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الدولة الإسلامية

A Self-Profile of the Islamic State: The Creedal Document

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Introduction

In 2002 Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi established a jihadi group in Iraq called Monotheism and Jihad. In 2004 he pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and renamed his group "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," thus apparently merging it with Al-Qaeda. After Al-Zarqawi was killed in June 2006, his followers renamed the group "The Islamic State in Iraq," without bin Laden's approval. This ostensive state was not proclaimed a caliphate, but its leader, Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, was referred to as "The Commander of the Faithful," a term usually applied to the caliph. This first version of the Islamic State was almost annihilated by 2010. It recuperated, however, and in June 2014 the group reestablished the state, this time explicitly declaring it to be it a caliphate. This second version was at first called The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS; in Arabic: *dawlat al-Islam fi al-Iraq wal-Sham*, abbreviated as Daesh, and also translated as The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL). Later the name was changed to The Islamic State (*al-dawla al-islamiyya*), in accordance with the organization's rejection of the concept of nation states – though others continue to refer to the organization as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh (this report will use the name ISIS). Ibrahim Awwad, also known as Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Al-Huseini Al-Qurashi, was appointed as the Islamic State's first caliph.¹

During the period in which Al-Zarqawi cooperated with Al-Qaeda (October 2004 - June 2006), his movement posted a short document on its website signed by "The High Command and the Legal Committee of Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers (i.e. Iraq)." This document set out the main creeds and doctrines of the combined Monotheism and Jihad/Al-Qaeda organization.²

In 2015 – by which time the political scene in Iraq and Syria had changed considerably – ISIS republished the document with small modifications under the title "These Are Our Creeds and Ways." Released by ISIS's publishing house, Maktabat Al-Himma, it was posted on the Internet and apparently also distributed in print.³ One of the online copies is subtitled "*Ahl al-sunna wa-jama'a madha ya'taqidun wa-bi-madha yu'minun?*" ("What are the creeds and beliefs of the People who follow the Prophet's Customs and adhere to the Community?"). The term *ahl al-sunna wa-jama'a* has always denoted orthodox Sunni Islam. This subtitle thus identifies the Islamic State's Islam as the genuine form of the religion.

The following report summarizes and analyzes the 2015 version of the creedal document, with occasional references to the earlier version. (For the full Arabic text of the 2015 document, see the Appendix at the end of this paper, following the Endnotes).

The document comprises 36 paragraphs (unnumbered in the original), appearing in a somewhat haphazard order. The opening paragraph delineates the boundaries of the community of believers, as follows: members are those who believe in absolute monotheism and the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, and meet all the requirements that ensue from this belief. Whoever fails to fully meet any of these requirements is an unbeliever, even if they proclaim themselves to be Muslims.

The next 35 paragraphs define the requirements that one must meet in order to be considered a Muslim, mostly in the form of mandatory creeds (as opposed to specific duties that must be performed by the believers). The requirements fall in two basic categories: theological and political. The first category involves articles of faith that relate to the concept of monotheism and the divine message, and to eschatology. The second involves principles relating to sources of authority, leadership, jihad, internal cohesion, the nature of faith and conditions for the accusation of unbelief (*takfir*). This is not to say that the religious/political distinction is a sharp one. "Politics" in Islam is informed by religion: the sources of authority are the sacred texts; internal cohesion is a religious obligation, and so is jihad, and the conditions for *takfir* define the transgressors against the religion, who must be fought. Conversely, some of the theological articles of faith have political implications. For example, within the category of eschatology the document mentions belief in the return of the caliphate. This tenet implies that believers owe allegiance to the Islamic State.

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Theology: Monotheism And The Divine Message

Debates about the concept of monotheism have raged among Muslims since the first centuries of Islam. Rationalists who were later referred to as the Mu'tazila movement raised several questions pertaining to monotheism. For example, how should a believer interpret Koranic idioms such as "Allah sees," "Allah's hand," etc., which are anthropomorphisms and might therefore be seen as impairing absolute monotheism? Another problem was presented by the belief, widely-held among Muslims, that the Koran is uncreated: this belief implies the existence of an eternal (because uncreated) entity besides Allah. Regarding the first question, the rationalists concluded that the attributes should not be taken literally, and regarding the second they concluded that the Koran was created by Allah. Yet another major issue related to Allah's justice, namely, predestination versus free will. If Allah decrees everything, this must include human actions. But then how can He punish humans for committing sins and reward them for doing good? The rationalists concluded that man is free to choose his own actions.

The Mu'tazila's opponents rejected these rationalist positions, and some of them attempted to resolve the conundrums using various intricate formulations. Regarding the issue of Allah's attributes, for example, it was suggested that at least some of them must be taken as metaphorical. The traditionalists, however, insisted on accepting the attributes as real and avoiding any attempt to apply human understanding to them. This was the position of many renowned medieval scholars, among them Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1348), the main authority for the neo-Hanbali school as well as for modern radical Muslims. ISIS adopts Ibn Taymiyya's position, citing him verbatim (par. 2 of the document). Ibn Taymiyya's formula alludes to the old controversies by emphasizing that Allah's attributes must be taken literally, "without allegorical or figurative interpretation and without voiding them of their content" (*min ghayr takyif wa-la tamthil wa-la tawil wa-la ta'til*).⁴

Taking a similar approach to the question of the Koran, Ibn Taymiyya argued that it, too, is part of Allah's attributes. As quoted in the document (par. 5), he wrote that the Koran "is Allah's words, part of His attributes, uncreated, both its letters and its meanings." By avoiding the word "eternal," Ibn Taymiyya's formula circumvents the implication that there is an eternal entity besides Allah (the Koran).⁵ The angels have been yet another challenge to logic, and the ISIS document adopts the conservative position, asserting that they exist and that love for them is a sign of true faith (par. 4). As for predestination and free will, ISIS adopts a complicated formula that retains both Allah's omnipotence and omniscience *and* human free will, without really resolving the paradox. According to this formula, Allah decrees everything, the will is His and His alone, He creates all human actions, and humans are free to choose their course of action if Allah chooses to allow this. In all of this He is just and compassionate (par. 9).

Being just, Allah has sent His message to humanity from the beginning of time. The document repeats the essential Muslim creed that Allah sent many prophets, the first being Adam and the last being Muhammad, whose message must be believed and obeyed by all humans (par. 3, 6).

Theology: Eschatology

Eschatological texts (i.e., texts discussing the afterlife and the end of days) in the Koran and Prophetic statements (*hadith*), and in other works by Muslims, comprise a vast corpus that allows for many different interpretations. That said, belief in certain eschatological themes was considered an indication of genuine faith from the very beginning of Islam. Moreover, the Last Judgment is presented in the Koran as the major incentive to repent and to believe in Allah and the Prophet.⁶ The tribulations of the grave, the Last Day, the Resurrection, the Bridge leading to the final gathering place, the portents of the Hour, the Savior (Mahdi) who will rule justly before the Hour, the return of Jesus, prophet of Allah, who will break all the crosses and slay the evil false messiah (*dajjal*) – all of these and many other elements have been broadly accepted by Muslims as essential creeds. The view that whoever disbelieves in them is an unbeliever has been widespread. There are, however, many eschatological prophecies that did not become creedal, as well as eschatological elements whose creedal status is still debated.⁷

Muslims have debated the chronology of the eschatological events, as well as many details – and the reality – of the eschatological descriptions. For example, what are the respective roles of Jesus and the Mahdi? And is the resurrection in fact body-and soul? Are

the pleasures of Heaven and tortures of Hell to be understood literally or figuratively? As with the issue of monotheism, the conservatives tended to understand the descriptions literally, whereas the rationalists did not.⁸ Modern Muslims add new perspectives to the discussions. Some attempt to provide scientific explanations for apocalyptic descriptions, whereas others identify modern realities with eschatological events. The latter phenomenon peaked following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and again after the “Arab Spring” in 2011.⁹

The ISIS creedal document avoids alluding to controversies in eschatological matters. It merely repeats the main Sunni eschatological creeds (pars. 10-14), with one important addition: “We believe in the return of Jesus who will rule justly, and we believe in the return of the Righteous Caliphate (*al-khilafa al-rashida*), modelled on the practices of the Prophet” (par. 12).

The return of Jesus (and/or the Mahdi), who will rule justly, has long been an essential dogma; the return of the caliphate, however, has never been one.

Throughout Islamic history, claimants to power, and whole dynasties, identified themselves with prophecies about the Savior – the Mahdi – in order to gain legitimacy and win the hearts of the masses. The most famous of these were the Abbasids (749-1258), the Fatimids (909-1171) and the Almohads (1130-1269) – and in modern times, the Mahdi of Sudan and Ghulam Ahmad of India. Although they all propagated apocalyptic ideas, the return of the Righteous Caliphate never became an article of faith. The modern dream of reestablishing the caliphate apparently emerged after the demise of the Ottoman Empire (1924),¹⁰ but did not become dogma. The Islamic State, which claims to have realized this dream, elevated the status of the caliphate by turning it into dogma.

The Islamic State makes the connection between the caliphate and eschatology not only in the creedal document but in other texts as well. As part of this, ISIS scholars occasionally cite an enigmatic prediction attributed to the Prophet, recorded as early as the 9th century: “There will be after me twelve rulers (or caliphs), all of them from the tribe of Quraysh.”¹¹ Pre-modern attempts to explain this prophecy usually applied it to past events, deliberating who the twelve caliphs might have been (the Rashidun and some of the Umayyads, etc.). In other words, the explanations of the twelve-ruler tradition mostly involved retrojection, namely attempts to prove that the Prophet foresaw events that came after him, such as the decline of the Umayyads and advent of the Abbasids, the internecine wars, the revolt of the Zanj in Iraq in the 9th century, and so forth. The idea of a renewed caliphate in the future was marginal in the explanations of this tradition. By the 10th century, the twelve-ruler tradition was relegated to the status of “forged” and was rarely cited, whereas the dogma of the Mahdi who will rule justly retained its status.¹² The fate of the twelve-ruler tradition changed in modern times, when it received truly eschatological interpretations.

Even before the Islamic State, jihadists cited the twelve-ruler hadith as referring to a future caliphate, and also cited other Prophetic predictions referring to this. However, as a rule, they relegated the renewed caliphate to some unknown point in the future, seeing it as the culmination of a process of unification and consolidation of Muslim power. Contemporary Muslim apocalyptic literature sometimes contends that the Mahdi himself will establish the new caliphate.¹³

Challenging this view of the caliphate as a distant and perhaps eschatological vision, the Islamic State announced that the Caliphate has returned in the here and now, as tangible and present reality.¹⁴ Moreover, ISIS accords the belief in the caliphate the status of an article of faith, which it never had. In the creedal document this is expressed by mentioning this belief in conjunction with a long-established creed, namely, the return of Jesus. The political implication of this newly-added creed is obvious: Whoever disbelieves in the Caliphate is an unbeliever on a par with those who disbelieve in basic eschatological events such as the return of Jesus, the Last Day, the portents of the Hour, etc.

The return of the Righteous Caliphate was already presented as dogma in the early version of the creedal document, issued by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, namely by Al-Zarqawi during his period of cooperation with Al-Qaeda (2004-2006). As a matter of fact, Al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda’s leaders were divided on the matter of the caliphate. Al-Zarqawi had aspired to establish a caliphate since his arrival in Iraq in 2002. Bin Laden and Zawahiri, however, did not make the establishment of a caliphate a first priority. On the contrary, Al-Qaeda warned against this at the time, arguing that the conditions were not ripe for a caliphate to be established. When the “Islamic

State in Iraq” was first announced (in October 2006), it was not explicitly called a “caliphate,” though its head was referred to by the regnal title “Commander of the Faithful.” Bin Laden and Zawahiri firmly refused to recognize the state as a caliphate.¹⁵ Accordingly, the paragraph about the caliphate in the earlier creedal document may be understood as expressing hopes for establishing a caliphate *in the future* – thus reflecting the ambition of Zarqawi and his followers, but also the reservations of Al-Qaeda about a caliphate in the here and now.

Only the second reincarnation of the Islamic State, established in June 2014 and headed by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, came fully into the open as a self-proclaimed caliphate. Interestingly, its creedal document retains the original paragraph about the caliphate, which presents it as a vision for the future. Apparently this article is now meant to convey that the current caliphate is the righteous one promised by apocalyptic traditions. Indeed, the Islamic State goes to great lengths to prove that it is a “caliphate molded upon the Prophetic rule and customs.” This line of propaganda should be understood in the context of the criticism and de-legitimation directed against ISIS by the majority of Muslim circles, including jihadist movements and scholars.¹⁶ In addition, keeping the caliphate in the realm of eschatological creeds, even though it has been established in reality, lends the ISIS regime an attractive transcendental aura.

Politics: Sources Of Authority

Traditionally, the sources of authority in Islam are the Koran; the model presented by the Prophet as embodied in the *Hadith* literature; the consensus of the scholars (*ijma'*); and experts' conclusions derived by deduction (*qiyas*) and by considering the public good (*maslaha*). “Consensus” was understood as the opinions prevalent within a school of jurisprudence, or the points of agreement among major early jurists. The validity of *qiyas* and *maslaha* was debated and so was the status of the *Hadith*. On the one hand the *Hadith* explained and completed the Koranic teachings, which were often unclear. On the other, it was known that much of the *Hadith* was fabricated. Furthermore, a problem was presented by cases where the Koran and the *Hadith* seemed to disagree. Already at the end of the 7th century CE many scholars solved this problem by contending that “the *Sunna* (as embodied in the *Hadith*) was the judge of the Koran and not vice versa.”¹⁷ But the problem remained how to choose between the differing and sometimes contradictory *hadiths*. The Muslims developed mechanisms for distinguishing between true and false *hadiths*, but these were far from foolproof. Scholars continued to disagree on the authenticity of *hadiths* and therefore also on matters based on these *hadiths*.

For ISIS, the Prophet's authenticated practices (*sunna*) and statements, as recorded in the *Hadith* literature, have absolute authority. They consider the *Hadith* to be “a second revelation,” on a par with the Koran (par. 7). Shari'a laws must be derived exclusively from the Koran and the *Hadith*; no place is accorded by ISIS to the other traditional Islamic sources of law, namely *qiyas*, *maslaha* and *ijma'*. Admittedly, the first two of these have often been contested, but *ijma'* has always had pride of place in Sunni law-derivation.

ISIS thus adopts the standard Salafi formulation, which recognizes as sources of authority only the Koran and the authenticated *hadiths* as understood by the *salaf*, i.e., the three first generations of Muslims (par. 23). The fact that Salafis disagree among themselves even on major issues attests to the problematic nature of this position. The problem stems from the fact that even authenticated *hadiths* are debatable: not everyone accepts the validity of the authentication. In addition, even authenticated *hadiths*, as well as the interpretations of the *salaf*, contain plenty of inconsistencies and contradictions.

Politics: Leadership

The second basic tenet of Islam (after monotheism) is belief in the mission and the leadership of Muhammad. He was the last of the prophets, but as the leader of the community he was succeeded by the caliphs. In line with these tenets, the document affirms that Muhammad is a universal prophet and that every person must believe in him, follow his teachings, obey him in everything, love him and respect him. The Prophet's family must also be loved and respected, though without exaggeration. As for the Prophet's Companions, they must be respected without reservation, and their internecine wars must be passed over in silence (par. 3, 8).

The document states further that, once a leader is nominated, the community must accept and obey him even if he is known or suspected to be a sinner, or if he is *mastur al-hal* (“his condition is unknown”). Only if the leader is known to be an unbeliever must he be deposed and replaced by a righteous leader (par. 24, 29, 32).

These principles of ISIS are deeply rooted in the Sunni tradition. Love for the Prophet’s family “without exaggeration” has always been a hallmark of Sunni Islam. Sunnis regard this as a characteristic which differentiates them from the Shi’a: Sunnis love and respect the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), whereas Shi’ites revere them excessively. The other side of the same coin is the attitude towards Muhammad’s Companions, the *Sahaba*. Supporters of the Shi’a denounce most of the *Sahaba* on the grounds that they were to blame for usurping the caliphate from Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son in law.¹⁸ In response, veneration of the *Sahaba* became an article of faith for the Sunnis at least as early as the 9th century. By all accounts, most of the Companions sinned by participating in the internecine wars after the Prophet’s death, and the Shi’a hold this fact against them; the Sunnis, however, expressly disregard or explain away this sin.¹⁹ It may be added that the Sunnis had no alternative but to respect the Companions, because they were the transmitters of Muhammad’s legacy (*sunna*) to the following generations. The Shi’a did not need the Companions for this purpose because they relied on the imams, namely the descendants of the Prophet, for information about Muhammad’s legacy.

The requirement to obey a leader even if he is a sinner is a traditional Sunni principle, inspired by fear of rebellion and of internecine wars.²⁰ The classical formulation of this rule (cited verbatim in par. 24) is that one may perform the ritual prayer behind any imam (leader), be he a righteous person, a sinner, or an unknown quantity in terms of the sincerity of his belief or his moral integrity.²¹ In the ISIS context, the stipulation regarding “unknown condition” (*mastur al-hal*) may also refer to states of uncertainty, as happened in March 2015 when Al-Baghdadi was reportedly injured in an airstrike and the believers had no way of knowing the state of his health.

Politics: Internal Cohesion

Internal cohesion has been a religious obligation from the inception of Islam, as was the prohibition on internecine wars. Accordingly, the document praises solidarity among Muslims and denounces disunity and disagreement among them (par. 32). It emphasizes that all the Muslims form one community and that Arabs and non-Arab Muslims are equal, surpassing one another only in the degree of their religious devotion. When it comes to the matter of granting protection to non-Muslims on behalf of the Muslim community (*dhimma*, or *aman*), the highest Muslim official and the lowest-ranking Muslim are equally authorized to do so (par. 35). The lives, property and dignity of Muslims are inviolable “except as made licit by Allah and the Prophet” (par. 26). The Muslims must unite under one banner (par. 34). Issues that may be subject to reasoning (and therefore to disagreements) must not be the cause of mutual denunciation (par. 32, 33). Adherents of all religion except Islam are unbelievers whom the Muslims must fight (par. 36). The establishment of an Islamic caliphate is a communal obligation incumbent upon all Muslims; obedience to the nominated caliph is mandatory and rebellion is forbidden, according to the Prophet’s statement, “Whoever dies without having pledged allegiance to a caliph dies as one who has never converted to Islam” (par. 32).

All the stipulations in this document regarding solidarity, the obligation to establish a caliphate, the ban on rebellion and the duty to fight the enemies of Allah derive from classical Sunni jurisprudence. Some expressions in the document are taken verbatim from Ibn Taymiyya.²² The purpose of the classical scholars in making these stipulations was to safeguard the Muslim identity and avoid chaos. The principle of equality is also taken verbatim from the Koran and the *Hadith*.²³ As for the adherents of other religions, classical Islam tolerated them as submissive-protected communities under Islam (*dhimma*). In practice, the Islamic State does too, but the creedal document does not mention this possibility, labelling all non-Muslims as unbelievers who must be fought.²⁴

The statement that Muslims are inviolable “except as made licit by Allah and the Prophet” in fact belongs to the issue of *takfir* (on which see below). It is vague enough to be subject to various interpretations. This means that the alleged inviolability of all Muslims may be set aside at the discretion of the Islamic State leaders and officials, as has in fact been amply proven by ISIS’s actions and practices.²⁵

Politics: Jihad

Pre-modern Muslim jurists generally agreed that jihad must be waged in order to “make Allah’s word supreme,” that is, in order to make the Shari’a prevail wherever possible. They also agreed that Jihad must be declared and led only by a Muslim ruler or his representative, unless it is in defense of the life and property of Muslims. This pre-modern Sunni consensus on jihad disintegrated under the impact of modern circumstances and international doctrines and laws.²⁶ The result is a heated and ongoing debate among Muslims about the interpretation of jihad, its necessity, and many details of its implementation.

According to the ISIS creedal document, jihad must be carried out by means of both propaganda and weapons. War against Allah’s enemies is obligatory under all circumstances: with or without the permission of a nominated leader, and even single-handedly, especially if Islamic values are under attack. Propagating a religion other than Islam or insulting Islam are belligerent acts that obligate fighting the perpetrators (par. 25, 27, 30, 31). However, fighting renegades is more important than fighting unbelievers (par. 28).

The ISIS document thus blurs all distinctions and calls for a total war not only against unbelievers but also against non-ISIS Muslims. It does not mention any of the modern controversies concerning jihad.

Politics: The Nature Of Faith And The Conditions For The Accusation Of Unbelief (*Takfir*)

Muslims have debated the nature of faith since the beginning of theological deliberations in the 8th century CE. Some held that proper Islamic faith required belief in the heart, declaration with the tongue, and acts with the limbs, i.e. performance of the religious obligations. They also held that there were degrees of faith: “faith may increase and decrease,” as they put it; that is, one may be a better or a lesser Muslim – depending on one’s obedience or disobedience to Islamic law. Others held that there were no degrees of faith – one was either a Muslim or a disbeliever – and that performance of the religious obligations was not a necessary condition for being considered a Muslim. This means that belief in the heart and the declaration of faith suffice to make one a Muslim. In fact, both positions were accepted by classical Sunnism, but the more fervent and conservative scholars favored the first. Ibn Taymiyya, the main authority for neo-Hanbalism as well as for modern radical Muslims, argued that the position which excludes acts from the requirements of faith was in fact heretical, not Sunni.²⁷

ISIS adopts the stricter position. The document states that being a Muslim requires belief in the heart, speech (that is, a declaration of faith), and acts, and there are different degrees of faith, depending on how closely a Muslim obeys the Shari’a. (par. 15)

The other side of the same coin is the conditions for the accusation of unbelief. In other words, when does one cease to be a Muslim? If one fails to perform all or some of the religious obligations, or violates Islamic prohibitions, does one become a renegade?

The matter was and continues to be hotly debated among Muslims because of the dire consequences of reneging from Islam: renegades must repent or be killed. Some 7th-8th century extremists (certain parts of the Khawarij movement) considered Muslim sinners to be unbelievers, but most Muslims have rejected this attitude and considered these Khawarij to be heretical. Various formulations were composed that, generally speaking, avoid *takfir* as far as possible (as opposed to the position of the abovementioned Khawarij). Even ISIS scholars, though they are extremist by the standards of the rest of the world (including Al-Qaeda), explicitly distance themselves from the fanatical Khawarij and from “extremists” (*ghulat*, par. 16).

The ISIS document stipulates that a Muslim forfeits the faith and becomes a renegade only if he or she abandons belief in monotheism and the Prophet, or fails to perform the ritual prayer, or commits sins while considering these sins to be licit. Committing sin (without considering it licit) does not in itself put a Muslim beyond the pale of Islam, nor does the omission of certain obligations, because the Islamic faith comprises many elements (*shu’ba*), not all of which are requisite for being considered a Muslim (par. 15-16).²⁸ According to the document, whoever appears to be a Muslim must be treated as one, unless he or she is involved in

something that contradicts Islam (*nawaqid al-Islam*). Certain conditions and judicial processes are needed in order to establish an accusation of unbelief against individual Muslims (*takfir al-mu'ayyan*) (par. 17, 19). At the same time, the document states that the Shi'a are all unbelievers, as well as everyone who adheres to a religion other than Islam (par. 18, 20). Countries governed by infidel governments are “the abode of unbelief” (*dar kufr*), but their inhabitants are not necessarily all unbelievers (par. 21).

All of these stipulations concerning *takfir* are characteristic Hanbali and neo-Hanbali positions, often cited verbatim in the document.²⁹ Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab composed a list of ten *nawaqid al-Islam*.³⁰ Ibn Taymiyya in particular promoted the distinction between unbelief in the abstract sense, that is, the heretical doctrines themselves, and the proclamation of a specific individual as an unbeliever (*takfir al-mu'ayyan*).³¹ The latter requires meeting certain conditions and carrying out a judicial process of proof. Its purported consequence is that no punitive measures may be taken against a renegade until his or her status as such has been proven. It should be noted that abandoning Allah and the Prophet, omitting the act of prayer, and considering sins as licit are not the only ways to forfeit the faith.³² Thus, for example, Ibn Taymiyya considered the widely-practiced custom of venerating saints to be an expression of unbelief. Accordingly the ISIS document stipulates that whoever is involved in “anything that contradicts Islam” is an unbeliever (par. 19), and that “whoever fails to meet all the conditions and requirements [of monotheism] or infringes upon it in any way” (par. 1) is an unbeliever. However, the document does not specify precisely what “the conditions and requirements” of monotheism are, the result being that the statement “whoever pronounces the proclamation of faith and shows himself to be a Muslim must be treated as one” (par. 19) is rendered meaningless. Without specific rules regarding the tests of faith, the criteria employed in a judicial process to establish *takfir al-mu'ayyan* remain at the discretion of the Islamic State. Indeed, in the past these tests of faith were at the discretion of the Muslim scholars. This is precisely why there were always disagreements about *takfir*. Furthermore, the document adds modern ideologies to the category of egregious unbelief, namely, secularism, nationalism, patriotism, communism and Baathism. It therefore appears that the distinction between abstract unbelief and specific unbelievers who must be punished is quite blurry, and the rules for the accusation of *takfir* are conveniently vague. It is not surprising that many Sunnis have been killed by the Islamic State not necessarily because they omitted to perform the ritual prayer, or disavowed Allah and Muhammad, but because they did not join the State, or criticized it. Obviously, ISIS's loose criteria of *takfir* enabled it to kill those Sunnis as apostates or rebels, even though they proclaimed themselves to be Muslims.³³

The stipulation that Muslims under infidel rule are not necessarily infidels themselves (par.21) harks back to situations in medieval times when frontier lands, as well as Al-Andalus, all of which were formerly under Muslim rule, fell back under the control of unbelievers. A famous case in point is that of the Anatolian town Mardin, which was contested between the Mongols and the Mamluks in the 13th century CE. Ibn Taymiyya wrote several legal rulings concerning the status of this town.³⁴ The legal problem was that many of the Islamic obligations, such as giving alms (*sadaqa*), performing jihad, judging according to the Shari'a and so on, depend on the regime being Islamic. Muslims under an unbeliever regime cannot perform these obligations, so the question arises whether they still count as Muslims.

In mentioning this issue in its creedal document (i.e. the status of those living under non-Muslim rule), ISIS is obviously referring to the citizens of Arab and Muslim countries, whose regimes it considers to be renegade. It is noteworthy that the earlier version of the document (the Al-Qaeda version) explained why the subjects of such renegade Arab and Muslim regimes still count as Muslims. It stated that these renegade regimes took power in Muslim countries and there was no Muslim State to deter them. The citizens of these countries, who were powerless, are therefore blameless and do not forfeit their status as Muslims. This explanation is omitted in the current ISIS document for obvious reasons: The Islamic State is now in power and fights the renegade regimes. Nevertheless, ISIS retained the statement about the inhabitants of the “abode of unbelief” not necessarily being unbelievers. The reason is probably ISIS's wish to distinguish itself from “extremists” and to avoid alienating the inhabitants of these countries. However, this statement does not prevent ISIS from killing Muslims indiscriminately.

Conclusion

The document “These are our Creeds and Ways” is a self-profile of the Islamic State, reflecting its basic theology and political ideology. ISIS declares that it shuns extremism, and in fact it adds nothing new to traditional Islamic dogmas except for making the return of the caliphate a mandatory article of faith. The document deals with topics that have occupied Muslim minds for generations, yet it also reflects modern and local conditions and phenomena. It is firmly based on Islamic sources, which it cites often, and much of its content is identical to Islamic conservative Hanbali and neo-Hanbali doctrines.

Endnotes

- 1 See William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, New York, 2015, 1-22, 31-45, 73-84, 121-6, 135-44 (12-15 on the period of cooperation between al-Zarqawi and al-Qaeda).
- 2 “The Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad” website http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_35417.html (accessed 21 March, 2016).
- 3 The document was provided to me by MEMRI. I owe thanks in particular to Rafi Green and Hagit Migron. The text can be accessed at <https://ia801302.us.archive.org/1/items/3akedatona-1/3Qidatona.pdf> and also at <https://archive.org/details/3akedatona-1> (accessed 18 April, 2016). The date of publication is July 22, 2015 and the compiler is identified as Abu Qudama Al-Muhajir.
- 4 This formula concludes Ibn Taymiyya’s highly sophisticated discussion of the subject, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu Fatawa Shaykh al-Islam*, Medina: Majma’ al-Malik Fahd li-Tiba’at al-Mushaf al-Sharif, 2004, 8/432; idem, *Al-Risala al-Tadmuriyya*, Medina: Matabi’ al-Madina al-Munawwara, n.d. See also <http://www.alagidah.com/vb/showthread.php?t=2238> (accessed March 17, 2016).
- 5 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu Fatawa*, 13/132.
- 6 See e.g., Koran 2: 62, 126 177, 4: 39, 162, 6:31, 32:10-12, 70:26, among others. On the Apocalypse in Islam see J. Idleman Smith and Y. Yazbek Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981; D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 2002 (apocalypse in the Quran: 269-306).
- 7 See e.g., <http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=231962> (accessed March 20, 2016). The scholarly works consulted for this paper do not make the distinction between eschatological themes that became creeds and others that did not.
- 8 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding*, 65, 95, among others.
- 9 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding*, 127-46; D. Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005; McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, especially 28-29, 99-100, 105-111, 145-7 among others.
- 10 There were a few abortive attempts to reestablish a caliphate, see McCants, *ISIS*, 122. See also Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic*, 129-32, 225-9.
- 11 McCants, *ISIS*, 114-9, 179-81.
- 12 There are several versions of the twelve-ruler hadith, see, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Khallal, *Al-Sunna*, Riyadh: Dar al-Raya lil-Nashr wal-Tawzi’, 1410/1489, 431 (no. 652); Ibn Hibban, *Sahih Ibn Hibban*, ed. Shu’ayb al-Arnaut, Muassasat al-Risala, 1993, 15/43-45; al-Haythami, *Majma al-Zawa’id wa-Manba’ al-Fawa’id*, Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Rayyan lil-Turath and Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1407/ 1986, 5/178; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*, Cairo: Muassasat Qurtuba, n.d., 5/92-99; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, ed. Muhammad Fu’ad Abd al-Baqi and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa, 1379/1959, 13/213-215. For a discussion of this tradition, as well as the Mahdi and the return of Jesus, see D. Cook, *Studies*, especially 34-188, 236-47 (the twelve rulers on pp. 36-49).
- 13 See Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic*, 90, 127-32, 157, 198, 226-9; McCants, *ISIS*, 134.
- 14 Mullah Umar in Afghanistan assumed the Islamic regnal title “Commander of the Faithful” (*amir al-muminin*) as early as 1996, but his Emirate was not called caliphate. See Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic*, 172-5.
- 15 See McCants, *ISIS*, 3-20, 39-42, 52-5, 124-5; but cf. 52, 45, 78-9, 129-30. It should be mentioned that, once the Islamic State in Iraq was declared, bin Laden did not acknowledge it but he did not openly reject it, either. Apparently his statements concerning it depended on the contexts in which they were made and the public addressed.
- 16 McCants, *ISIS*, 126-30; see also Ella Landau-Tasserion, [Delegitimizing ISIS on Islamic Grounds: Criticism Of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi By Muslim Scholars](#), MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis No. 1205, November 19, 2015.
- 17 See I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, translated from the German by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, London: George Allen and Unwin ltd. 1971, 31-3.
- 18 See Etan Kohlberg, “Some Imami Shi’i views on the Sahaba,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), 143-75.

- 19 See e.g., al-Lalika'i, *Sharh Usul I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a*, ed. Ahmad Sa'd Hamdan, Riyadh: Dar Tayba li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', n.d. 7/1241 ff.
- 20 See P. Crone, *God's Rule*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 135-8, 228-37; B. Lewis, *Islam in History*, Chicago: Open Court, 1993, part VI: History and Revolution (especially 261-322).
- 21 Leading the prayer is one of the functions of the ruler – imam – or his representative, so that performing the prayer behind the appointed imam is a sign of obedience. See legal rulings on this topic, Islamweb.net, Markaz al-Fatwa, at <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=120175> (accessed 19 April, 2016); *Tariq al-Salaf, Bab al-Salah*, at <http://www.alsalafway.com/cms/fatwa.php?action=fatwa&id=3192> (accessed 19 April, 2016, cited from Ibn Taymiyya).
- 22 Par. 35 – cf. Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmi' Fatawa*, 1/414, 418-22.
- 23 Koran 49:13. The *hadith* “All Muslims are equal in blood, and the lowest of them may grant protection” is widely circulating, see e.g. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Talkhis al-Habir*, Cairo: Mu'assasat Qurtuba 1995, 4/216.
- 24 On ISIS and *dhimma* see MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 1205, [Delegitimizing ISIS on Islamic Grounds: Criticism Of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi By Muslim Scholars](#), November 19, 2015; 10-11.
- 25 Atrocities committed against Muslims are too well known to be detailed here.
- 26 See R. Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of jihad in Modern History*, The Hague, Paris and New York: Mouton; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter Distributor, 1979; Bonner, M. *Jihad in Islamic History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; also see MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 1205, [Delegitimizing ISIS on Islamic Grounds: Criticism Of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi By Muslim Scholars](#), November 19, 2015; 7-9.
- 27 See a lucid explanation of the matter in Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, 24-40.
- 28 Not all radicals would agree with this. See Lav, *Radical Islam*, 114-9. Cf. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmi' Fatawa*, 1/420, where he promotes internal cohesion, and denounces the Khawarij who infringe upon it by accusing other Muslims of unbelief.
- 29 See Lav, *Radical Islam*, 33-4, 38-40. The notion that faith comprises many elements is based on a widely circulating *hadith* cited in the document (par. 15).
- 30 For the text, see: <http://www.twhed.com/vb/t5427/>
- 31 Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Masa'il wa-l-Rasa'il al-Marwiyya 'an al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, ed. Abdallah ibn Salman ibn Salim al-Ahmadi, Riyadh: Dar Tayba, 1991, 1/225-30 (most of the opinions therein are not derived from Ibn Hanbal himself, although the book was published by al-Ahmadi under Ibn Hanbal's name); Abu al-'Ala ibn Rashid, *Dawabit Takfir al-Mu'ayyan inda Shaykhay al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya wa-Ibn Abd al-Wahhab wa-Ulama al-Da'wa al-Islahiyya*, Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 2004.
- 32 Lav, *Radical Islam*, 118.
- 33 See examples of ISIS's arbitrary violence in McCants, *ISIS*, 33-5, 42-4, 136.
- 34 See George Grigore, “The Historical Context of Fatwa of Mardin Given by Ibn Taymiyya,” 1st *International Symposium of Mardin History Papers*, ed. Ibrahim Ozcosar and Huseyin H Gunes, Istanbul 2006, 345-50.

