

**Islam and the Fate of Others:
The Salvation Question**

Mohammad Hassan Khalil

New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 272 pages.

In *Islam and the Fate of Others*, Mohammad Hassan Khalil masterfully approaches a difficult topic. What happens to non-Muslims when they die? Who is accountable for accepting Muhammad's prophethood? Could any sane person possibly reject the truth were it clearly revealed to him/her? In order to address these questions and others, Khalil probes some of the most prominent premodern and modern voices in Islamic history. A reader looking for consensus on the answers to these challenging queries, however, will be left direly wanting. Khalil unearths not a monolithic consensus but instead a cacophony of opinions concerning soteriological matters, which overwhelmingly envi-

sions a heaven filled with Muslims and non-Muslims. As an added bonus to Khalil's robust and provocative study, his adroit prose reads smoothly, his storytelling is exquisite, and he never obfuscates his topic with obtuse language or style. That, combined with meticulous attention to transliteration and precise, fluid translations, makes Khalil's monograph an absolute pleasure to read and should appeal to specialists and non-specialists.

In order to interrogate Islamic concepts of salvation, Khalil chooses four geographically and ideologically diverse representatives from the tradition: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240), Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935). Each section gives attention to voices beyond these four thinkers, as well, and in the final chapter Khalil offers an especially rich discussion of modern thinkers from across the globe who have written on soteriology in Islam. Khalil thus demonstrates both explicit and implicit connections between premodern and modern debates in this area. The author even manages to draw a potential connection between Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and the Nation of Islam. Khalil perceptively notes that the field of translation can be a "theological battleground" and cites examples from English translations of the Qur'an, making sure that even readers unfamiliar with Arabic will appreciate the significance of his study.

Another related and forthcoming volume edited by Khalil, *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others* (Oxford University Press), promises to add to the discussion he began in his monograph. Unlike his monograph, *Between Heaven and Hell* will give significant attention to this-worldly implications of the fate of non-Muslims in the afterlife. Because Khalil's objective in the monograph is to analyze the annals of Islamic tradition relating to views on the afterlife, he does not focus extensively on this-worldly consequences of those views. The still unpublished *Roads to Paradise: Concepts of Eschatology in the Hereafter in Islam* (eds. S. Guenther and T. Lawson) will also contribute to the robust topic of Islamic views on the afterlife.

The first chapter in *Islam and the Fate of Others*, "Damnation as Exception," focuses on the Khurasani metaphysician al-Ghazali but also treats the much later Indian scholar Shah Wali Allah (d. 1176/1762). The second chapter, "All Paths Lead to God," targets the Andalusian mystic Ibn al-'Arabi while also giving attention to Shirazi philosopher Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640). The third chapter, "The Redemption of Humanity," devotes its study to the controversial polymath Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.

The fourth chapter, “The Modern Scene,” simultaneously acts as a conclusion and complements Khalil’s *Religion Compass* article on modern pluralism debates in English. This chapter treats the widest spectrum of thinkers, focusing not only on Rida but also the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), South African Farid Esack, Pakistani Fazlur Rahman, and British convert T. J. Winter.

Detailing the arguments of each thinker Khalil examines would be impossible, given the space limitations of this review. I will therefore spend the rest of this review presenting a few critiques. Firstly, although Khalil’s monograph explores the writings of dozens of diverse Muslim thinkers, the book at once palpably and disproportionately favors Sunni scholars. Some Shi‘i scholars are mentioned, mostly in the last chapter (e.g., Tabataba‘i, Ayoub, and Sachedina), with the key exception of Mulla Sadra in the second chapter. But each of the four primary studies spotlights Sunni scholars. Khalil, however, notes this limitation in his introduction, explaining that his “sampling” is neither exhaustive nor representative of all schools of Islamic thought. The influence of the four figures he selects reaches far beyond their particular schools, though, and “their interpretations of Islam are, therefore, extremely useful and consequential” (p. 19).

Khalil’s extensive citations of Qur’anic verses, both his own analyses and citations of Muslim scholars, testify to the unparalleled role of the Qur’an in Muslim discourses on soteriology and the fate of non-Muslims. These citations also demonstrate Khalil’s attention to detail and hermeneutics. He gives ample attention to how scholars have understood Qur’anic words and phrases like *aḥqāban* and *khālīdīn fihā abadān* (for example, do these expressions mean forever or a long time?), but this reviewer would have liked to see more attention given to the exegetical methodology of the scholars whom Khalil treats. He makes no mention, for example, of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* or Walid Saleh’s work on Ibn Taymiyya’s Qur’anic hermeneutics. Similarly, Khalil remains silent about Whittingham and Abul Quasem’s scholarship on al-Ghazali’s approach to the Qur’an. And although when discussing Ibn al-‘Arabi Khalil cites Chittick extensively, he does not mention Sands’ monograph on Sufi Qur’an commentaries, which treats not only the approaches of Ibn al-‘Arabi, but also of al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya.

Beyond the Qur’an, Khalil also shows great familiarity and expertise with a plethora of primary as well as secondary literature on his topic. In the first chapter, Khalil explains that he limits his investigations of primary sources to “relevant works” of a given author. At the risk of arguing from absence, one

would suppose that each of the authors he treats wrote more about salvation than Khalil suggests. For example, in multi-volume works like Ibn Taymiyya's *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* and al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, how can the reader be sure that Khalil found the most salient sections dealing with soteriology of non-Muslims? Expecting Khalil to have thoroughly dissected Ibn Taymiyya's collection of fatwas – which is a library in its own right – defies reason, but the reader may have benefited from greater articulation of the author's method for locating sources.

Other potentially neglected areas in *Islam and the Fate of Others* include secondary literature that relates precisely to his topic. In Khalil's discussions of modern thinkers, he includes the Pakistani reformer Fazlur Rahman and cites his *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, but not his 1990 article "The People of the Book and the Diversity of Religions." This work deals explicitly with the soteriological fate of non-Muslims. Khalil also cites Carl-A. Keller from Waardenburg's edited volume *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions* but makes no mention of Waardenburg's monograph *Muslims and Others*, which would have presumably deserved mention if for no other reason than to critique; incidentally, Khalil's citation of Keller in the bibliography is listed incorrectly in the otherwise alphabetized list.

Additionally, in the opening and closing lines of his book Khalil asks: "What does Islam say about the fate of non-Muslims?" Although he writes about what numerous Muslims have said about the fate of non-Muslims, this emphasizes that perhaps Islam says nothing about anything, ever. Rather, Muslims do. Although many individuals may very well ask what Islam says about a given topic, the language is imprecise because Islam does not speak.¹ Given that Khalil demonstrates so forcefully that Muslims have maintained divergent and sometimes conflicting positions on soteriological matters, we should realize all the more that humans, through language, describe ontological matters. Khalil implicitly acknowledges that Islam does not talk, but directly stating that it does not would have aided his argument, given a tendency for authors to mistakenly personify religions.

Regrettably, Khalil also speaks of Islam and "other faiths" (e.g., p. 6). Although "faith" as a synonym for religion is commonplace, a closer examination of the term suggests a lack of interchangeability among faith, religion, and particular religions. Like the language of "Islam says," referring to religions as faiths subtly compromises Khalil's goals; it positions Islam as something that is synonymous with belief and therefore not as centrally related to practice or behavior. The word choice, moreover, emphasizes the hegemony of Protestantism over the English language. A brief section on the Islamic con-

ceptions of the afterlife would also have been useful (e.g., articulating doctrines on the punishment in the grave, *barzakh*, *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, intercession, and the concept fate itself). Much to this reviewer's delight, he did not locate any typos in the text (except a few entries in the bibliography that were misplaced).

Some critiques notwithstanding, Khalil's monograph is a superb scholarly production on all levels. Given his forthcoming edited volume and already published article in *Religion Compass*, moreover, he has created an important niche for himself as a rising scholar in Islamic studies. Khalil should be congratulated for his splendid achievement that is *Islam and the Fate of Others*. The text should be of interest to scholars of theology, comparative religion, Qur'anic studies, ethics, pluralism, philosophy, Islamic history, and Sufism.

Endnote

1. "‘Islam’ does not get up in the morning. Islam does not brush its teeth. Islam does not take a shower. Islam eats nothing. And perhaps most importantly for our consideration, Islam says nothing. Muslims do," Omid Safi, "The Times They are a-Changin': A Muslim Quest for Gender Justice, Equality, and Pluralism," in *Progressive Muslims*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 22.

Elliott Bazzano
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Religious Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara, CA