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CLASSICAL AND MODERN QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS ON QUR'AN 9:29

AL-SUYUTI (D. 1505 CE)

Fight those who don't believe in God nor in the Last Day [Unless they believe in the Prophet God bless him and grant him peace] nor hold what is forbidden that which God and His emissary have forbidden [e.g., wine] nor embrace the true faith [which is firm, and abrogates other faiths, i.e., the Islamic religion] from among [for distinguishing] those who were given the Book [i.e., the Jews and Christians] until they give the head-tax [i.e., the annual taxes imposed on them] (*'an yadin*) humbly submissive, and obedient to Islam's rule.¹

[*Jizya* is part of] land and slaves . . . is incumbent upon the People of the Book . . . on people who allow wine [Jews and Christians] and pig-meat [Christians]. . . [Saaghiruuna means] submissively . . . [it means] by coercion . . . [*'an yadin* means] directly, not trusting the trickery of an intermediary . . . by force . . . without resistance . . . in an unpraiseworthy manner . . . while you stand and [the *dhimmi*] sits with the whip in front of you [you take] the money while he has dirt on his head.²

AL-ZAMAKHSHARI (D. 1144)

'an yadin): does this refer to the hand of the giver or the receiver? It refers to the giver, i.e. from a forthcoming rather than a withholding hand. For he who refuses and withholds doesn't proffer his hand, as opposed to the reluctant obeyer. [proverb example]—not by someone deputized, but directly from the hand of the *dhimmi*]. The hand of the taker means that [when he takes it] his hand is the

upper, the ruler; or, because of the benefit [to the *dhimmis*, viz. protection] because receiving the *jizya* from them and lowering their spirits is of benefit to them. (wa-hum Saarighuuna) it is taken from them when they are in a lowered and humbled state. [The *dhimmi*] must approach walking, not riding; the taker is standing while the giver is sitting and trembling in awe /yutaltilu taltalatan/. He is seized by his collar, and is told: “Perform the *jizya*,” and is pushed on the nape of his neck /yuzakhkhu/.³

AL-TABARI (D. 923)

The *dhimmi* posture during the collection of the *jizya*—“[lowering themselves] by walking on their hands [on all fours?], reluctantly; on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas—but this is not accepted by everyone.”⁴

AL-BEIDAWI (D. 1286)

... on the authority of Ibn Abbas ... that the *jizya* is taken from the *dhimmi*, [while] his neck is being hung low.⁵

IBN KATHIR (D. 1373)

The Order to Fight the People of the Scriptures until They Give the Jizyah

Allah said, “*Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*” Therefore when the People of the Scriptures disbelieved in Muhammad, they had no beneficial faith in any Messenger or what the Messengers brought. Rather they followed their religions because this conformed with their ideas, lusts, and the ways of their forefathers, not because they are Allah’s laws and religion. Had they been true believers in their religions, that faith would have directed them to believe in Muhammad because all Prophets gave the good news of Muhammad’s advent and commanded them to obey and follow him. Yet when he was sent, they disbelieved in him, even though he is the mightiest of all Messengers. Therefore, they do not follow the religion of earlier Prophets because these religions came from Allah, but because these suit their desires and lusts. Therefore, their claimed faith in an earlier Prophet will not benefit them because they disbelieved in the master, the mightiest, the last and most perfect of all Prophets. Hence Allah’s statement,

“Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the People of the Scripture.”

This honorable Ayah was revealed with the order to fight the People of the Book, after the pagans were defeated, the people entered Allah's region in large numbers, and the Arabian Peninsula was secured under the Muslims' control. Allah commanded His Messenger to fight the People of the Scriptures, Jews and Christians, on the ninth year of Hijrah, and he prepared his army to fight the Romans [Byzantines] and called the people to *Jihad* announcing his intent and destination. The Messenger sent his intent to various Arab areas around Al-Madinah to gather forces, and he collected an army of thirty thousand. Some people from Al-Madinah and some hypocrites, in and around it, lagged behind, for that was a year of drought and intense heat. The Messenger of Allah marched, heading towards Ash-Sham to fight the Romans until he reached Tabuk, where he set camp for about twenty days next to its water resources. He then prayed to Allah for a decision and went back to Al-Madinah because it was a hard year and the people were weak, as we will mention, Allah willing.

Paying Jizyah Is a Sign of Kufr and Disgrace

Allah said, *“until they pay the Jizyah,”* if they do not choose to embrace Islam, *“with willing submission,”* in defeat and subservience, *“and feel themselves subdued,”* disgraced, humiliated and belittled. Therefore, Muslims are not allowed to honor the people of *Dhimmah* or elevate them above Muslims, for they are miserable, disgraced, and humiliated. Muslim recorded from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said, *“Do not initiate the Salam to the Jews and the Christians, and if you meet them in a road, force them to its narrowest alley.”* This is why the Leader of the faithful 'Umar b. Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, demanded his well-known conditions be met by the Christians, these conditions that ensured their continued humiliation, degradation, and disgrace. The scholars of Hadith narrated from Abdur-Rahman b. Ghanm Al-Ash'ari that he said, *“I recorded for 'Umar b. Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, the terms of the treaty of peace he conducted with the Christians of Ash-Sham: ‘In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. This is a document to the servant of Allah, 'Umar the Leader of the faithful, for the Christians of such and such city. When you [Muslims] came to us we requested safety for ourselves, children, property and followers of our religion. We made a condition on ourselves that we will neither erect in our areas a monastery, church, or a sanctuary for a monk, nor restore any place of worship that needs restoration nor use any of them for the purpose of enmity against Muslims. We will not prevent any Muslim from resting in our churches whether they come by day or night, and we will open the doors [of our houses of worship] for the wayfarer and passerby. Those Muslims who come as guests, will*

enjoy boarding and food for three days. We will not allow a spy against Muslims into our churches and homes or hide deceit [or betrayal] against Muslims. We will not teach our children the Qur'an, publicize practices of *Shirk*, invite anyone to *Shirk* or prevent any of our fellows from embracing Islam, if they choose to do so. We will respect Muslims, move from places we sit in if they choose to sit in them. We will not imitate their clothing, caps, turbans, sandals, hairstyles, speech, nicknames and title names, or ride on saddles, hang swords on the shoulders, collect weapons of any kind or carry these weapons. We will not encrypt our stamps in Arabic, or sell liquor. We will have the front of our hair cut, wear our customary clothes wherever we are, wear belts around our waist, refrain from erecting crosses on the outside of our churches and demonstrating them and our books in public in Muslim fairways and markets. We will not sound the bells of our churches, except discretely, or raise our voices while reciting our holy books inside our churches in the presence of Muslims, nor raise our voices [with prayer] at our funerals, or light torches in funeral processions in the fairways of Muslims, or in their markets. We will not bury our dead next to Muslim dead, or buy servants who were captured by Muslims. We will be guides for Muslims and refrain from breaching privacy in their homes.' When I gave this document to 'Umar, he added to it, 'We will not beat any Muslim. These are the conditions that we set against ourselves and followers to our religion in return for safety and protection. If we break any of these promises that we set for your benefit against ourselves, then our *Dhimmah* (promise of protection) is broken and you are allowed to do with us what you are allowed of people of defiance and rebellion.'"⁶

SAYYID QUTB (D. 1966)

History witnessed repeated violations by the Jews of their treaties with the Muslim state in Madinah, as also their scheming against the Muslims. These violations led to the encounters with the Jewish tribes of Qaynuqa, al-Nadir and Qurayzah, and also the Battle of Khaybar. Their efforts to bring together all the forces hostile to Islam in an unholy affiance, with the aim of exterminating Islam altogether, are well known.

They have continued to scheme against Islam and the Muslim community ever since. They were instrumental in the chaotic events that led to the assassination of the third rightly-guided Caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan and to the emergence of division in the Muslim community. They were the main culprits in the conflict that took place between 'Ali and Mu 'awiyah. They led the way in the fabrication of false statements attributed to the Prophet, historical reports and baseless interpretations of Qur'anic statements. They also paved the way to the victory of the Tartars and their conquest of Baghdad and the fall of the Islamic Caliphate.

In modern history, the Jews have been behind every calamity that has

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befallen the Muslim communities everywhere. They give active support to every attempt to crush the modern Islamic revival and extend their protection to every regime that suppresses such a revival.

History Tells Its Tale

The other people of earlier revelations, the Christians, have been no less hostile. Enmity between the Byzantines and the Persians went back for centuries. Nevertheless, as soon as the Church felt that Islam, the new faith, represented a threat to its concocted version of Christianity, which was no more than a collection of ancient pagan legends, misguided inventions and a handful of statements from the Prophet Jesus, both camps buried all their past enmity and age old-hatred to confront the new faith together.

Then the expedition to Tabuk, which is the major subject of discussion in this surah, took place, followed by the march of the army commanded by Usamah ibn Zayd. This was prepared by the Prophet and dispatched by his successor, Abu Bakr, in a demonstration of power to confront the Byzantine forces being mobilized to suppress the voice of Islam. Then the Muslims achieved a great victory in the Battle of Yarmuk against the Byzantines. This ushered in the liberation of wide areas of Syria, Egypt, North Africa and the Mediterranean from Byzantine colonialism, and the consolidation of an Islamic base in Andalusia.

These final rulings, as they are stated in this surah, deal with a specific situation that obtained in Arabia, and serve, in a sense, as a legislative prelude to the Tabuk campaign, the central issue of the surah, which sought to confront the Byzantine mobilization close to the Arabian borders. But the attitude of the people of earlier revelations and their hostility to Islam and the Muslim community were not the result of any particular historical event, or limited to any stage. That is a permanent reality. They will continue to be at war with Islam until the Muslims have abandoned their faith altogether. This hostility and the war it launches will continue to be fed by all possible means. Hence, the rulings outlined in this surah remain in full effect, unlimited to a particular period of history.

A Fight until Submission

Fight against those who—despite having been given Scripture—do not truly believe in God and the Last Day, and do not treat as forbidden that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth, till they [agree to] pay the submission tax with a willing hand, after they have been bumbled. (Verse 29)

This verse and the ones that follow were meant to prepare the Muslims for their expedition to Tabuk and the confrontation with the Byzantines and their puppet regime of Christian Arabs, known as the Ghassanid. This suggests that the

descriptions we have here were true of the people on the other side of the confrontation. They simply show the reality of those people. These descriptions are not mentioned here as conditions for fighting the people of earlier revelations, but as qualities inherent in their distorted beliefs and the actual reality of those people. Hence they provide the justification for fighting them. The ruling also applies to all those who share the same beliefs and characteristics.

This verse specifies three such characteristics. (1) They do not believe in God and the Last Day; (2) they do not treat as forbidden what God has forbidden; and (3) they do not believe in the religion of truth. The verses that follow show how these characteristics apply to them.

Firstly, the Jews claim that Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians assert that Christ is His son. These claims echo similar ones made by the pagans of former times. Hence, they are to be treated on the same basis as people who do not believe in God and the Last Day. Secondly, they treat their rabbis and their monks, as well as Jesus Christ, as their Lords, in place of God. This is in total conflict with the principles of the faith of truth which is based on total submission to God alone, who has no partners. As they make such claims they demonstrate that they are idolaters who do not follow the true faith. Thirdly, they try to put out the light of God's guidance with their mouths. In other words, they are at war with the divine faith. No one is ever at war with the divine faith if he truly believes in God. Fourthly, many of their monks and rabbis devour peoples property without any justification. They do so knowing that their claims to such property are false. Hence they do not treat as forbidden what God and His Messenger have made forbidden, whether we take this statement as referring to the Messenger sent to them or to the Prophet Muhammad.

All these characteristics were true of the Christians in Syria and the Byzantines, as well as other Christians ever since Church Synods distorted the faith preached by Jesus Christ and claimed that he was the son of God and invented the concept of the Trinity, the conflict between the different sects and churches over the concept of Trinity notwithstanding. What we have here then is a general order stating a universal rule that applies to all those among the people of earlier revelations who share the same characteristics as the Christians of Syria and Byzantium.

Aggression has been committed in the first place, against God's Lordship of the universe and against human beings who are forced to submit to deities other than God. As Islam tries to defend God's Lordship and human dignity, ignorance will try to stop it by aggression and war. This is the reality we have to realize.

This Qur'anic verse commands the Muslims to fight against those among the people of earlier revelations who "do not believe in God and the Last Day." A person who claims that Ezra or Jesus is the son of God cannot be described as a believer in God. The same applies to a person who says that the Christ is the Lord, or that God is one of a Trinity, or that He manifested Himself in Jesus. It further applies to all concepts formulated by the Synods, diverse as these concepts are.

Nor can we describe as believers in God and the Last-Day—those who say that they will suffer God's punishment only for a few days no matter what sins they may commit because God loves them as His sons and daughters, or because they are God's chosen people. The same applies to those who claim that all sins are forgiven through a holy communion with Jesus Christ, which is the only way to achieve forgiveness. Neither of these two groups can be described as believers in God or in the Last Day.

This verse also describes the people of earlier revelations as ones who do not treat as forbidden what God and His Messenger have made forbidden. Whether the term "His Messenger" refers to the Messenger whom God sent to them in particular or to the Prophet Muhammad, the import is the same. The following verses explain this by saying that they devour other people's property by false claims, an action which has been forbidden in all divine messages and by all God's messengers. Some of the clearest examples of this are usurious transactions, the sale of bonds of forgiveness by the Church, opposition to the divine faith with brutal force as well as trying to turn believers away from their faith. Another clear example is forcing people to submit to beings other than God, and forcing them to implement laws other than those revealed by God. All these examples are covered by the description: "who do not treat as forbidden what God and His Messenger have forbidden." All this applies today to the people of earlier revelations as was applicable to them when this verse was revealed.

The Qur'anic verse also describes them as not following "the religion of truth." This is clear from what we have already said. It is not part of the religion of truth to believe in the Lordship of anyone other than God, or to apply a law different from God's law, or to accept legislation enacted by any authority other than God, or to submit to anyone other than Him. All these qualities are today true of the people of earlier revelations, as it was true of them then.

The condition simply that they should pay the tribute, or the submission tax, with a willing hand and that they be utterly subdued. What is the purpose of this condition, and why is it the end at which all fighting must stop?

The answer is found in the fact that with such characteristics, the people of earlier revelations place themselves at war with the divine faith, both in belief and in practical terms. They are also at war with Islamic society because of the inherent conflict between the codes of living derived from the divine faith on the one hand and ignorance, or *jahiliyyah*, on the other. As described in these verses, the people of earlier revelations belong to *jahiliyyah* in both beliefs and practices. History also proves the nature of conflict, and the impossibility of co-existence between the two codes. The people of earlier revelations were determined in their opposition to the Islamic faith in the period preceding the revelation of this verse, and in the period following it, up to the present day.

As the only religion of truth that exists on earth today, Islam takes appropriate action to remove all physical and material obstacles that try to impede its efforts

to liberate mankind from submission to anyone other than God. That submission is translated in following the religion of truth, provided that every human being is given free choice. There must be no pressure either from the religion itself or from those forces putting up the physical obstacles. The practical way to ensure the removal of those physical obstacles while not forcing anyone to adopt Islam is to smash the power of those authorities based on false beliefs until they declare their submission and demonstrate this by paying the submission tax. When this happens, the process of liberating mankind is completed by giving every individual the freedom of choice based on conviction. Anyone who is not convinced may continue to follow his faith. However, he has to pay the submission tax to fulfill a number of objectives . . . by paying this tax, known as *jizyah*, he declares that he will not stand in physical opposition to the efforts advocating the true Divine faith.⁷

AL-AZHAR, AL-MUNTAKHAB FII TAFSIIR AL-QUR'AAN AL-KARIIM, 1985:

9.28: O you believers, it is because of their polytheism that the polytheists have defiled their souls, being in error in their belief. Don't let them enter the Prohibited Mosque after this year (9AH). If you fear poverty because of cutting off your business with them, God will compensate you for this, and out of his bounty will make you rich, if He wills. Verily, God is knowledgeable about your condition, and wise to put it [back] in order.

9.29: O you believers, fight the unbelievers, namely the People of the Book who do not believe True Faith and do not accept the Resurrection and the Recompense [heaven, hell] in the true way, and do not require stopping what God and his Emissary ordered stopped; they do not embrace the True Religion, i.e. Islam. Fight until they believe, or force them to pay the *jizya* humbly and obediently, not grudgingly, so that they contribute to the Islamic budget [*sic*].

9.30: . . . may God curse these unbelievers and their families, out of amazement at how far they have strayed from the Truth, which is clear; but they inclined toward error.⁸

RICHARD BELL (D. 1952), A COMMENTARY ON THE QUR'AN

V. [verse] 29 begins somewhat abruptly, and the phrase *min alladhina 'utu l-kitab* comes in rather awkwardly. It is also an unusual charge against the People of the Book that they do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day. It looks as if this verse had first been used with regard to the polytheists, and later made the beginning of

the declaration of war against “those who have been given the Book.” *jizyah*—only here in later Muslim law was the special poll-tax levied upon non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, and was distinguished from the *kharaj* which rested on the land. But it is doubtful if this distinction was introduced before the second century [A.H.]; and probably the word here is equivalent to “tribute” in general. ‘an yad, the exact meaning of the phrase is uncertain. Beidawi gives “submissively” or “in person.” . . . Another possible sense is “out of hand,” i.e., at once, on the spot, in ready money.⁹

NOTES

1. Suyuti wrote a famous and ubiquitous commentary, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, which he composed with his teacher, Jalaal al-Diin al-MaHallii; the latter composed the second part, and then Suyuti wrote the first part to complete it, including this translation/quote for Q. 9.29. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. (Beirut, 1404/1984), p. 244.

2. From Suyuti’s *Durr al-Manthūr* . . . (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 228, where Suyuti quotes various traditions.

3. Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaaf* . . . , ed. M. Ahmad (Cairo, 1365/1946), vol. 2, pp. 262, 263.

4. Tabari, *Jāmi ‘al-Bayān* . . . , ed. M. Shākir (Beirut, 1421/2001), vol. 10, pp. 125, 126.

5. Beidawi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl* . . . , ed. H. O. Fleischer (1846–1848; repr., Osnabrueck, 1968), vol. 1, p. 383, line 25.

6. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathir* (Riyadh, 2000), vol. 4, pp. 404–407.

7. Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, vol. 8: Surah 9 (Leicestershire, UK, 2003), pp. 115–16, 120–23.

8. *Al-Muntakhab fī Tafsīr al-Qur’aan al-Kariim* [The Culled [correct selection from] Qur’an Commentary], 11th ed. (Cairo: Committee for the Qur’an and Sunna, 1985). Note says the *jizya* was a tax somewhere between 8 and 40 dirhams (p. 263 ff.).

9. Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur’an*, vol. 1: *Surahs I–XXIV* (Manchester, 1991), p. 299.