifested by Muslims towards minority faiths in their midst. See his essay, “The History” in J. Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St Catherine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Surat al-‘Ankabut, XXIX: 46. Cf: Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and hold discourse with them in the finest manner ... (Surat al-Nakhl, XVI: 125)

respect for, not only the religion of Christianity in general, but the monastic ideal in particular. In other words, it can be seen, literally, as a ‘seal’ of approval of a way of life that appears on the surface to be at the very antipodes of the Islamic ideal.

A superficial response to the Prophet’s Charter, based on a conventional Muslim attitude towards monasticism, would be as follows: even if it is an authentic document, the letter proves nothing other than the fact that, since monks are generally harmless, they should be left in peace. In other words, they should be protected, yes, but only on account of a legal principle, and despite the dogmatic errors on which their way of life is founded.

My contention, on the contrary, is that the legal principle of protection is itself the expression of the fundamental unity of the Abrahamic faiths, an inward unity of spirit which is directly connected to ‘that which is finest’, that which is *absan*, and which takes precedence over the differences between the faiths on the level of external forms. This position, we believe, helps us to resolve, in a fruitful and reflective manner, the paradox generated by the Charter.

The paradox is this: monasticism is clearly referred to in the Qur’an as an ‘innovation’; and yet the Prophet’s words— not to mention the tradition of protection characterizing Muslim relations with monks throughout history— imply a recognition of the validity of the monastic ideal. Furthermore, it is in the monastic Way that one finds Christianity at its most exalted and concentrated— the monks raise to its highest pitch of intensity all that makes Christianity what it is, including the very dogmas criticized in the Qur’an.

The paradox is sharpened further when we consider the principle, no monasticism in Islam’ (*la rahbaniyya fi ’l-Islam*), and the Sunnah of the Prophet in which marriage is so highly stressed, being referred to in fact as ‘half of the religion’. The ideal of *tawhid*, of integrating oneness, dictates that the whole of life— not just religious devotion— is to be placed at the service of God. Contemplation and action are seen as complementary, not contradictory, for the Muslim; isolating oneself from the world for the sake of contemplation is, from this point of view, unfaithful to the integral human vocation.

The contrast between the Muslim and the monastic ideal is clear. But this contrast on the surface should not blind us to certain underlying, and largely unsuspected, affinities between the two ideals. One can argue:

- 1) that these affinities help to account for the extraordinary respect and solicitude manifested to the monks by the Prophet of Islam;
- 2) that these affinities are most markedly expressed in one key dimension of the Prophet's Sunnah, on the one hand, and the mystical fruits of the monastic path on the other;
- 3) that, probed with sufficient depth, these affinities reveal the power of sincere devotion to transcend the plane of dogmatic differences; and finally
- 4) that the realities revealed through devotion, contemplation, and pure prayer, not only relativise dogmatic differences as between different faiths but also, and with all the more reason, they relativise differences of doctrine and practices within one and the same faith: to put it bluntly, if the Prophet could go so far in respecting and protecting the monks of Christendom, is it not absurd that we, as Muslims sharing the same faith, seem unable to tolerate and respect each other's differences? The lesson for intra-faith dialogue is clear: we ought to be able to focus upon what is most excellent' in the position, the beliefs, the attitudes and the cultures of the internal Other, our fellow Muslims.

I strongly believe that one of the best ways of increasing tolerance of diversity within Islam is to deepen our understanding, and our practice, of the spiritual substance of the faith; careful consideration of the affinities between the Sunnah of the Prophet and the monastic ideal helps us to orient our attention to this spirit that transcends the plane of dogma, and which also gives inner life to the dogmas that can only partially express the Real.

What, then, are these affinities? First, let us hear what the Qur'an says about the monks: *You will find the nearest of them [the People of the Book] in love to those who believe to be those who say: Verily, we are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and they are not proud.*<sup>71</sup>

Humility is given as a key characteristic of the monks here, this accounting

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<sup>71</sup> Surat al-Ma'ida, V: 82

for one of the reasons why the Christians will be the ‘nearest’ of the People of the Book to the Muslims. However, we need to probe the deeper aspects of this nearness, for it goes beyond mere friendship or sentiment. The following verse, from the Sura Al ‘Imran, leads us to these deeper aspects:

*They are not all alike. Among the People of Book is an upright community, who recite the verses of God in the watches of the night, and who prostrate [to Him] ; they believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and hasten unto good works; they are among the righteous. (Surat Al ‘Imran, III: 13)*

One can justifiably regard the monks and nuns as being among those referred to in this verse. Now the very intensity of their devotion, entailing long night vigils, mirrors one crucial aspect of the Prophetic Sunnah, so little stressed in our days. We know that the Prophet and his close companions also spent long periods of the night in prayer, as the following verse, from the Surat al-Muzzammil tells us:

*Truly your Lord knows that you stand in prayer close to two-thirds of the night, and half of it, and a third of it— you and a group (taifa) of those with you... (LXXIII: 20)*

One thus sees something of the monastic way very much present in the Sunnah of the Prophet. We also know from strongly authenticated hadiths, that the Prophet would spend hours at a stretch reciting such long Surahs as the Surat al-Baqara and the Surat Al ‘Imran, bowing and prostrating frequently, making supplications in accordance with the verses recited.<sup>72</sup> One might also mention here the Prophet’s *zuhd*, his abstemiousness, his regular fasts apart from Ramadan, and the fact that, when he did eat, he never filled his stomach with food. Such details of the Prophet’s life help us to see something of the discipline that we associate with the monastic way. However, what distinguishes the Prophetic norm is that this intense contemplative discipline was accomplished in the very midst of an active marital, social, and political life.

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<sup>72</sup> See Qazi ‘Iyad’s *Muhammad, Messenger of God (al-Shifa)*, Tr. Aisha Bewley, (Inverness: Madinah Press, 1991), pp. 74-75

In this light we can better appreciate the principle of ‘no monasticism in Islam’: in the words of Frithjof Schuon, “it really means not that contemplatives must not withdraw from the world, but that the world must not be withdrawn from contemplatives”<sup>73</sup>— in other words, the world must not be deprived of the graces that flow through the presence of contemplatives within it. For the aim of Islam is to penetrate the whole of life with spirituality, not that spirituality is to be excluded from everyday life.

We can take another step closer to understanding the ‘nearness’ of the Christian monastic way to the Muslim contemplative ideal by looking carefully at another central aspect of the Sunnah: the remembrance of God, *dhikru’Llah*.

One must always remember, in any discussion of *dhikr*, that it means both a principle of awareness, of recollectedness, of consciousness of God, and also the means to achieve that awareness, namely the invocation of the Name or Names of God, the meditative practice *par excellence* of the contemplative tradition of Islam. If prayer constitutes the core of religious practice, the *dhikru’Llah* is, as the Qur’an puts it very simply, *akbar*, that is, *greater* or *greatest*:<sup>74</sup> *Truly prayer keeps [one] away from lewdness and iniquity, and the remembrance of God is greater.* (Surat al-‘Ankabut, XXIX: 45)<sup>75</sup>

Numerous sayings of the Prophet attest to the pre-eminence of the *dhikr*. For example, it is related that the Prophet asked his companions: ‘Shall I not tell you about the best and purest of your works for your Lord, and the most exalted of them in your ranks, and the work that is better for you than giving silver and gold, and better for you than encountering your enemy, with you striking their necks and them striking your necks?’ Thereupon the people addressed by him said: ‘What is that; O Emissary of God?’ He said, ‘The

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<sup>73</sup> This is from the remarkable essay by Schuon, “The Universality of Monasticism and its Relevance in the Modern World”, in his *Light on the Ancient Worlds* (London: Perennial Books, 1965; reprint, Suhail Academy 2004), p. 122.

<sup>74</sup> The Arabic comparative is at the same time the superlative, so the word *akbar* can be translated in either way.

<sup>75</sup> All translations from the Qur’an are based on those of Pickthall and Arberry.

perpetual invocation of God— exalted and glorious (*dbikeru 'Llah 'azza wa jalla daiman*).<sup>76</sup>

And again: upon being asked ‘Which act is most meritorious?’ the Prophet replied: ‘[It is] that you die while your tongue is moistened with the *dbikeru'Llah...*’<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the fourth Caliph Sayyidina ‘Ali affirms: ‘Perpetuate the *dbiker*, for truly it illumines the heart, and it is the most excellent form of worship (*huwa afzal al-'ibada*).<sup>78</sup>

There are many verses of the Qur'an that should be carefully noted in connection with the *dbiker*. Let us restrict ourselves, however, to the following.

*Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God; is it not in the remembrance of God that hearts are at peace? (Surat al-Ra'd, XIII: 28) Those are true believers whose hearts quake with awe when God is invoked (Surat al-Anfal, VIII: 2) And invoke the Name of your Lord morning and evening. (Surat al-Insan, LXXVI: 25) And invoke the Name of your Lord, devoting yourself to it with utter devotion. (Surat al-Muzzammil, LXXIII: 8) O ye who believe! Invoke God with much invocation. (al-Ahzab, XXXIII: 42) Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation between night and day are signs for those of substance, those who remember God standing, sitting, and reclining on their sides and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth... (Al 'Imran, III: 190-191) And invoke your Lord within yourself, in humility and awe, and beneath your breath, in the morning and in the night. (al-A'raf, VII: 205)*

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<sup>76</sup> Cited in *Al-Ghazali--Invocations and Supplications*, (Book IX of The Revival of the Religious Sciences) Trans. K. Nakamura (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1990), p. 8 (we have slightly modified the translation of the last sentence of the hadith.) This hadith is found in the collection of Ibn Maja (*Sunan*, Adab, 53) and in that of Ibn Hanbal (*Musnad*, VI. 447). See the Arabic text for this and several other hadith of similar import in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 391-2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 7. The hadith is given in Tabarani's *al-Mu'jam al-kabir*, XX. 107. *Ghurur al-Hikam wa durar al-kalim* (Qom: Imam-e 'Asr, 2001) p.177, no.2537

<sup>78</sup> *Ghurur al-Hikam wa durar al-kalim* (Qom: Imam-e 'Asr, 2001) p. 177, no. 2537.

The *dhikr* is presented here as the quintessence of all religious activity, or as the spiritual act *par excellence*. For the universality of its modes— standing, sitting, reclining, ‘in yourself’ ‘with humility’, ‘with awe’, ‘in secret’, ‘under one’s breath’, according to the verses cited above— transcend the formal rules pertaining to the fixed canonical prayers, which involve particular words, movements, conditions, and times: the *dhikr*, by contrast is described as something to be performed at all times, in all places, in all postures; it is thus to be woven into the texture of everyday life, rather than super-imposed upon life as an extraneous, formalistic practice.

One of the names of the Prophet is indeed *dhikru’Llah*, (remembrance of God) and the whole of his life, in all its manifold diversity can be summed up in this phrase: never for a moment was he distracted from God, he was always immersed in consciousness of reality. Now, turning to the monks, we will find that such a perspective on prayer resonates deeply with the chief, distinguishing feature of the monastic contemplative path, particularly as regards the Eastern Orthodox Church, to which the monks of St Catherine’s have always belonged. The ‘prayer of the Heart’, the ‘Jesus Prayer’, which is the continuous repetition of a formula containing the Name of Jesus— was and still is the essence of what is known as the Hesychastic Way, from *hesychia*, meaning ‘silence and stillness’. This refers to a state of receptivity to nothing but the divine Presence. Listen to this description of the remembrance of God given by one of the earliest masters of Hesychasm, St. Diadochos of Photiki, who lived in the fifth century:

“Those who desire to free themselves from their corruption ought to pray not merely from time to time, but at all times..... a man who merely practices the remembrance of God from time to time loses through lack of continuity what he hopes to gain through his prayer. It is a mark of one who truly loves holiness that he continuously burns up what is worldly in his heart through practising the remembrance of God, so that, little by little, evil is consumed in the fire of this remembrance...”<sup>79</sup>

Not only can this passage be read as a commentary on the Qur’anic words, *and the remembrance of God is greater*, but also on the verse which tells us

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<sup>79</sup> *The Philokalia*, vol. 1



about men who are not distracted by trade and business from the remembrance of God.<sup>80</sup>

At this point we can anticipate the following objection: the God which is believed in, remembered and invoked by the Christian contemplatives is not identical to Allah, for they believe in a Trinitarian God. Now there are two responses we can make. The first is to cite the verse of the Qur'an which tells the Muslims to say to the People of the Book explicitly: *Our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender.*<sup>81</sup>

Other theological arguments could be made here, but let us move to the second response, which leads us to a more profound understanding of what this verse can mean in metaphysical terms. This involves studying carefully the doctrinal framework within which the remembrance of God was and is accomplished by the Christian monks.

To be as brief as possible, this is described as mystical theology, or as apophatic, that is, negative, theology, associated chiefly with the towering figure of St Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>82</sup> This figure, whose life is shrouded in mystery, probably lived in the fifth century. He adopted the persona of St Paul's Athenian convert mentioned in Acts, 17: 34; and wrote under this pseudonym treatises that remain foundational for Christian mysticism.

So what is the nature of this 'God' in whom the Christian mystical theologians believe? According to Dionysius, and all the great authorities in the Hesychastic tradition, God is absolutely indescribable. He is the inscrutable One, writes Dionysius, 'out of reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this unity unifying every unity.' This sounds very much like *tawhid*, does it not?

Dionysius continues: When...we give the name of "God" to that

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<sup>80</sup> Surat al-Nur, XXIV: 36-37.

<sup>81</sup> Surat al-'Ankabut, XXIX:46

<sup>82</sup> The scholar Bernard McGinn describes him as the fountainhead of mystical speculative systems for at least one thousand years.' *The Foundations of Mysticism* (London: SCM Press, 1992), vol. 1, p. 158.

transcendent hiddenness, when we call it “life” or “being” or “light” or “Word”, what our minds lay hold of is nothing other than certain activities apparent to us...<sup>83</sup> Does this not remind us of the Qur’anic refrain: *glorified be God above what they describe?*

Going forward in time, but coming closer in space to St. Catherine’s, listen to St Gregory of Sinai, of the 14<sup>th</sup> century: “stillness means the shedding of all thoughts for a time, even those which are Divine and engendered by the Spirit ...”<sup>84</sup>

The state of Hesychia, then, is receptive only to That which transcends all thoughts, and therefore all dogmas— it is an opening to the divine Reality as it is in itself, not such as it is defined by dogmatic thought. It is in this contemplation of the supreme Reality— which is absolutely One— that the Christian theological tenet of the oneness of God finds its most compelling consummation. St. Gregory of Palamas, another central figure in the tradition of Hesychasm, puts this oneness of God in the following terms: <sup>85</sup>

‘We worship one true and perfect God in three true and perfect Persons— not a threefold God— far from it— but a simple God.’<sup>86</sup> We should remember here that simple means non-compound, absolutely itself with no admixture or multiplicity.

Again, let us anticipate the obvious objection: this conception of the oneness of God is compromised by the mention of three Persons. My response is this: what is more important for us, as Muslims, when we evaluate this Christian conception of God— is it the oneness, the ultimate

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<sup>83</sup> ‘Cited by Vincent Rossi, ‘Presence, Participation, Performance: The Remembrance of God in the Early Hesychast Fathers’, in ed. James S. Cutsinger, *Paths to the Heart--Sufism and the Christian East*, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2002, pp. 78-79. Cf. Imam Baqir.

<sup>84</sup> Cited by James Cutsinger, ‘Hesychia: An Orthodox opening to Esoteric Ecumenism’, in *Paths to the Heart*, p. 236

<sup>85</sup> As Jeremy Henzell-Thomas notes: *simple* denotes “same-fold” - that is, not multifarious, exactly what is denoted by the original meaning of “identity”. It goes back ultimately to a compound formed from prehistoric Indo-European \**sm-*, \**sem-*, \**som-* ‘same’ (source also of English *same*, *similar*, *single*, etc) and \**pl-* ‘fold’. This passed into Latin as *simplus*, “single”.

<sup>86</sup> Cited by Peter Samsel, ‘A Unity with Distinctions: Parallels in the Thought of St Gregory Palamas and Ibn Arabi’, in *Paths to the Heart*, p. 195.

Reality that transcends all dogmas, or is it the fact that, on the level of dogma, a Trinitarian conception comes into the picture? We contend that we would be true both to the Qur'an and the Sunnah if we focus on what is *absan*, finest, most excellent, in the Christian conception of the Real, and thus allow their own stress on the transcendent oneness of God to take priority, for us, over the Trinitarian aspect of their belief.

Furthermore, our ability to focus on this transcendent aspect of their belief will be deepened in the very measure that we are sensitive to the spiritual substance of our own faith; and it will be strengthened also by our awareness of the fact that the reality of God transcends all dogmas, our own included; and this position will be made more existential and less theoretical insofar as we intensify our commitment to that reality through the actual practice of prayer, devotion and contemplation.

This point of view helps us to resolve the paradox of the Qur'anic position on the People of the Book: on the one hand, many verses criticize their dogmatic errors; and on the other, there are clear verses indicating that they are nonetheless saved on account of their faith and virtue. There is also an incident in the Prophet's life which helps us to resolve this paradox; it is an eloquent expression of the principle we have been trying to stress: sincere devotion to the supreme Reality transcends the plane of dogmatic differences.

A delegation of Christians came from Najran in Yemen to engage the Prophet in theological debate, largely over the nature of Christ. What matters from our point of view is not so much the fact that the debate was cut short by the Prophet's challenge to engage in a *mubabala*, a curse on those who were wrong— a challenge the Christians did not take up; nor does its spiritual significance reside only in the fact that the Prophet offered the Christians protection, in return for tribute. For me, the deepest significance of this episode lies in the fact that, when the Bishop wished to perform the liturgy for the delegation, the Prophet allowed him to do so in his own mosque.

Now the Prophet was fully aware of what the liturgy entailed, in its essentials, and that the formulae used would of course centre on Christ as the

Son of God. The Bishop would thus be reciting the very words that are so severely censured in the Qur'an; and yet the Prophet allowed him to do so in his own sacred place of worship. Was this just a question of good *adab* on the Prophet's part? Or can we see this act of spiritual etiquette arising, rather, out of the Prophet's recognition of the principle we are stressing here: just as the divine reality transcends all dogma, likewise, sincere devotion to that reality transcends the dogmatic framework within which it is accomplished.

Let us return to the words of the Qur'an cited by the Prophet in the Charter: *Discourse not with them except in that which is finest*. We have seen in the Prophet's actions towards the monks, in particular, a clear expression of what this 'finest' element is: all that is most noble, most elevated, most sincere. This mode of discourse does not mean a refusal to differ: it means to differ with dignity and respect. It means a refusal to allow any differences to eclipse or undermine what is most noble in the neighbour, in the "Other"; what is most essential in his or her belief. It means a refusal to allow one's attitude to the "Other"—whether within or outside one's religion—to be determined by extrinsic and relative factors. It means, on the contrary, an affirmation of all that is best in the "Other", and to make this the basis of one's fundamental disposition towards the "Other".

In this way, one induces the "Other" to likewise see what is best in one's own position: a reciprocal recognition, a mutual respect can thus be envisaged and cultivated between two or more partners in dialogue.

This reciprocal recognition is finely expressed in the relationship between the monks and the Prophet, and it is enshrined in symbolic as well as literal terms, For we have not only the covenant of St. Catherine's, and other letters of recognition and protection granted by the Prophet, but also the following remarkable facts of sacred history, centred on the monks associated with the city of Bostra in Syria who recognised the Prophet prior to the onset of his mission.

First we have the monk Bahira, who invited the Meccan traders passing through Bostra to a feast, and recognised the signs of the awaited prophet in

the young Muhammad who was with his uncle, Abu Talib.<sup>87</sup> These signs, described in prophecies handed down from generation to generation, were most likely the basis on which, decades later, the monk Nestor, also in Bostra— perhaps in the very same cell of Bahira— told Maysara that he was travelling with the long-awaited Prophet.<sup>88</sup> And finally, again in Bostra, we hear of an unnamed monk telling Talha that the Prophet had come, and named him.<sup>89</sup> The mystery of these coincidences is deepened when we remember that Amina, the Prophet’s mother, claimed that she was aware of a light within her when she was pregnant, a light which shone with such intensity that she claimed she could see the castles of Bostra.<sup>90</sup>

Can we see here a luminous anticipation of the mutual recognition between the Prophet and the monks— each recognising the light of God in the other? This provides us with a wonderful theme for meditation, with which we can draw these remarks to a close. The light of the Prophet shines from the womb, the *rahim*. This takes us directly to *rahma* (mercy), the compassion proper to true wisdom: *We sent you not, God says to the Prophet, except as a rahma (mercy) to all creation* (Surat al-Anbiya’, XXI: 107). This compassionate wisdom does not negate but affirm, not abrogate but illuminate, the truth and sanctity present in all religions, which are all revelations of one and the same God. It is thus that the Prophet is described, together with the believers, as believing in “God, His Angels, His Books and His Messengers”: *la nufarrigu bayna abadin min rusulibi— We make no distinction between any of His Messengers*.<sup>91</sup> In the luminous and compassionate wisdom of the Prophet, then, there is both illumination and illimitation or Non-Delimitation: bounded by no dogmatic restrictions, it brings truth to light wherever it is to be found. It is thus ‘light upon light’, *nurun ‘ala nur*.

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<sup>87</sup> *Muhammad—His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, M. Lings, Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1996, reprint, Suhail Academy, 2004, p. 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p.47.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p.21.

<sup>91</sup> Surat al-Baqarah, II: 285.