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LE SHĪʿISME IMĀMITE QUARANTE ANS APRÈS

HOMMAGE À ETAN KOHLBERG

Sous la direction de
Mohammad Ali AMIR-MOEZZI, Meir M. BAR-ASHER,
Simon HOPKINS

Illustration de couverture : Hamadan (Iran), XIX^e^ siècle : plat métallique portant la sentence shīʿite « Ali est l'ami de Dieu » (*ʿAlī walī Allāh*) (collection privée).

BREPOLS

sheykh. Omaggio a Alessandro Bausani islamista nel sessantesimo compleanno, Venezia, 127-39.

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"NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION"
Q. 2:256 in mediaeval and modern interpretation

Patricia CRONE*
Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

Sura 2:256 famously contains a statement which, read on its own, sounds to the modern ear like a declaration of a human right: *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*, "there is no compulsion in religion". Read as part of the unit formed by verses 255-57, it seems less a declaration of rights than a reference to a point taken for granted by both the speaker and his audience[1], but that does not make it any less liberal. Since a polity based on religion cannot coexist with unlimited freedom of religion, the verse was a problem to the early exegetes, who reacted by interpreting it restrictively[2]. It is only in modern times that the verse has come to be understood as a declaration of universal religious tolerance. In the words of a Chief Justice of Pakistan, the verse contains "a charter of freedom of conscience unparalleled in the religious annals of mankind... It is with regret mingled by perturbation that one notices attempts made by Muslim scholars themselves to whittle down its broad humanistic meaning"[3]. Given that they did whittle it down, how was it possible to broaden it again? The answer offered here is that two Muʿtazilite interpretations of Q. 2:256 played a major role in facilitating the modernist reinterpretation of the verse in Sunnism and Shiʿism alike, without their Muʿtazilite roots being acknowledged, or even known. I discuss the history of these interpretations against the background of the exegetical literature on Q. 2:256 in general in the first part of this article, ending with post-revolutionary Iran. The second part is in the nature of an appendix on three questions that suggest themselves in the course of the first half of the article: how do the Sunni Islamists handle the verse? How do the modernists and Islamists who interpret the verse as a declaration of religious freedom dispose of unwanted parts of the tradition? And just what did the verse actually mean when it was first recited? Should the reader wonder how a mediaevalist such as myself

* I should like to thank the ten graduates with whom I read interpretations of Q. 2:256 at Princeton University in the spring term of 2004 and without whose energy, enthusiasm and high level of competence I would never have been able to cover so many exegetical works. They provided me with several references too (acknowledged in the appropriate places), and one of them, Karen Bauer, commented helpfully on an earlier draft of this article. I am also grateful to John Balfe, Rainer Brunner and Michael Cook for most helpful comments, and to Aron Zysow for first casting doubt on the reading of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī that I presented in *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Unfortunately, it was not until it was too late to change the book that I realized how right he was.

1. See below, p. 158.

2. Cf. M. Cook, *The Koran: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2000, p. 100-102. For a longer treatment, see Y. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, Cambridge 2003, chap. III.

3. S. A. Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam*, Lahore 1978[2], p. 16.

dares to venture into the modern world, all I can say is that the sixty-fifth birthday of a friend and scholar such as Etan Kohlberg does call for something unusual.

The mainstream and Mu'tazilite interpretations

The salaf

When the curtain opens on the exegetical literature, it presents us with three positions regarding the meaning of *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* that remained canonical down to modern times (henceforth the three traditional interpretations). The first is that the verse had been abrogated by the Qur'ānic injunction to fight[4], a view upheld, among others, by the foremost jurist of late Umayyad Syria[5]. The second is that the verse referred to a bygone historical situation in Medina to do with Anṣārī women whose children had been raised among the Jews in pre-Islamic times[6], or alternatively with an Anṣārī whose sons had converted to Christianity before the rise of Islam[7]: in both cases the parents wanted to force their children to become Muslims when Islam came to Medina, whereupon the "no compulsion" verse was revealed, telling them not to. This interpretation, which deprived the verse of current relevance, was sometimes combined with the view that the verse had been abrogated[8]. The third position was that the verse granted religious freedom to *jizya*-paying infidels by ruling that it was unlawful to convert them by force[9]. In fact, all jurists, whatever their views on this verse, accepted that *jizya*-paying infidels were free to practise their own religion, but the verse

4. Thus Sulaymān b. Mūsā (below, note 5); Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/743f) in Ibn Wahb, *Jāmi'*, fol. 20a, p. 12ff; the same and his son, Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798) in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5825, 5833, and other works; Ibn Zayd and Ibn Mas'ūd (d. c. 33/653f) in Tha'labī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 234; 'Ikrima (d. 107/725 or later) and al-Suddī (d. 127/745) in Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, no. 2615. It is also one of two opinions transmitted from al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/724) (cf. his reconstituted *Tafsīr*, n° 263, without use of the word *mansūkh*). The abrogating verse is usually Q. 9:5, the so-called sword verse ("Kill them wherever you find them"), or Q. 9:73 ("Fight the unbelievers and hypocrites"), but 'Ikrima strangely identifies it as Q. 2:285 ("They say, we hear and obey"). In Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, p. 595, the abrogator is the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that he has come to fight people until they profess the unity of God.

5. That is Sulaymān b. Mūsā (d. 115/733f or later), a Damascene client of the Umayyads (cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, Hyderabad 1325, vol. 4, p. 226f, s.v.). His view is recorded in Abū 'Ubayd, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, p. 96; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, no. 2616; al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, vol. 2, p. 99, and elsewhere.

6. Anṣārī women would have their children fostered by Jews, and/or Anṣārī women who had trouble producing viable offspring would vow to bring up their children as Jews if they lived. When the Banū Naḍīr were expelled, there were Anṣārī children among them, and their parents wanted them to stay as Muslims: thus Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713f) (sometimes from Ibn 'Abbās), Mujāhid (100/718 or later) (sometimes from al-Ḥasan), and al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721 or later) in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5812-6, 5818, 5820-4, 5826.

7. Abū al-Ḥuṣayn had two sons who were converted to Christianity by traders coming from Syria. When they wanted to leave for Syria, he asked the Prophet to stop them: thus al-Suddī and 'Ikrima or Sa'īd b. Jubayr from Ibn 'Abbās in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5817, 5819. For a collection of the *ḥadīth*s relating the verse to Anṣārī affairs, see Ibn Ḥajar, *al-'Ujāb fī bayān al-asbāb*, vol. 1, p. 609ff.

8. Thus for example Ibn Salāma al-Baghdādī, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, p. 56.

9. Thus Qatāda (d. 117/735f) and al-Ḍaḥḥāk in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5827-30, cf. also Ibn 'Abbās in no. 5832.

had the merit of being epigrammatic, and we know of real cases in which it was invoked to safeguard the rights of *dhimmī*s who had been forced to convert[10]. This third position came in many versions, some identifying the *jizya*-paying category more broadly than others[11], some providing illustrative material[12], or justifying the inclusion of Zoroastrians in it[13], and some claiming that slaves (who did not pay *jizya*) or Christian and Jewish captives (who were still *ḥarbī*s devoid of legal protection) could not be forced to convert either[14]. Nobody, however, held the verse to limit the obligation to fight the infidels outside the abode of Islam until they either converted or accepted *dhimmī* status[15], and there was general agreement that *some* infidels, notably Arab pagans and apostates, were ineligible for *jizya*-paying status and so had to choose between conversion and death. The Prophet himself had given the last two categories the choice between Islam and death, as al-Ṭabarī pointed out[16]. Before the twentieth century, with the exception of the Ismailis, nobody seems to have considered how the verse was to be reconciled with the use of force against Muslim dissenters[17].

The three traditional interpretations are regularly cited in exegetical and other works down to modern times, in the Sunni, Zaydi, Imāmī, and Ibadi literature alike, often as the only comments given. One or other, or all three, are cited in practically every work of *tafsīr* mentioned in this article, and in many others in addition. They presuppose different times of revelation (in Mecca, early Medina,

10. I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, tr. A. and R. Hamori, Princeton 1981 (German original 1910), p. 33. Some Ḥanafīs held forced conversions to be legally binding even though they were wrong (thus Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 549f; cf. Ibn Qudāma, *Mughnī*, vol. 12, p. 291f (*Kitāb al-murtadd*; drawn to my attention by Phillip Lieberman).

11. The statement transmitted from the Basran Qatāda refers now to the People of the Book and now to both them and the Zoroastrians (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5827f, 5830; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, no. 324); others speak of anyone other than the pagan Arabs (e.g. Ḍaḥḥāk, *Tafsīr*, no. 262 [= Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5829]), and the Khurāsānī Muqātil b. Ḥayyān (d. 135/752f) in Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 394 (*al-wajh al-sābi'* [in fact the sixth], missing its paragraph number).

12. Cf. the story of the old Christian woman that 'Umar wanted to convert (Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, vol. 2, no. 280).

13. Thus Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 134f; Mujāhid in Abū 'Ubayd, *Amwāl*, vol. 48, no. 86; cf. Y. Friedmann, "Classification of unbelievers in Sunni Muslim law and tradition", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22 (1998), p. 179ff; id., *Tolerance and Coercion*, p. 72ff.

14. The verse was revealed when an Anṣārī forced his black slave to convert (Mujāhid in Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, p. 45), or Mujāhid told a Christian slave to convert ('Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, no. 325; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, no. 5831); a Rūmī slave of 'Umar's invoked the verse when 'Umar told him to convert (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 6, p. 110 [vol. 6, p. 159], s.v. "Ussaq"); Abū 'Ubayd, *Amwāl*, vol. 48, no. 87; id., *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, p. 97, and elsewhere); al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) cited it when asked about forcing slaves to convert (Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, no. 2613, cf. 2610 on Ussaq, 2616 on Sulaymān b. Mūsā's disagreement). Listed as a rule about captives (no coercion if they are adult *kitābī*s) in Qurṭubī, *Aḥkām*, vol. 3, p. 281 (doctrine 6); Shawkānī, *Fatḥ*, vol. 1, p. 275 (doctrine 5); Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Khan, *Fatḥ*, vol. 1, p. 427 (copying Shawkānī).

15. "The applicability of the verse is limited to the Jews that it was revealed about. As for compelling infidels to (submit) to the religion of truth, it is obligatory, and for this reason we fight them until they either convert or pay *jizya*, accepting to be ruled by the religion", as the fourth/tenth-century al-Khaṭṭābī says (*Ma'ālim al-sunan*, vol. 2, p. 287).

16. Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 414f. The whole *umma* is agreed *'alā ikrāh al-murtadd 'alā al-islām*, as Ibn Ḥazm remarks in his comments on the verse (*Iḥkām*, vol. 2, p. 890).

17. See below, p. 137f.

and late Medina respectively), but all three identify the import of the verse as legal and construe the words *lā ikrāha* as a negative command ("do not use force"). Differently put, all three understand the verse as prescriptive.

From as early as the ninth century, other interpretations appeared. These later interpretations usually construe *lā ikrāha* as a statement of fact, so that the meaning of the verse is descriptive rather than prescriptive. They do not seem to be meant as alternatives to the three traditional interpretations, merely as additional ways of putting the verse to work, and the meaning they find in it is typically what we would broadly call theological. The Muʿtazilite al-Aṣamm (d. c. 200/816), for example, understood *ikrāh* "compulsion", as *karāha* "dislike", and took the verse to say that there was nothing in the religion (of Islam) for its adherents, as opposed to hypocrites, to dislike.[18] In the same vein, unidentified exegetes cited by al-Māturīdī held the verse to proclaim that God instilled such love of the divine commands in the hearts of the believers that they obeyed them willingly, without the need for compulsion[19]. Fourth/tenth-century Muʿtazilites, on the other hand, read the verse as a statement that God did not compel His servants to believe: humans had free will. And still other Muʿtazilites of the same period construed the verse as saying, or simply presupposing, that humans could not force others to believe: their innermost selves were inaccessible. It is with the last two arguments that the first part of this article is concerned. I shall refer to them as the first and the second Muʿtazilite arguments, though only the first articulates a central Muʿtazilite doctrine; the second reflects a common idea which the Muʿtazilites liked, but which they may not have originated.

The two Muʿtazilite interpretations

The first Muʿtazilite interpretation, i.e. the understanding of 2:256 as meaning "there is no (divine) compulsion in religion", seems first to be attested in the exegesis of Abū Muslim al-Iṣbahānī, a Muʿtazilite secretary who worked in Baghdad and Isfahan and died in 322/934[20]. His exegetical work is lost, but quotations survive, and his comments on 2:256 are cited by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī together with those of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (d. 365/976), a Shāfiʿite jurist who was once a Muʿtazilite and whose commentary on the Qurʾān (also lost) was written in his Muʿtazilite phase. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī expressly characterizes their interpretation as the one "that concords best with the doctrines of the Muʿtazila". It seems to be from Abū Muslim that he cites the statement (which we shall meet time and again) that God "has not based the matter of faith on coercion and force but rather on enablement and choice"[21]. What follows is explicitly said to be by al-Qaffāl. According to the

18. Cited in Jishumī (also known as Jushamī), *Tahdhīb*, fol. 95b, 5 up. My thanks to Suleiman Mourad, who is preparing an edition of the manuscript, for a photocopy of the section relating to Q. 2:256.

19. Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, p. 594f, where Māturidī himself compares the verse with Q. 22:78 (*He has imposed no difficulties upon you in the religion*). This interpretation was also known to the Imāmīs (cf. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 5, p. 98).

20. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, Tehran 1971, p. 151; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, ed. A. F. Rifāʿī, Cairo n.d., vol. 18, p. 35ff; cf. also Kirmānī, *Abū Muslim*, p. 11ff.

21. *Mā banā amr al-īmān ʿalā al-ijbār wa-l-qasr wa-innamā banāhu ʿalā al-tamakkun wa-l-ikhtiyār*. He could have this from Zamakhsharī, who has *lam yujri allāh amr al-īmān ʿalā al-ijbār wa-l-qasr walākin ʿalā al-tamkīn wa-l-ikhtiyār*, without naming an authority (below, note 45). But given that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī explicitly names Abū Muslim and al-Qaffāl, it seems more likely that both he and Zamakhsharī are citing Abū Muslim here.

latter, God set out the proofs of monotheism and then said, "the infidel no longer has any excuse for remaining an infidel, now that these proofs have been made clear; rather, he ought to be forced and coerced to adopt the faith; but this is not possible/allowed (*jāʾiz*) in this world, which is a world of tribulation (*ibtilāʾ*), given that coercion and compulsion nullify trial and tribulation"[22].

A modern reader is apt to read both Abū Muslim and al-Qaffāl's statements as prohibitions of human compulsion in matters of faith. Who would God be speaking to if not to human beings, and why else should He characterize things as possible or allowed? Besides, al-Qaffāl adduces two Qurʾānic verses in which God tells the Prophet not to compel people to become believers, Q. 18:29 (*Let him who will, believe, and him who will, disbelieve*) and Q. 10:99 (*If your Lord had wanted it, every one on earth would believe, all of them; so will you force people to become believers?*). If God told the Prophet not to force people to convert, surely the message is that lesser human beings may not do so either. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī seems to agree when he adds that al-Qaffāl's interpretation is supported by the statement, *right guidance has become distinct from error* (which follows *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*) and glosses it as meaning that "the proofs have been made manifest and the evidence made clear, so now there is no method left other than coercion, compulsion and force; but that is not allowed/possible, given that it rules out moral responsibility (*taklīf*)". For all that, there can be no doubt that Abū Muslim, al-Qaffāl and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī all read the verse as a statement about free will: al-Qaffāl invokes God's words to the Prophet in illustration of God's wish to let the unbelievers choose for themselves, not for the injunction to the Prophet to refrain from using force (which was later abrogated). When, in a recent book of mine, I read Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's passage as prohibiting forced conversion, I was unwittingly adopting the modernist interpretation of the verse[23].

That Abū Muslim, al-Qaffāl, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī were concerned with free will is made explicit in several *tafsīr*s by later scholars that we will come to in due course and whose understanding of the tradition is undoubtedly correct[24]. For one thing, the concatenation of free will with the (Qurʾānic) idea of life as a test is standard in Qadarism. Thus al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) explains that in Q. 6:35 God reproaches the Prophet for his sadness when the polytheists would

22. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, p. 15 (*lam yabqa baʿda īḍāḥ hādhihi al-dalāʾil li-l-kāfir ʿudhr fī al-iqāma ʿalā al-kufr illā an yuqsara ʿalā al-īmān wa-yujbara ʿalayhi wa-dhālika lā yajūzu fī dār al-dunyā allatī hiya dār al-ibtilāʾ idh fī al-qahr wa-l-ikrāh ʿalā al-dīn buṭlān maʿnā al-ibtilāʾ wa-l-imtiḥān*).

23. P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh 2004 (published in America as *God's Rule. Government and Islam. Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, New York 2004), p. 381. The error is noted in the additions and corrections to the British paperback version, but not yet incorporated in the American edition. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is also read as opposing forced conversion by J. D. McAuliffe, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on *āyat al-jizyah* and *āyat al-sayf*", in M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Toronto 1990, p. 111ff.

24. See Ṭabrisī, below, note 90; Khūʾī, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 328; Ālūsī, below, note 49; Ṭanṭāwī and Shiḥāṭa, below, note 114.

not believe and tells him that if He had wanted to force them (*yujbirahum*) to obey, He could have done so, but He had not done so because He wanted to test them (*yabtaliyahum*), so that He could recompense them for their actions[25]. Al-Ḥasan, too, quotes Q. 10:99 (*If your Lord had wanted it, every one on earth would believe, all of them; so will you force people to become believers?*). Al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956 or 346) mentions the Muʿtazilite belief that "If He had wanted to, He would have compelled (*jabara*) human beings to obey Him ... but He does not because that would eliminate trial (*miḥna*) and put an end to tribulation (*balwā*)"[26].

Further, the Muʿtazilite al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) also interprets Q. 2:256 in an anti-determinist vein. He lists the view that "there is no compulsion by God in the religion (*laysa fī al-dīn ikrāh min Allāh*)" among the diverse interpretations of the verse and later explains it as meaning that God wanted His servants to believe voluntarily (*yurīdu min al-ʿibād al-īmān ṭawʿan*). In his view the verse demonstrated that the determinists (*mujabbira*) were wrong and that faith was not something created by God, but rather a human act (*wa-l-īmān fiʿl al-ʿibād*): "it is the servant who chooses (*al-ʿabd mukhtār*); if it were otherwise, His statement *Right guidance has been distinguished from falsehood* until the end of the verse would not be correct"[27].

To this may be added that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cites al-Qaffāl again in his comments on another verse, apparently once more from the latter's *tafsīr*, and here al-Qaffāl not only approves of forced conversion, but positively praises it[28]: the merit of fighting in the cause of religion could not be denied by any fair-minded person, he says, for people clung to their wrong religions out of habit; but when they were forced to adopt the true religion for fear of being killed, their love of the false religion would gradually vanish while their love of the true one would grow, so that eventually they would achieve salvation instead of everlasting punishment[29]. Clearly, the religious freedom he envisages as granted by the "no compulsion" verse is not freedom from coercion by humans.

It may seem odd that al-Qaffāl should believe God to abstain from compulsion in matters of faith and yet approve of humans practising it, but the Muʿtazilites had an answer to this in the form of the second interpretation of 2:256: the verse said or presupposed that forced conversion was not really coercion to believe, for it was impossible to change the inner beliefs of other people; coercion only affected external conformity. This is what the Ḥanafī and Muʿtazilite jurist al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) tells us in a legal work in answer to the question why the Prophet gave the pagan Arabs the choice between Islam and the sword when it was well known that forced converts did not become real Muslims. The Arabs were only forced in terms of external observance (*iẓhār*), he says, not religious conviction (*iʿtiqād*), which is beyond compulsion; but having been forced to live as Muslims, such people would gradually come to accept Islam, or their children would. In other words, he distinguished between religion as internal conviction and religion as communal affiliation, deeming it a good thing to force people into the community on the same grounds as al-Qaffāl: it made it easier for them to see the truth[30]. In answer to the question how killing (read: fighting?) could be obligatory if there was no compulsion in religion, al-Jishumī said that people were given the choice between conversion, acceptance of *jizya*, and fighting, which did not in his view amount to compulsion in religion. As he saw it, there was not really any such thing as forced conversion at all: "religion is what people adhere to by conviction, and one can only conceive of coercing somebody to behave as an adherent of the religion, not to believe in the religion" (*al-dīn mā yutamassaku bihi iʿtiqādan fa-innamā yutaṣawwaru al-ikrāh ʿalā iẓhār al-dīn lā ʿalā al-dīn*)"[31]. Unlike al-Jishumī, al-Jaṣṣāṣ read the *lā ikrāha* verse as a legal command, entertaining the possibility that it was an injunction of global tolerance of infidels which had later been narrowed down by the order to fight, but his denial that inner conviction could be forced does seem to be linked to his theology. To a Muʿtazilite, there was neither divine nor human coercion where it really mattered: people were free to choose their own convictions in their innermost selves.

The distinction between inner conviction and communal affiliation was not unique to the Muʿtazilites, and there were others too who brought it to bear on Q. 2:256. According to the grammarian al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), some scholars read the verse as a command not to say that people who had been incorporated into the Muslim community after war had become Muslims by force, on the grounds that when they did become genuine Muslims, it would not be by force[32]. This statement is widely encountered in the literature after him, often as an anonymous opinion, sometimes as his[33]. Jishumī is among those who cite it, explicitly crediting it to al-Zajjāj[34]. Apparently, al-Zajjāj and unspecified others construed *lā ikrāha* as meaning "no calling (forced converts) reluctant", not as a factual statement that coercion could not affect religion in the sense of inner conviction; but Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), another grammarian and a pupil of the Ḥanbalite Thaʿlab, is cited as commenting that only that which people have accepted in their hearts

25. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Risāla fī al-qadar*, ed. H. Ritter in his "Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit", *Der Islam* 21 (1933), p. 76.

26. Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and A. J. B. Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 1861-77, vol. 4, p. 22 (ed. C. Pellat, Beirut 1966-79, vol. 4, § 2255). If He had made every human sinless or given all humans the knowledge available to messengers, He would not have made this world a *dār al-balwā wa-l-imtiḥān*, as one reads in al-Maqdisī (wrote ca. 355/966), *Kitāb al-bad' wa-l-taʾrīkh*, ed. and tr. C. Huart, Paris 1899-1919, vol. 1, p. 110f.

27. *Tahdhīb*, fol. 95b, 4 up; 96a, 4ff. Jishumī was murdered by predestinarians in Mecca (W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin 1965, p. 188).

28. Qaffāl in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, p. 192 (*ad* Q. 3:110). The muddle of which I suspected al-Qaffāl in *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 381n., was my own.

29. Augustine had said the same in justification of the forced conversion of the Donatists: many were glad to be delivered from the tyranny of custom, the cloth of ignorance, and parental example; surely the use of a little force in things temporal was worth the eternal gain? (N. Q. King, "*Compelle Intrare* and the plea of the pagans", *The Modern Churchman* 4 [1961], p. 112).

30. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām*, vol. 1, p. 548f. The Muʿtazilites have overtaken Augustine here: to the latter, the ineffectiveness of the use of force was still a bit of an embarrassment (cf. King, "*Compelle Intrare*", p. 112).

31. Jishumī, *Tahdhīb*, fol. 96a, 5.

32. Zajjāj, *Maʿānī*, vol. 1, p. 335.

33. Thus Thaʿlabī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 236 (where he invokes Q. 4:94: *Do not say to those who offer you a greeting, "you are not a believer"*); Shahrastānī, *Mafātīh*, vol. 1, p. 399b (from Thaʿlabī?); also Ḥalabī, *Durr*, p. 546; Thalāʾī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 102f, and other works. For Imāmī citations, see below, notes 85, 88.

34. *Tahdhīb*, p. 95b, 8 up.

counts as religion, not what they are simply forced to do[35]. This view, which is also mentioned by al-Māturīdī[36], corresponds to al-Jaṣṣāṣ' position. Many grammarians were said to be Muʿtazilites[37], but al-Zajjāj and Ibn al-Anbārī are not among them, so whether this interpretation was actually pioneered by the Muʿtazilites is hard to say. It would have helped to know what Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (also known as al-Kaʿbī, d. 319/931) and al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) said about the verse, but it is not covered in the quotations from the (lost) works of the first two scholars collected by Gimaret and Nabhā respectively or in the Paris fragment of the (incompletely preserved and unpublished) *tafsīr* of the third[38]. Whatever the answer, the Ismailis also read the verse in the light of the distinction between external observance and inner conviction, as we shall see, but with a different implication. One would have expected the Sufis to have done so as well. Kāshānī (d. 730/1329) does say that religion is inner guidance, which is not amenable to coercion[39], and the much later Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī (d. 1327/1909) makes the same point in more elaborate terms[40]. But most Sufis say little or nothing about the *lā ikrāha* statement, which does not seem to have interested them much[41].

The tenth-century context

There cannot be much doubt that the Muʿtazilites who denied that forced coercion existed while at the same time declaring it a good thing were responding to

35. Cited in Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, vol. 1, p. 252; Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*, p. 123.

36. Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, p. 594 ("Some people say, *No compulsion is there in religion*: i.e. no religion is accepted by force; that is not faith").

37. Cf. C. H. M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, Leiden 1977, p. 150 (my thanks to Monique Bernards for a reference which led to this one).

38. Cf. D. Gimaret (ed.), *Une lecture muʿtazilite du Coran: le Tafsīr d'Abū ʿAlī al-Djubbāʾī (m. 303/915)*, Louvain 1994; Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Kh. M. Nabhā, Beirut 2007 (my thanks to Hüseyin Hansu for showing me this work); al-Rummānī's *Tafsīr*, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS arabe 6523: it starts with Q. 3:55 (I am much indebted to Maroun Aouad for checking the manuscript for me). But there are other manuscripts, possibly containing different fragments (cf. F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 8, Leiden 1982, p. 113, 270).

39. Ibn ʿArabī (attrib.), *Tafsīr* (in fact Kāshānī, *Taʾwīlāt*), vol. 1, p. 89f (drawn to my attention by Ludmila Zamah). For the authorship, see R. Forster, *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qurʾānexegese*, Berlin 2001, p. 93.

40. Gunābādī, *Bayān al-saʿāda*, vol. 1, p. 122 (the death-date given here is from *EI*[2], s.v. "Niʿmat-Allāhiyya"; ʿA. Nuwayhiḍ gives it as 1311/1894 in his *Muʿjam al-mufassirīn*, Beirut 1983-4, vol. 2, p. 526).

41. There are no comments on the verse in Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, p. 37; Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, vol. 1, p. 76f; or id., *Minor Qurʾān Commentary*, p. 17-19; Ruzbihān Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis*, vol. 1, p. 53f. Qushayrī merely explains that the proofs are clear (*Laṭāʾif*, vol. 1, p. 210); Niʿmat Allāh Nakhjawānī merely paraphrases the text (*Fawātiḥ*, vol. 1, p. 87); and Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī merely quotes (without mentioning them) Shaykhzādeh, *Ḥāshiya*, p. 570, on *jizya*-payers versus the Arab pagans and Abū al-Suʿūd, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 386, on how the rational person will choose the religion of his own accord, in his *Tafsīr al-adhān min tafsīr nūr al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 200f. He does have considerably more to say about the verse in the unabbreviated edition (*Tafsīr rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 406ff), but not about the words *lā ikrāha* (my thanks to Ludmila Zamah for introducing me to Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī and to Susan Gunasti for drawing my attention to the unabbreviated edition). But for a highflown Sufi interpretation centering on *lā ikrāha*, understood as divine coercion, see al-Harrālī in Biqāʿī, *Naẓm*, vol. 4, p. 40ff.

a situation in which the use of force in the service of religion had come to be seen as problematic[42]. When al-Qaffāl asserts that no fair-minded person could deny the merit of fighting in the cause of religion, it was precisely because it had been denied, even by Muslims; and when al-Jaṣṣāṣ explains why the Prophet forced the Arabs to convert, it was because some people had come to find it unacceptable. To that extent, the tenth-century exegetes were facing much the same problems as twentieth-century modernists responding to Western criticisms of *jihād*.

Unlike the modernists, however, the tenth-century exegetes were not trying to rewrite Islam as a religion which had renounced the use of force, thus recasting *jihād* as secular warfare, but rather to distinguish their religion as a set of beliefs about eternal matters from the obligations it prescribed regarding life in the here and now. Islam was both a set of doctrines about the transcendent and a civic religion. In its second capacity it regulated a society that most people entered for reasons beyond their control, usually by being born into it, sometimes by being dragged into it. Many thinking men in the fourth/tenth century had a strong sense that such external vicissitudes were separate from people's innermost convictions: communal affiliation was not to be conflated with religion in the sense of individual faith; social obligations were one thing, individual salvation was something else. In the context of Q. 2:256 adherents of this view would insist that only individual conviction counted as religion (*dīn*), which comes across as forced in linguistic terms, given that *dīn* was often used synonymously with *sharīʿa* (law, civic religion); but they had to say it because it was *dīn* that the verse located in the compulsion-free zone. To a modern reader their reading also comes across as self-serving in that it allowed them to endorse the use of compulsion in religious matters while claiming to do nothing of the kind; but it did have the satisfying effect not just of reconciling the law with the *lā ikrāha* verse, but also of identifying the individual as an autonomous agent responsible for his own salvation.

The later history of the two interpretations

Both the first and the second Muʿtazilite interpretation of the *lā ikrāha* verse became standard in Imāmī exegesis, as will be seen. On the Sunni side the second interpretation reappears in two works on *aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, by the Shāfiʿite Kiyā al-Harrāsī (d. 504/1110) and the Mālikī Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148) respectively[43], but not in any verse-by-verse *tafsīr* on Q. 2:256 that I have seen before modern times. The Sunnis did pick up the interpretation of *lā ikrāha* as relating to free will, however. After Abū Muslim, al-Qaffāl and al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī, the interpretation appears in the Muʿtazilite al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), a Sunni by adoption[44]. "God did not make the matter of faith a matter of compulsion and coercion but rather of enablement and choice", he says, probably quoting Abū Muslim al-Iṣbahānī; like so many, perhaps including Abū Muslim himself, he adduces

42. Cf. P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 375ff.

43. Kiyā al-Harrāsī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, p. 339ff (cf. M. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge 2000, p. 347); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, p. 233.

44. Cf. A. J. Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: the Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī*, Leiden 2005. Cf. also M. Ḥ. al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, [Cairo] 1976-89, vol. 1, p. 457ff. for a discussion of where his Muʿtazilism shows.

Q. 10:99 as well (*If your Lord had wanted it, all those on earth would have believed together. Will you then force people to become believers ?*)[45]. After al-Zamakhsharī the interpretation appears in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as seen already, and thereafter it is cited, now from al-Zamakhsharī and now from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī, occasionally from both, by Niẓām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qummī al-Naysabūrī (d. 728/1327f)[46], Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745/1344), Muṣṭafā b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Tamjīd al-Ḥanafī (d. 880/1475)[47], the Yemeni al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834, a Zaydi who was a virtual Sunni)[48], the Iraqi Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854)[49] and (on the basis of al-Shawkānī) the Indian Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1889f)[50]. Ālūsī apart, it is not clear from any of these authors that the reference is to freedom from divine rather than human compulsion unless one knows the tradition.

Non-Mu'tazilite developments

The Mu'tazilites were not the only exegetes to express themselves in a fashion that laid them open to misunderstanding by modern readers. Traditionalist scholars will sometimes gloss *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* as meaning: "Do not force anyone to convert". Contrary to what one might think, this is not a global prohibition of forced conversion, but rather a statement regarding the eligibility of infidels other than Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians for status as *jizya*-paying *dhimmīs*. According to the Shāfi'ites and many Ḥanbalīs, only Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians could be accepted as *jizya*-payers; all other infidels had to be either converted or killed. "Do not force anyone from among the People of the Book or the Zoroastrians to become monotheists after the conversion of the Arabs", as Ibn Wahb al-Dīnawarī (d. 308/920) put it, meaning that all other infidels should be forced[51]. But the Ḥanafīs and most Mālikīs held that all infidels other than the now extinct pagan Arabs (or just the now extinct pagan Quraysh) could be accepted[52], and this is what they mean when they say that nobody at all should be forced to convert. "Do not force anyone to adopt the faith after the conquest of Mecca and the conversion of the Arabs", as Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 370/980f) said[53]. Apostates still had to be given the choice between conversion and death. The jurists were of course well aware that the verse could be read as a universal grant of tolerance incompatible with the duty to execute apostates and wage *jihād* against non-Muslims; but those who understood it in that vein always added that it had been abrogated. The meaning was either general and abrogated or specific and concerned with *jizya*-payers, as Ālūsī said[54].

Some mediaeval scholars voiced dissident views. Thus the Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) held that even Christians and Jews had to be fought until they were either converted or killed, on the grounds that the *kitābī*s mentioned by God in the *jizya* verse (Q. 9:29) had died out and others had appeared who plainly were not those who had been given the pre-Qur'ānic scriptures[55]. Tolerance was not for him. Nor was it for the later Andalusian Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148), who took the meaning of Q. 2:256 to be both general and valid on the grounds that what it prohibited was compelling people to adopt falsehood: Muslims could not be forced to convert to other faiths. As for compelling people with truth on one's side (*bi-l-ḥaqq*), it was part of the religion, he said[56]. The militance of these two scholars should presumably be related to the Christian *reconquista*.

In a diametrically opposed vein, the Ḥanbalite Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) argued in a number of non-exegetical works that even Arab polytheists qualified for *jizya*-paying status (though as it happened, they no longer existed). The only reason they had been forced to convert, he said in one work, was that the *jizya*-verse (Q. 9:29) had not been revealed until year 9, by which time there were no idolaters left in Arabia[57]. The plain meaning of the "no compulsion" verse was that all infidels without exception qualified for *jizya*-paying status and that none of them should be forced to convert when they were conquered. Indeed, he claimed in another work, "to anyone who carefully considers the life of the Prophet it will be clear that he did not ever force anyone to adopt his religion, and that he only fought those who fought him". Where that leaves the pagan Arabs is not clear[58]. In a third work he lays down that spiritual struggle (*jihād al-nafs*), or battling with one's own devilish inclinations, must always precede physical warfare, as it did in the case of the Prophet; one has to master every form of *jihād* to fight the enemies of God with one's heart, tongue, hand and property, and thus make God's word uppermost[59]. It sounds extraordinarily modern. He owed his conviction that the Prophet only fought defensive wars and never compelled anyone to convert to his teacher Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who also insisted (in some of his works) that infidels were only to be fought for their transgressions, not for their unbelief on its own, and he adduced the *lā ikrāha* verse in support of this

45. Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 387. Unfortunately, Lane does not discuss Zamakhsharī's use of earlier Mu'tazilite *tafsīr* in his chapter on the sources of the *Kashshāf*.

46. Niẓām al-Dīn, *Gharā'ib*, vol. 3, p. 19. The lines he cites are from al-Qaffāl, but he names no names.

47. Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīt*, vol. 2, p. 292 (citing Abū Muslim and al-Qaffāl, i.e. from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī); Muṣṭafā b. Ibrāhīm, *Ḥāshiya*, vol. 5, p. 394 (where both al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī are acknowledged: *wa-fī al-Kashshāf... qāla al-imām*).

48. Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-qadīr*, vol. 1, p. 275 (*wa-fī al-Kashshāf*). Cf. B. Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: the Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkānī*, Cambridge 2003.

49. Ālūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol. 3, p. 18 (some people say that the meaning is *laysa fī al-dīn ikrāh min allāh*, among them al-Qaffāl – clearly from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī).

50. *Fatḥ al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 427 (*qāla fī al-Kashshāf*).

51. Dīnawarī, *Wāḍiḥ*, vol. 1, p. 85; similarly Fīrūzābādī, *Tanwīr*, *ad loc.* (unpaginated); cf. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, p. 76ff. This view is also reported in Hūd b. Muḥkim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 240, but whether the Ibāḍīs adopted it is not clear, cf. below, note 70.

52. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, p. 77f, 79f; cf. the Mālikī position in Ibn 'Aṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, vol. 2, p. 195f; Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Baḥr*, vol. 2, p. 292.

53. Abū al-Layth, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 695f.

54. Ālūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol. 3, p. 18.

55. Ibn Ḥazm, *Iḥkām*, vol. 2, p. 890; cf. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, p. 104f.

56. Ibn 'Arabi, *Aḥkām*, vol. 1, p. 233 (*'umūm fī ikrāh al-bāṭil fa-ammā al-ikrāh bi-l-ḥaqq fa-min al-dīn*).

57. Friedmann, "Classification of unbelievers", p. 185, citing Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, p. 24f.

58. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Badā'i' al-tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 414, expressing his agreement with the Iraqis and Medinese "even though they except some idolaters" (i.e. Arab pagans). Ibn al-Qayyim did not actually write a *tafsīr*; this work is a modern compilation from his writings (cf. the editorial introduction, p. 16ff).

59. *Zād al-ma'ād*, vol. 3, p. 5ff.

view[60]. In Ibn Taymiyya's case it should perhaps be seen as the obverse of the high standards of obedience to Islamic law that he demanded within the Muslim community, at least for purposes of excluding the newly converted Mongols and their Muslim collaborators from it, declaring *jihād* to be obligatory against them[61]: just as mere unbelief did not suffice to make people an object of *jihād*, so mere profession of the faith did not suffice to shield against it; what counted was behaviour. But there may well be more to it. It is far beyond my competence, however, and I must limit myself to the observation that neither Ibn Taymiyya nor Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya make their comments on *lā ikrāha* in formal works of *tafsīr*, let alone those of the *musalsal* (verse-by-verse) type, which tend to be more conservative than most.[62] In line with this, their views are not cited in later exegetical comments on the verse either[63].

The two exegetes constantly cited in the post-Tīmūrid period, al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or later) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), also make some modern-sounding statements. Al-Bayḍāwī, a Shāfi'ite keen to purge al-Zamakhsharī's *tafsīr* of its Mu'tazilite elements[64], explains that there is no (human) compulsion in religion (as far as *jizya*-paying infidels are concerned) because compulsion is forcing somebody to do something that he does not regard as good, and this is not necessary now that right guidance has become distinct from falsehood; any rational person will hasten to embrace the faith[65]. It was with this statement that he replaced al-Zamakhsharī's reading of the verse as a proclamation of free will, and his reading is certainly more persuasive, if only without my parenthetical additions. The second parentheses are necessary because he accepted the traditional limitations on religious freedom: as far as the legal import of the verse was concerned, it was either abrogated or concerned with *kitābī*s alone, as he declared in agreement with al-Zamakhsharī, adducing the story of the Anṣārī father of two Christian sons. (This story, originally set in Medina before the permission to fight and the institution of the *jizya* rules, was increasingly coming to be read as a story about the rights of *jizya* payers.)[66] When he casts the truth as something freely chosen, he means it as mere praise of Islam: there was nothing in it for its adherents to dislike, as al-Aṣamm had said; its obligations were so light that everybody obeyed them of their own accord, as others had put it[67]; the evidence in its favour was so clear that every rational person would hasten to adopt it, al-Bayḍāwī now added himself.

In the same vein Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) glosses the verse as meaning "do not force anyone to adopt the religion of Islam", explaining that the evidence in favour of the truth of Islam is manifest and clear, so that compulsion is unnecessary; he whom God guides to Islam will adopt it and he whose heart God makes blind will not benefit from being forced into it[68]. This is close to al-Bayḍāwī, though the wording is different, and again no legal claim beyond the usual prohibition of the forced conversion of *dhimmī*s seems to be made. For all that, it is impossible not to be struck by the distancing tone in which forced conversion is mentioned in these *tafsīr*s, especially that of Ibn Kathīr. The latter takes us back to Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Damascus and the enigma of how all these modern-sounding statements are to be explained.

Later exegetical works often mention that Islam is too obviously true to be in need of compulsion. In fact, Ottoman *tafsīr*s on Q. 2:256 seem to be mostly commentaries on and paraphrases of either al-Zamakhsharī or al-Bayḍāwī[69].

Sectarian interpretations

Neither the Shi'ites nor, in so far as one can tell, the Kharijites seem to have taken a particular interest in Q. 2:256[70]. But some Shi'ites did come up with views of their own.

60. *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*, p. 121 (with the astonishing claim, at p. 123, that most of the *salaf* considered the verse to be neither limited nor abrogated), cf. p. 155f; M. Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya: ḥayātuhu wa-'aṣruhu, ārā'uhu wa-fiqhuhu*, [Cairo] 1952, p. 379ff. But Ibn Taymiyya also says that *jihād* is obligatory against anyone who has heard the call to God and the Prophet without responding, see *al-Siyāsa al-shar'iyya* in *Majmū' fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya*, vol. 28 (*fiqh*, VIII: *jihād*), [Beirut] 1997, p. 349; tr. O. A. Farrukh, *Ibn Taimiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam*, Beirut 1966, p. 135 (with a mistranslation); also R. Peters (tr.), *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Princeton 1996, p. 44. Here the cause of war is indeed unbelief.

61. Cf. the letters in *Majmū' fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya*, vol. 28, p. 410ff, 424ff (reproduced in Ibn Taymiyya, *Thalāth rasā'il fī al-jihād*, ed. M. Abū Ṣu'aylik and I. al-'Alī, Amman 1993, nos. 1 and 2), and the responsa, *ibid.*, p. 501ff, 509ff (reproduced in Ibn Taymiyya, *Fiqh al-jihād*, ed. Z. Sh. al-Kabbī, Beirut 1992, p. 119ff, 125ff).

62. Compare below, p. 141, 153.

63. The only citation of Ibn al-Qayyim's views that I have encountered is in the mottos of Āl Ḥamad's edition of Ibn Taymiyya's treatise *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*, intended to persuade misguided Muslim youth that shedding innocent blood is not in accordance with Islam or the model of the Prophet (p. 6, cf. 12, 17f).

64. cf. *EI*[2], s.v. "al-Bayḍāwī". Curiously, Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284), whose *Kitāb al-inṣāf fīmā taḍammanahu al-Kashshāf min al-i'tizāl* polemicizes against Zamakhsharī's Mu'tazilite interpretations (cf. I. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden 1920, p. 123ff), does not comment on Q. 2:256. (For Ibn al-Munayyir's own unexceptional views on the possible meanings, see his versified work, *al-Tafsīr al-'ajīb*, p. 43f.)

65. Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, vol. 1, p. 259f.

66. That it was revealed before the order to fight scriptuaries is noted e.g. by al-Suddī in Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, p. 45f; Ibn 'Aṭiyya, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 197; Qurṭubī, *Aḥkām*, vol. 3, p. 281. Contrast Shirbīnī, *Sirāj*, vol. 1, p. 170; Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 386; Fayḍī, *Sawāṭi'*, vol. 1, p. 238f (where the Anṣārī is barely recognizable); and later works.

67. Above, notes 18-19.

68. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 310f.

69. I am indebted to Susan Gunasti for discussions of this point.

70. Only Ibāḍī *tafsīr*s survive, and they are not numerous. Of those available, that of Hūd b. Muḥkim al-Hawwārī (mid-3rd/9th cent.) could have been written by a mainstream Basran, as indeed in a sense it was, since it is based on the commentary of Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815) (cf. C. Gilliot, "Le commentaire de Hūd b. Muḥakkam/Muḥkim", *Arabica* 44 [1997], p. 181f); and the late 3rd/9th cent. Abū al-Ḥawārī omits the verse from his *Dirāya*. The epistle attributed to Sālim b. Dhakwān makes it clear that the "tolerance verses" were abrogated by the permission to fight, but does not cite Q. 2:256 (P. Crone and F. Zimmermann (eds. and trs.), *The Epistle of Sālim b. Dhakwān*, Oxford 2001, p. 65ff (vol. 2, § 25-31); for the expression "tolerance verses", which Sālim does not use, see below, note 109). The modern Ibāḍī Aṭfayyish (d. 1322/1914) merely says that nobody should be forced to convert to Islam (*Taysir al-tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 412; cf. below note 72), though he also says that infidels other than *kitābī*s and Zoroastrians should be killed if they do not convert (*Himyān al-zād*, vol. 3, p. 358).

Ismailis

The most interesting Shi'ite interpretation is that of the Ismailis, who voice it outside the genre of *tafsīr*. In his work on prophethood, the missionary Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) declares that *jihād* is meant to bring people under the law (the *ẓāhir*); once this has been achieved, they are to be left to choose their own saving faith without further compulsion: this, in his view, is what the *lā ikrāha* verse proclaimed[71]. Here we have the distinction between outer and inner man that we met in the Mu'tazilite justification of forced conversion: outer man is subject to compulsion, inner man is free. But there are two significant differences. First, the freedom that al-Jaṣṣāṣ had described as a plain fact, arising from the impossibility of forcing people to believe, is here a legal right: Abū Ḥātim is saying that it is not *allowed* to force people to believe. Secondly, Abū Ḥātim is not talking about infidels living as hypocrites under Islamic law, but about Muslims living as dissidents under that law: what the verse established was that they were free to choose their own path to salvation; as long as they observed the law, their beliefs were a private matter and nobody had the right to interfere with them. In other words, the Ismailis read the verse as a proclamation of tolerance of Muslim dissidence. They were the only Muslims to do so until modern times. (The Ibadi Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Aṭfayyish (d. 1332/1914) does comment that opponents are not to be forced to adopt "our religion", but whether this ruling is of pre-modern origin is impossible to say.)[72] One would assume the Ismailis originally to have adopted this interpretation in an attempt to legalise their own position, but they applied their understanding of the verse to mainstream Muslims living under Ismaili rule as well[73].

Given that the distinction between inner and outer man was widely made in the tenth century and that Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī died almost half a century before al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976) and al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), it seems unlikely that the Ismailis should be indebted to Mu'tazilism here. But Mu'tazilism does seem to be involved when we reach Abū al-Fawāris (fl. c. 400/1000). In answer to the question why 'Alī did not take up the sword when he was deprived of the caliphate, Abū al-Fawāris replies that *jihād* (against other Muslims) was obligatory only in connection with apostasy and adduces Q. 2:256 in support of this view, explaining that acts performed under compulsion have no moral value and that "all these tests (*imtiḥānāt*) and trials (*fitan*)... have been instituted as a respite for the devils so that they can lead astray and tempt and cause people to deviate from God's path by way of trial (*ikhtibāran*) and tribulation (*balwan*) for the community"[74]. This does sound remarkably Mu'tazilite. Here as in Abū Ḥātim and other Ismaili attestations, however, the verse is understood, not as a description of God's refusal to coerce human beings to believe, but rather as God's injunction to humans to refrain from using force against others in matters of faith as long as they abide by the law: it was in obedience to this verse that 'Alī had abstained from taking up arms against his opponents. The tolerance granted by the Ismailis only applied to followers of Islamic law, not to adherents of any religion, so we are still a long way from the modernist interpretation. But it does show how easily the Mu'tazilite exegetes on free will could be read as ruling out human rather than, or as well as, divine coercion.

71. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, p. 110-112.
72. Aṭfayyish, *Himyān al-zād*, vol. 3, p. 358.
73. Cf. P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 380.
74. Abū al-Fawāris, *Risāla fī al-imāma*, ch. VII (my translation).

Zaydis

The Zaydis also came up with an interpretation of their own. According to them, the Imam al-Hādī (d. 298/911) took the verse to mean there could be no such thing as forced conversion of Muslims. He said that the verse was revealed to Muḥammad after the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya: in accordance with that treaty, Muḥammad would return Meccans who came to him, and back in Mecca the unbelievers would force them to renounce Islam; God put an end to this situation by telling Muḥammad to stop sending converts back and permitting the Muslims to use force against the unbelievers until they had been either converted or annihilated[75]. In other words, God forbade forced conversion to falsehood and permitted forced conversion to the truth: this is the interpretation that later crops up in the Andalusian Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148)[76].Since the Andalusian is not likely to have read Zaydi literature, one would take the interpretation to have enjoyed wider currency than the exegetical tradition currently available suggests. It crops up in modern times too, as will be seen. Then as now the condemnation of forced conversion to falsehood is not a plea for tolerance by a beleaguered minority, but rather a refusal by militants to practise tolerance themselves: the verse established religious freedom for Muslims, not for anyone else.

The Zaydis were also familiar with the traditional interpretations of Q. 2:256 [77] and at some point they adopted the first Mu'tazilite interpretation as well. Presumably, they were introduced to it by al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101), given that the latter, who started as a Ḥanafī, ended as a Zaydi[78]. But they also knew it from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī[79].

Imāmīs

Unlike the Zaydis and the Ismailis, the Imāmīs do not seem to have come up with their own interpretation of *lā ikrāha*, which does not in fact seem to have interested them very much. Their earliest exegetes only comment on other parts of Q. 2:256 or omit the verse altogether[80]; the same is true of several later exegetes[81].

75. Sharafī, *Maṣābīḥ*, MS, vol. 2, p. 506. This passage was located by Bernard Haykel, who kindly sent me both a photograph and a transcription.
76. Cf. above, note 56.
77. Najrī, *Shāfī al-'alīl*, vol. 1, p. 340. He is also classified as a Ḥanafī.
78. Madelung, *Qāsim*, p. 186f. Jishumī could be the ultimate source of the statement of the 9th/15th-century al-A'qam that "there is no coercion from God in religion; rather, the servant chooses" (*Tafsīr*, p. 57).
79. Sharafī, *Maṣābīḥ*, MS, vol. 2, p. 505. The authorities are given as Abū Muslim and al-Qaffāl, but it is clearly from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī that they are cited.
80. Thus Thumālī, *Tafsīr*, p. 119; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 69f; 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 259f, no. 563f; al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (attrib.), *Tafsīr*, p. 497ff. For the limited interest of pre-Būyid exegetes in issues not directly related to Shi'ism, see M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, Leiden 1999, p. 79.
81. Thus the 10th/16th-century commentators Ardabīlī, *Zubdat al-bayān 'an aḥkām al-qur'ān*, p. 863; Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhira*, p. 101f; and the 11th/17th-century Baḥrānī (cf. the reference below, note 92).

The view that *lā ikrāha* referred to the ease with which the Islamic precepts were obeyed appears in Imāmī *ḥadīth*, but not, it seems, in the extant works of *tafsīr*[82]. The earliest Imāmī exegete to comment on *lā ikrāha*, al-Qummī (fl. c. 307/919), merely cites ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) as commenting that nobody is (or should be?) forced to convert (*lā yukrahu aḥad ʿalā dīnihi*); rather, people come (should come?) to the truth after seeing the difference between right guidance and falsehood[83]. Exactly what he meant is unclear, but he could be referring to the impossibility of coercing inner man. Some later scholars list the verse as abrogated[84].

Inner man makes his unambiguous appearance in Imāmī literature with al-Ṭūsī (d. 459/1067), who cites the three traditional interpretations along with al-Zajjāj's injunction (cited anonymously) that people who have become Muslims thanks to war should not be told that they have been forced to convert. In answer to the question how there can be no compulsion in religion when people are being killed (read: fought?) over it, he gives the same answer as al-Jishumī, but in different words: there is no compulsion in that which is truly religion (*fīmā huwa dīn fī al-ḥaqīqa*), which is the acts of the heart, as opposed to that which is open to coercion, namely external conformity; the person compelled to utter the two *shahādas* does not actually adopt the religion, any more than the person forced to profess unbelief actually becomes an unbeliever[85]. He is endorsing the second Muʿtazilite interpretation. Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī (d. 598/1202) reproduces al-Ṭūsī's statement[86], and a condensed version of Ibn Idrīs appears in al-Shaybānī (d. 994/1585)[87]. Al-Zajjāj's injunction also appears in other Imāmī works without being linked to the Muʿtazilite interpretation[88].

The first Muʿtazilite interpretation appears with al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154). The verse means that "the affairs of religion are based on enablement and choice (*al-tamakkun wa-l-ikhtiyār*), not on force and coercion (*al-qasr wa-l-ijbār*)", he says, adducing Q. 10:99 and drawing on either Abū Muslim al-Iṣbahānī or al-Zamakhsharī[89]. "The meaning is that there is no divine coercion in religion (*laysa fī al-dīn ikrāh min Allāh*); rather, the servant is given a choice (*al-ʿabd mukhayyar*)", he says in another work, using the same words as al-Jishumī and adding al-Ṭūsī's explanation that true religion is in the acts of the heart, not the profession of the two *shahādas* (which can be imposed by human force)[90]. Here he is fusing the two Muʿtazilite interpretations. The same seems to hold true of Nūr al-Dīn al-Kāshānī (d. after 1115/1703f), according to whom "God did not base faith (*īmān*) and Shiʿism on force and coercion but rather on enablement and

82. Cf. above, note 19.

83. Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 92; also cited in Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 92, p. 263f, where it is attributed to ʿAlī al-Riḍā.

84. Ibn al-ʿAtāʾiqī, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, p. 52f; cf. also Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, p. 121.

85. Ṭūsī, *Tibyān*, vol. 2, p. 311.

86. Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī, *Muntakhab*, p. 95.

87. Shaybānī, *Mukhtaṣar nahj al-bayān*, p. 42.

88. Thus the first Imāmī *tafsīr* in Persian, Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, *Rawḥ al-jinān*, vol. 2, p. 330 (probably using al-Thaʿālibī), and Mullā Fatḥ Allāh Kāshānī, *Manhaj al-ṣādiqīn*, p. 98; cf. also below, note 90, on al-Ṭabrisī.

89. Ṭabrisī, *Jawāmiʿ*, vol. 1, p. 167f.

90. Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 306. He also cites al-Zajjāj's injunction, but separately from his Muʿtazilite interpretation.

choice, unlike *islām* (i.e. membership of the Muslim community)"[91]. The words are Abū Muslim's (or al-Zamakhsharī's) on free will, but what they are being made to support appears to be the claim that inner man remains free even when outer man is coerced by other human beings.

With al-Shaybānī and Nūr al-Dīn al-Kāshānī we have reached the Ṣafavid period, when Iran was being converted to Shiʿism by force, and what al-Kāshānī is saying may be that people cannot be forced to become Shiʿites in terms of *īmān*, inner faith, but only in terms of *islām*, external practice: if so, he is condoning the forced conversion of Sunnis on the grounds that their inner convictions are left alone. But one can also read him as saying that people can only be forced to become Muslims, not Shiʿites, since Shiʿism is inner faith. If so, the passage is critical of the forced conversion of Sunnis. Criticism certainly seems to be what we encounter in Nūr al-Dīn al-Kāshānī's grandfather, Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680). This scholar starts by citing al-Qummī on how nobody should be forced to convert, al-Bayḍāwī (unnamed) on how there is no need for compulsion because any rational person will embrace the faith, and the traditional view that the verse should be understood as a general proclamation of tolerance which had been abrogated or limited to the People of the Book. He proceeds to conclude that if the word *dīn* means Shiʿism here, as it does in the *ḥadīth* of Ibn Yaʿfūr, then the verse should be understood as prohibiting the use of force in Shiʿism *without* recourse to postulates of abrogation or limitation[92]. This sounds like polemics against current policies.

But the polemics, if such they are, can hardly be described as resounding, and it is impossible to discern any reference to current affairs in other exegetes, whether Ṣafavid or later. Some refrain from commenting on *lā ikrāha* altogether[93]. Mirzā Muḥammad al-Mashhadī (d. 1125/1713f) glosses the statement with some words from al-Bayḍāwī (unnamed), construing the right guidance (*rushd*) that has become clear from error in the next line as evidence that there must be an infallible guide at all times[94]. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿĀmilī (d. after 1168/1754f) repeats that God did not base faith (*īmān*) on compulsion, only on choice, but does not develop the theme.[95] Shubbar (d. 1242/1826f) says the same, adducing Q. 10:99[96]. Exegetes writing in Persian stick to the three traditional interpretations[97]. There can be no doubt that the verse-by-verse commentary (*tafsīr musalsal*) was an extremely conservative genre.

91. Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-muʿīn*, vol. 1, p. 127.

92. Kāshānī, *Ṣāfī*, vol. 1, p. 261; more briefly also ibid., *Aṣfā*, vol. 1, p. 121. For the tradition (cited in full in the *Aṣfā*), see ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 259, no. 564; Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 3, p. 242f, where the tradition is also adduced *ad* Q. 2:256, here to identify the Shiʿites as the believers whom God will lead into His light as against the adherents of *ṭāghūt* whom He will lead into darkness, regardless of behaviour (the *ṭāghūt*, treated as a plural, are the usurpers already in Qummī.)

93. Cf. above, note 81.

94. Mashhadī, *Kanz al-daqāʾiq*, vol. 1, p. 611f.

95. ʿĀmilī, *Wajīz*, vol. 1, p. 205.

96. Shubbar, *Tafsīr*, p. 79.

97. Thus the 11th-century Isfarāʾinī, *Tāj al-tarājim*, vol. 1, p. 297f; the 12th-century Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, *Rawḥ al-jinān*, vol. 2, p. 329f; the 15th or 16th-century Abū al-Maḥāsin Jurjānī, *Tafsīr-i gāzūr*, vol. 1, 336f; and Mullā Fatḥ Allāh Kāshānī (d. 988/1580), *Manhaj al-ṣādiqīn*, vol. 2, p. 97f (with some echoes of al-Bayḍāwī). I cannot find Q. 2:256 in Abū al-Fatḥ Jurjānī (d. 976/1568), *Tafsīr-i shāhī*.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The Sunnis

We now reach the period in which the great wrench from the tradition begins. It does not always show: some exegetes continue to write much as before, even into the 1990s[98]. But they are greatly outnumbered by those in whom change can be discerned.

There is an early modernist in al-Qāsimī, a Damascene who died in 1332/1913. He cites Ibn Kathīr (Do not force anyone to convert) and, without naming him, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the first Muʿtazilite argument (God did not base religion on force and compulsion: force would be incompatible with this world as a place of trial and tribulation, with al-Qaffāl's explanation). His modernism shows in the fact that he takes the two statements to mean the same, namely that "the sword of *jihād*... is not employed to force people to adopt religion, but rather as protection for the mission on behalf of religion and surrender to its sovereign and just rule"[99]. What he is trying to rebut, without mentioning it, is the old charge that Islam had been spread by force, now taken up by the all too powerful Westerners. Al-Qāsimī, whose argument recurs in later Syrian *tafsīr*[100], rebuts the charge by reading the verse as an unconditional rejection of force in matters of religion and explaining that the armies involved in the expansion of Islam had been acting as mere protectors of the missionaries. This was a good argument because it was how the Christian detractors of Islam had often legitimated their own use of military force. The idea that conquest would allow missionaries to go about their business is as old as Gregory I (d. 605)[101]. Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254) had formally ruled that infidel rulers could be forced to allow the free movement of missionaries in their lands, and the Spanish had used that argument to legitimate their conquest of the Americas[102]. Where the Muslims traditionally fused the roles of warrior and missionary, the Christians traditionally separated them[103]: this was what al-Qāsimī was now doing as well.

Al-Qāsimī does not mention the Western charges that he is trying to dismiss, but they are explicit in Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935), a reformist whose comments on Q. 2:256 are based on Muḥammad ʿAbduh's lectures. Many of our enemies claim that the religion was established by the sword (*qāma bi-l-sayf*), he says, but this is not true; for in Mecca, Islam was persecuted and in Medina the "no coercion" verse was revealed as soon as the idea of forcing somebody to convert suggested itself, namely when Anṣārī parents wanted to compel their Jewish or Christian children to become Muslims; it was other religious communities that

98. See for example Āl Mubārak, *Tawfīq*, vol. 1, p. 331; Tuʿaylab, *Fatḥ al-raḥmān*, vol. 1, p. 308f; Ḥikmat b. Bashīr b. Yāsīn, *Tafsīr* – three Saudis who could all have written a thousand years earlier.

99. Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin*, vol. 3, p. 664f.

100. Cf. Sāʾis, Karsūn and al-Subkī, and Zuḥaylī, below, notes 111, 159, without mentioning his name. Note also the concept of *ḥurriyyat al-daʿwa* in Sayyid Quṭb, below, note 137.

101. C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of the Crusade*, Princeton 1977 (German original 1935), p. 10f.

102. J. J. Muldoon, *Americas in the Spanish World Order: the Justification for Conquest in the Seventeenth Century*, Philadelphia 1994, p. 17f, 21ff.

103. They did so in the Crusades as well. The Crusaders were out to liberate Jerusalem, not to convert the Muslims.

went in for the use of force, especially the Christians, he says. To Riḍā, the story of the Anṣārīs does not illustrate the rights of *dhimmīs* (let alone a bygone historical situation), but rather a universal prohibition of forced conversion; of limitation or abrogation he does not say a word[104]. His tone is highly rhetorical, but his claims certainly struck a chord. They are often cited[105], even by Shiʿites[106].

There is no trace of the Muʿtazilite arguments in Rashīd Riḍā, nor is there in the Palestinian Darwaza (wrote 1930s-40s), who examines the verse with a new attention to the overall context and concludes that it must be meant as a general affirmation of religious freedom (*al-ḥurriyya al-dīniyya*)[107]. But both Muʿtazilite arguments reappear in Elmalılı (d. 1942), author of a *tafsīr* in Turkish, who argues that religion is confession by the heart and beyond the reach of compulsion: even God refrains from constraint in the matter. As a modernist, he took this to mean that the verse forbids the use of force, and that moreover it does so generally, without being limited to the People of the Book, let alone abrogated[108]. In the same vein al-Ḥijāzī (first published 1951) adduces the old idea that inner man is beyond compulsion to prove, not that forced conversion is perfectly compatible with the *lā ikrāha* verse, but on the contrary that the verse forbids it. In favour of this view he also cites Q. 10:99 (*Will you then force people to become believers?*) and other tolerance verses traditionally held to have been abrogated in Medina[109], reading them as eternal commands, and combines all this with arguments drawn from Rashīd Riḍā[110]. Forty years later, Sāʾis, Karsūn and al-Subkī (published 1994) likewise seize on the view that inner man is beyond compulsion; "one cannot conceive of compulsion in it (*lā yutaṣawwaru al-ikrāh fīhi*), given that religion is a creed", as they say, sounding remarkably like al-Jishumī, but taking the fact that it was impossible to mean that it was forbidden[111].

More commonly, though, it is the first Muʿtazilite understanding of the verse that the modernists use, tacitly rewriting the freedom from divine coercion as a prohibition of its human counterpart. Thus Ḥamza, Barāniq and ʿAlwān (published 1953-62) read al-Qaffāl in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (both unnamed) as prohibiting human coercion in matters of faith and identify this as the message of the story of the Anṣārī and his two Christian sons, which they understand as a grant of

104. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 36f; cf. J. Jomier, *Le Commentaire coranique du Manār*, Paris 1954, ch. IX.

105. Cf. al-Ḥijāzī, al-Khaṭīb al-Mawṣilī and al-Zuḥaylī, below notes 110, 158, 191, and the modern editor in Māwardī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 271, note, who all quote him without mentioning him.

106. Rashīd Riḍā is quoted by name by Shīrāzī (below, note 124), and without acknowledgement in Āyatullāh Sabzawārī (below, note 130).

107. Darwaza, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 384. The verse also endorses *ḥurriyat al-iʿtiqād* in Ibn al-Khaṭīb (publ. 1964), *Awḍaḥ al-tafāsīr*, p. 50.

108. A. Karamustafa, "Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır's (1878-1942) philosophy of religion", *Archivum Ottomanicum* 19 (2001), p. 278 (drawn to my attention by Susan Gunasti).

109. "Tolerance verses" here translates *āyāt al-muwādaʿa*, an expression which seems to have been coined in the western Islamic world (cf. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar*, vol. 2, p. 196; Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Baḥr*, vol. 2, p. 292; Thaʿālibī, *Jawāhir*, vol. 1, p. 245; compare also Ibn Juzayy, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 64).

110. Ḥijāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 7f. The author is not otherwise known to me.

111. Sāʾis, Karsūn and Subkī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 283f. They also use al-Bayḍāwī and al-Qāsimī without naming them.

universal tolerance[112]. The Tunisian Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1970) echoes al-Zamakhsharī on how faith is based on enablement and choice in his discussion of Q. 2:256 as a grant of universal tolerance, in which there are also shades of al-Bayḍāwī on how rational people will accept Islam of their own accord. (He plays around with the chronology of revelation, too, as will be seen.)[113] Ṭanṭāwī (published 1977) quotes al-Ālūsī's rendition of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as well as Ibn Kathīr and al-Bayḍāwī, without naming any names, retaining al-Ālūsī's explicit identification of *lā ikrāha* as a denial of divine compulsion, but nonetheless concluding that the verse prohibits forced conversion (by humans); and Shiḥāṭa (1980s) repeats Ṭanṭāwī's comments, also without naming his source[114]. The modernist recasting of the first Muʿtazilite interpretation is carried into the Islamicist literature in English by Sachedina on al-Zamakhsharī, and by McAuliffe and, much as I regret it, myself on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī[115].

In short, both Muʿtazilite interpretations have served to provide anchorage in Sunnism for the interpretation of Q. 2:256 as a universal declaration of religious tolerance. Their Muʿtazilite origins have clearly been forgotten, partly thanks to the old habit among Muslim scholars of quoting other people's statements as their own and partly as a result of the constant invocation of al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr and other Sunni authorities in the same context[116]. It is undoubtedly as a timeless grant of universal tolerance that the vast majority of educated Muslims understand the verse today, especially when they write in English. One can read it on the web, and on bumper stickers[117]. Even the *mujāhid*s who kidnapped the American journalist Jill Carroll in Iraq in January 2006 kept insisting, during their attempts to convert her to Islam, that there was "no pressure" on her to follow their religion[118]. It was also as a timeless grant of universal tolerance that the Muslim response to the papal speech at Regensburg in September 2006 presented the verse, though the formulation seemed to make an alarmingly Muʿtazilite distinction between inner and outer man[119].

112. Ḥamza, Barāniq and ʿAlwān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 10f. The authors are not otherwise known to me.
113. Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 26.
114. Ṭanṭāwī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 588f; Shiḥāṭa, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 26f.
115. A. A. Sachedina, "Freedom of conscience and religion in the Quran", in D. Little, J. Kelsay and A. A. Sachedina, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures*, Columbia, SC, 1988, p. 67f; above, note 23.
116. There is a neat example in Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy*, p. 24: he cites Abū Muslim and Qaffāl from Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusi, not knowing that their *tafsīr*s were Muʿtazilite, adding Zamakhsharī (who is probably also citing Abū Muslim) without giving a thought to his Muʿtazilism, and mentioning that the same reasoning is found in Ālūsī, not knowing that he too is summarizing Abū Muslim and al-Qaffāl (from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī). He caps it all by citing Ibn Kathīr on the uselessness of coercion.
117. Orit Bashkin directed my attention to the web (see for example the Islamic Supreme Council of America on "Democracy according to Traditional Islamic Sources", 2:2 (http://www.islamicsupremecouncil.org/Publications/Papers/islamanddemocracy-091502.htm#_Toc14018355). Joseph Lowry saw a bumper sticker saying "No compulsion in Islam" in Philadelphia on 14th April, 2004.
118. "They'd kidnapped me, they all had guns ready to kill me, but oh no, no pressure there", as she comments (http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0816/p01s01-woiq.htlm; drawn to my attention by Karen Bauer).
119. Cf. below, p. 154.

The Imāmīs

Modernism took much longer to make its appearance in Imāmī than in Sunni commentaries on Q. 2:256[120]. The first break with tradition seems to come in the work of the Lebanese Mughniyya (or Maghniyya, published 1968). According to him, the verse proclaims that Islam does not force anyone to embrace it by force, as also shown by Q. 10:99 (*Will you force people to become believers ?*). This is the standard modernist interpretation, presumably blown into Imāmī society by winds from the Sunni world around it. It is also what Mughniyya would like the verse to mean, but he is too well schooled in the tradition to find it unproblematic. He has the reader ask what the point of prohibiting the use of force would be, given that the heart is beyond the reach of compulsion, clearly a reference to the second Muʿtazilite interpretation. Unlike the Sunnis who simply rewrite the Muʿtazilite description as a prescription (human beings cannot, i.e. may not, force others to convert), Mughniyya sees that the Muʿtazilite and the modernist interpretations are actually at loggerheads: if human beings simply cannot be forced to convert, why bother to legislate against it? He replies by reiterating that if the verse is read as a negative command rather than a factual statement, it prohibits forced conversion. But he concedes that one of the aims of war in Islam was *iẓhār al-islām*, the external adoption of Islam. Only somebody infallible, i.e. the Imam, or his deputy can wage such war, he adds, but this does not of course disprove that it is enjoined. In sum, he leaves the problem unresolved[121].

Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (published 1970), on the other hand, takes the verse to state either that compulsion only affects external acts or that the use of compulsion is prohibited: either way, he is implicitly taking the issue to be human relations with other humans. According to him, the verse proves that Islam was not spread by the sword, though he makes no attempt to deny the religious nature of the fighting it prescribes: its purpose is not to spread religion by force, he says, but rather to revive the truth (*iḥyāʾ al-ḥaqq*) and defend monotheists, whose religion is that of human nature (*al-fiṭra*). Once all have been subjected to the religion of prophethood, there will be no problem about tolerating other monotheists, whether Jews and Christians. Whether human nature leaves room for Zoroastrians, Bahāʾīs, atheists or pagans he does not say[122].

With some exceptions[123], the works written over the next three decades take their cue from Ṭabāṭabāʾī: all proclaim Islam to be a religion of tolerance while at the same time endorsing the use of force; all angrily deny that Islam was spread by the sword, yet frequently justify coercion with reference to the distinction between inner and outer man and/or the idea of Islam (or monotheism in general) as the

120. Cf. the traditional nature of al-Ḥāʾirī al-Tihrānī al-Mufassir (publ. 1337/1918f), *Muqtanayāt*, vol. 1, p. 115f; Khālidī, *Ṣafwat al-ʿirfān* [in Persian], vol. 1, p. 172f; Khūʾī, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 326ff (publ. 1966); Najafābādī, *Furqān*, vol. 2, p. 260, 263 (as late as the 80s ?).
121. Mughniyya, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 396-8.
122. Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Mīzān*, vol. 2, p. 342ff.
123. Notably Sabzawārī, *Jadīd*, vol. 1, p. 326f (cf. also below, note 150); Najafī, *Tafsīr-i āsān*, vol. 2, p. 130ff, who both read the verse as a straightforward affirmation of religious freedom, though the former starts by seeing it as about free will; and Dukhayyil, *Wajīz*, p. 53, still interpreting the verse as a proclamation of freedom from divine coercion.

inborn religion of mankind, and all tacitly or explicitly limit the grant of tolerance to Jews and Christians.

Thus Makārim Shīrāzī (published 1974, in Persian) argues that there is no need to convert people by force, given the wealth of proofs in favour of Islam; it is not actually possible to do so either, given that compulsion does not reach the heart; and on top of that it is forbidden by Q. 2:256, revealed in response to the Anṣārī who wanted to compel his two sons to become Muslims[124]; this Anṣārī behaved in the manner of tyrannical rulers, he says: to him as to Sayyid Quṭb, possibly his source of inspiration, it is secularist rulers who are guilty of trying to change people's convictions by force[125]. If even a father was not allowed to do so, *a fortiori* it was ruled out for others, he says. All this decisively refutes the poisoned propaganda of the Church (or, as the Arabic translation has it, the Crusaders) that Islam was spread by the sword. However, Shīrāzī adds, idolatry is not a religion from the point of view of Islam, so there is no contradiction between Q. 2:256 and the Qur'ānic verses ordering polytheists to be fought[126]. The Lebanese Faḍlallāh (published 1983) similarly declares that Islam does not consider polytheism or atheism (*ilḥād*) to be religions and so cannot coexist with their adherents, who must be forcibly made to live as Muslims as far as their external behaviour is concerned, whereas People of the Book can be offered freedom of religion if they accept the conditions of *dhimma*[127]. Both he and Dr al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṣādiqī (1985f) observe that the use of force is enjoined by the duty of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf*, thereby making it clear that the issue is the right to coerce other Muslims. But such use of force is not really coercion according to al-Ṣādiqī; rather it is bringing people into line with their own nature and sound rationality (*al-'aqliyya al-ṣāliḥa*); and in any case, what they believe in their hearts is not open to coercion at all[128]. Al-Karamī (published 1981f) similarly justifies coercing people to "return" to the truth on the grounds that there is no suspicion of force in the innermost heart[129], while the Ayatollah 'Abd al-A'lā Sabzawārī (published 1997) declares coercion to be unnecessary, impossible, and forbidden. Islam was not established by the sword, he says, for the Muslims were persecuted in Mecca. But Muslims fight in a defensive vein for the revival of the truth (*iḥyā' al-ḥaqq*) and the return of people to their original nature, and since Islam is in conformity with an intact original nature (*al-fiṭra al-salīma*), he who denies it is actually denying his own identity (*huwiyya*) and will (*irāda*). Besides, coercion only affects the external man. On top of that, compulsion can also be good, both for the public order and for the victim; indeed, what could be morally more repugnant than leaving somebody to work for his own eternal damnation? What the verse forbids, he says, is the use of compulsion without right (*bi-ghayr al-ḥaqq*), such as that employed by despots and tyrants (*al-ṭawāghīt wa-l-jabābira*), or maybe it forbids compelling believers

124. He quotes the story from the *Tafsīr al-manār*, explicitly saying so.

125. See p. 148 below.

126. Shīrāzī, *Namūna*, vol. 2, p. 204ff; Arabic tr. *Amthal*, vol. 2, p. 181ff. He probably owes the last point to Sayyid Quṭb too.

127. Faḍlallāh, *Min waḥy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 23ff.

128. He makes much the same point, now as Dr Āyatullāh al-Ṣādiqi, in his short *Tafsīr al-qur'ān bi-l-qur'ān*, p. 42.

129. Karamī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 337f.

to adopt unbelief, in the same way as Q. 16:106 (*Anyone who utters unbelief after accepting belief in God, except under compulsion ...*)[130].

All this is remarkably incoherent. If there had not been a religious revolution, the Imāmīs would presumably have used the first Mu'tazilite argument in the standard modernist way to prove that Islam prescribes religious freedom. But a revolution there was, and so it is the second Mu'tazilite argument that dominates their discussions, countering their modernist affirmations of religious freedom with what amounts to the traditional Mu'tazilite position on forced conversion: it is a good thing and no such thing exists. The incoherence arises from the fact that doctrines concerning two different aspects of life – the individual's relationship with God on the one hand and with fellow human beings on the other – have been collapsed into a single doctrine about the same reality: it is the same human beings who grant religious freedom, circumscribe it, and take it away again; God is not in the picture any more, except as the higher cause in the name of which the grant is made and revoked. In combination with the old doctrine that Islam is the religion of original human nature (*fiṭra*), this gives the modern Imāmī arguments a totalitarian intrusiveness all too familar from other twentieth-century ideologies. However self-serving the Mu'tazilite arguments may have been, they did at least have the merit of leaving the individual in control of his own inner self, responsible only to God. In the Imāmī arguments of the revolutionary period, by contrast, even inner man has been subjected to definition by the upholders of civic religion. Like the Marxist notion of false consciousness or the Freudian idea of the subconscious, the modern Imāmī concept of the *fiṭra* allows external authorities to identify the mental processes in the most private recesses of the individual's inner self, so that he has nowhere to retreat: others claim to know better than he does himself what his true nature is; humans have taken over the role of God (in this particular case in the name of God). What we encounter here is true modernity with its lack of sacred barriers, its flat reality shorn of metaphysics, its uniformly bureaucratic management of everything – the world in which most of us live. Nowhere is it more obvious that whatever Islamists may be up to, it is not the re-enchantment of the world[131].

How far this style of argument continues today I do not know, but new tones are certainly heard as well. Mullahs who argue in favour of religious pluralism have appeared in Iran[132], and Faḍlallāh has also changed his tune. In response to a question regarding the incompatibility of *lā ikrāha* and ideological coercion legalized by court jurists in the past, he now explains that some jurists understand Islamic concepts "in a partial and arbitrary way", perhaps unduly influenced by verses that call for toughness vis-à-vis unbelievers, so that they forget that in peacetime the dialogue (a word he now likes to use) should be friendly and based on

130. Sabzawārī, *Mawāhib*, vol. 4, p. 247ff (tacitly citing Rashīd Riḍā at p. 250). Ṣādiqī also mentions that the verse forbids *al-ikrāh 'alā tark lafẓ al-īmān*, citing the same verse (*Furqān*, vol. 3, p. 223, 226). Cf. Ibn al-'Arabī, above, note 56.

131. For Weber's evocative view of modernity as disenchantment of the world, see H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds. and trs.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York 1946, p. 139; L. A. Schaff in S. Turner (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Weber*, Cambridge 2000, p. 104f.

132. Thus for example Kadivar, below, note 142.

arguments that can find their way to the heart without any coercion[133]. Such views still do not seem to have found their way into verse-by-verse *tafsīr*.

The three further questions

This completes the main assignment of this paper, bringing us to the three further questions. First, how do the Sunni Islamists cope with the verse? Secondly, how do modernists and many Islamists who read the verse as a grant of religious freedom cope with inconvenient parts of the tradition? (Under this heading I shall consider the subsidiary question why modern historians and believers so often find themselves at odds). And finally, what might a modern historian take the meaning of the verse to be?

The Sunni Islamists

The term "Islamists" is here used to mean Muslims who want Islam to be the basis of public life again, to serve as the authoritative source in political and social affairs no less than private ones, which makes them a species of reformists and distinguishes them from modernists, who typically adopt secular ideologies (such as nationalism, socialism or liberalism) for the regulation of the public space. In the Shi'ite world modernism arrived late and Islamism triumphed early, so that for practical purposes they had to be treated together. But in the Sunni case they are distinct.

Like their Shi'ite counterparts, Sunni Islamists usually regard religious freedom as a characteristic so positive that it must be found in Islam, yet often want to legitimate religious coercion. They do not seem to make use of the idea that Islam is the religion of human nature, however, but rather reconcile their incompatible desires by identifying the religious freedom granted by Q. 2:256 as the right to live as a Muslim, in public no less than private affairs. This makes for a perfectly coherent stance, though only as long as the rights of non-Muslims are not considered too.

Mawdūdī barely comments on Q. 2:256 in his exegesis (written in 1942-49)[134], and the Islamist interpretation is first encountered in Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), who writes about the verse at length. Freedom of belief (*ḥurriyyat al-i'tiqād*) is a fundamental human right, he says: take away that freedom and you have removed the very humanity of man; and if forced conversion to Islam is forbidden, *a fortiori* so is the forced imposition of harsh worldly decrees by the government. Here we have Q. 2:256 as a declaration of the right to live as a Muslim, an interpretation also found among Imāmī Islamists, as we have seen[135]. The freedom demanded includes the right to wage holy war. Contrary to what people think, Sayyid Quṭb says, there is no contradiction between Q. 2:256 and the duty to *fight them until there is no fitna and the religion is God's* (Q. 2:193). On the contrary, *jihād* is waged for the very freedom that the "no compulsion" verse enjoins, namely freedom of religion (*ḥurriyyat al-'aqīda*), the right that the early Muslims had to fight for, and the freedom to proselytize (*ḥurriyyat al-da'wa*). Well-intentioned people trying to eliminate *jihād* are actually enemies of Islam on a par with Orientalists, for Islam has fought throughout its long history (he consistently presents Islam as an agent in its own right); it has done so, not to force people to convert, but rather to defend the believers, to establish freedom for the mission, and to establish its own order (*niẓām*). This is the only order in which the freedom of man can be realized because it eliminates service to other humans in favour of service to God and makes it impossible to humiliate others by means of legislation. Law-making is for God alone, man is only a servant and should not arrogate divine power to himself: this is the pillar (*qā'ida*) on which the divine order of Islam is based. All human beings will benefit from this freedom, even those who do not embrace Islam, for within the Islamic order people will be free to have their own creeds (a point also made by Elmalılı)[136]. Islam does not force people to convert, nor was it spread by the sword in the past, as its enemies claim, but it cannot exist without order (*niẓām*), power and *jihād*[137].

Freedom of belief is also pitted against secularism by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb (published 1967-70), who identifies the verse as an absolute rejection of all forms of coercion, both material and conceptual, with which people are seduced *away from the truth*: without liberation of the individual conscience from error and blindness, all humans are mere slaves or animals[138]. The verse prohibits forced conversion *and* forced departure from religion, as al-Mawṣilī (published 1972) declares: in order to uphold this principle we need power, he says; we cannot protect religion without it, and this is why we wage *jihād*; Islam has not spread by the sword, as biased people say, but rather by its spiritual force and thanks to all the many proofs that make the use of force superfluous[139].

What Sayyid Quṭb outlines is a new polity in which the public order would be Muslim and all other religions would be relegated to the private sphere, reversing the order which prevails in the West, where the public order is secular and all (other) religions are relegated to the private sphere. How non-Muslims could be participants in an Islamic state, as opposed to simple protégés of it, is not explained; and whether the freedom of belief without which one could not in his view be truly human would extend to polytheists and atheists he does not say. Nor does the *khaṭīb* 'Abd al-Karīm. But Sa'īd Ḥawwā (wrote 1970s) makes it clear that the freedom in question would in any case only be that of *dhimmī*s, adding that this status is not available to Arab pagans, but whether he has modern pagans such as 'Alawīs and atheists in mind one cannot tell (his treatment is surprisingly traditional)[140]. Dr 'Amīr 'Abd al-'Azīz (published 2000), editor with Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and others of the *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies*, is more explicit. He starts by rejec-

134. http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Issues/coexistence.htm; cf. his words on dialogue and peaceful coexistence at http://english.bayynat.org.lb/islamicinsights/amro250922.htm; and http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Doctrines/book1.htm (I owe all these references to Karen Bauer).

135. Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 198f.

136. Cf. above, p. 145, 146.

136. According to Elmalılı, Islam was the only religion under which people of all persuasions, idolaters included, could have religious freedom (Karamustafa, "Elmalılı", p. 278).

137. Sayyid Quṭb, *Ẓilāl*, vol. 1, p. 29ff; cf. S. Damir-Geilsdorf, *Herrschaft und Gesellschaft: der islamistische Wegbereiter Sayyid Quṭb und seine Rezeption*, Würzburg 2003, esp. p. 78ff (drawn to my attention by Rainer Brunner).

138. 'Abd al-Karīm, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 318ff.

139. Mawṣilī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 242.

140. Ḥawwā, *Asās*, vol. 1, p. 601. Contrast Elmalılı (above, note 136).

ting forced conversion: "It is not permitted for Muslims to convert infidels to the faith by force, for that kind of thing is no use, leads to no good, and does not bring about faith in the hearts of their own free will". It is not necessary to use force either, he adds, since Islam is a clear religion based on cogent arguments; on the contrary, that method is characteristic of vacuous, odious, self-absorbed egoists and oppressive authorities. But, he adds, the verse was revealed specifically about the People of the Book: idolaters and similar godless and permissive people (*mulḥidīn wa-ibāḥiyyīn*) are to be compelled to adopt Islam, since they cannot be accepted as *jizya*-payers and do not deserve any consideration because of their godlessness, stupidity, error and foolishness[141]. The modern wording and incoherence apart, it is not very different from al-Bayḍāwī.

The fact is that the modern concept of religious freedom and the *shar'ī* rules regarding infidels simply do not go together, so that there are only two ways of being coherent, namely to acknowledge that what worked in the past does not work today or to reject the whole notion of religious freedom as mistaken. Open recognition of the timebound nature of the tradition is still uncommon, at least in the material on the *lā ikrāha* verse that I have seen, but it is represented by at least one mullah in Iran, Kadivar, and some Muslims writing in English[142]. Outright rejection of religious freedom is also rare, if only in the sense that those who deride the concept, equating it with the freedom to live by any moral system that one likes, usually retain the label for the freedom to be a Muslim or, under Muslim sovereignty, a Christian or a Jew[143]. Thus construed, it is protected, or indeed spread, by force. When during the trial of the blind sheikh 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān for complicity in the assassination of Sadat in 1981, the judge adduced Q. 2:256 to show that Islam was not spread by fighting and cannot be imposed by force, the blind sheikh replied by citing the Andalusian Ibn al-'Arabī: was the infidel fought for anything *other* than religion? The Prophet ordered the Muslims to fight people until they accepted the unity of God and Muḥammad's message; the verse was abrogated, or it referred to People of the Book paying *jizya*, or it forbade the forced imposition of *falsehood*[144]. Some Saudi professors similarly reject the idea of religious freedom, thus finding themselves able simply to reaffirm the traditional rules regarding apostates and *dhimmī*s, and to declare that "those who have no religion other than polytheism and unbelief" must for their own good be fought until they adopt Islam[145]. In striking contrast to all this, the Sudanese Ḥasan al-Turābī (published 2004) gives us a modernist variation on the Mu'tazilite theme:

141. 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 390ff. His Arabic has the stilted and pretentious character familiar from much contemporary English academic prose.

142. Mohsen Kadivar, a pupil of Ayatollah Montazeri, whose prodigious output includes a book on *plūrālizm-i dīnī*, squarely confronts the incompatibility between the *prima facie* meaning of the Qur'ānic tolerance verse (Q. 2:256 included) and the traditional interpretations in a paper on "Freedom of thought" presented at the International Congress of Human Rights and the Dialog of Civilizations in Tehran, 6th May 2001 (available in a poor English translation at http://www.kadivar.com/Htm/English/ Papers/Human Rights.htm. My thanks to Mohsen Ashtiany for drawing my attention to this paper).

143. Only the Saudi Ḥamd seems to find the very expression distasteful (*Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, p. 185).

144. *Kalimat al-ḥaqq*, p. 125; cf. above, note 56.

145. Ḥamd, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, p. 182ff; Jazā'irī, *Aysar*, vol. 1, p. 246f (with the statement quoted).

God does not force anyone to become a Muslim by innate nature, so nobody, not even the Messenger, is allowed to do so either[146].

The handling of the tradition

If neither modernists nor Islamists like openly to confront the clash between the modern concept of religious freedom and the traditional rules, how do they cope with the points of incompatibility? There are four main topics to consider.

The Arab idolaters

Tradition is unanimous that the Prophet gave the pagans of Arabia the choice between Islam and death. If Islam was spread by the sword in its homeland, how could it be said to endorse religious freedom?

One solution was to date the Qur'ānic grant of religious freedom to a late stage in the Prophet's career. The three traditional interpretations variously presuppose that the *lā ikrāha* verse was revealed in Mecca (if it was abrogated by the permission to fight), or in early Medina (if it concerned problems arising from the pre-Islamic history of the Anṣār, more precisely in 4 A. H. if it was revealed in connection with the expulsion of the Banū Naḍīr)[147], or in late Medina (if it regulated *dhimmī* status). If the pagan Arabs were forced to convert whereas other infidels (or some of them) qualified for tolerance on the basis of rules revealed in late Medina, it might seem natural to infer that Islam moved from a militant phase in which the Arabs were forced to convert to one of general tolerance which still prevails today. This is not what the pre-modern jurists normally argued. On the contrary, they presented Islam as moving from a period of tolerance in Mecca to one of militance in Medina which has lasted ever since, modified only by the *dhimma* rules. But there were Shāfi'ite scholars in fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur who understood the contrast between the forced conversion of the Arab pagans and the tolerance extended to non-Arabs Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in chronological terms, postulating that the *lā ikrāha* verse had been revealed when not a single Arab pagan remained[148]; and as we have seen, the Ḥanbalite Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) argued that the Arab pagans had been given the choice between Islam and death for the simple reason that the *jizya* verse (not *lā ikrāha*) was revealed too late for them to benefit from it[149]. In the same way the modern Tunisian lawyer, Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1970), explains the exceptional treatment of the Arabs by placing the revelation of Q. 2:256 after the conquest of Mecca. When the Prophet had completed the subjection of their land and purified the Ka'ba, he says, God abolished warfare aimed at conversion (*al-qitāl 'alā al-dīn*)

146. Ḥasan al-Turābī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 194 (my thanks to John Nawas for this reference).

147. The first to make this explicit seems to be Rashīd Riḍā.

148. See the paraphrase of Qatāda in Tha'labī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 235; Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 369; abbreviated in his *Wajīz*, p. 183 (none of the occasions of revelation he lists in his *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, p. 45f, is compatible with this view); Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, p. 124 (a work drawn from al-Tha'labī's, see C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, Supplementband, vol. 1, Leiden 1937, p. 622). Qatāda's statement does not itself have any chronological implications (cf. above, note 11), nor is it normally cited or paraphrased as having any in other works (see for example, al-Ḥaddād al-Yamanī, *Kashf*, vol. 1, p. 405; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, vol. 3, p. 21f).

149. Above, note 58.

and endorsed (*abqā*) fighting aimed at the expansion of the sovereignty of Islam (*tawsīʿ sulṭānihi*)[150]. In other words, missionary warfare prevailed till Arabia had been conquered, thereafter there was just political expansion of the normal type. This is the argument that Montgomery Watt propagated in the 1970s: "For many centuries most Europeans believed that Islam was a religion of violence which spread by the sword ... [but] the early wars of expansion of the Islamic state ... had political and materialistic ends and were not directed to the religious conversion of the conquered peoples"[151].

Another solution was simply to omit all reference to the problem. This is the easy way out, which Ibn al-Qayyim also adopted in one of his works[152], and which was followed by Rashīd Riḍā and the many others who counter the charge that Islam was spread by the sword with the observation that the Muslims were a persecuted minority in Mecca. That the Muslims were persecuted in Mecca had in fact been used against critics of holy war already by the philosopher al-ʿĀmirī (d. 381/992), but the latter had freely conceded that the Prophet used the sword in Medina, merely insisting that he had done so as a last resort and in the best interest of the victims[153]. Riḍā, by contrast, claims that Q. 2:256 was revealed so early in Medina that the Muslims never had time to use force, without a word about either the injunction to fight or the fate of the Arab pagans[154]. This interpretation has also entered the Islamicist literature in English: "It is well known that the Qurʾān formally and repeatedly forbids to coerce or compel anybody to embrace Islam. The whole life of the Prophet shows that he sought liberty to preach his message", as Hamidullah says[155].

Jihād

If there is no compulsion in religion, how can *jihād* be an obligation? This is much more problematic, for whereas the pagans of Arabia can be forgotten, the expansion of Islam outside Arabia is not so easy to overlook, and to deny the ongoing duty to wage *jihād* is to risk defining oneself out of the Muslim community altogether.

a. A common response is to stress that *jihād* is not waged for forced conversion: thus al-Qāsimī, al-Ḥijāzī, Sayyid Quṭb, Saʿīd Ḥawwā, Ibn ʿAshūr, al-Mawṣilī, Shiḥāta, al-Zuhaylī, Sāʾis and co-authors, Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Faḍlallāh and no doubt many others too. It has the advantage of being basically true. It is not wholly true, for according to the Shāfiʿites and most Ḥanbalites, all infidels other than Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians must be given the same choice between Islam and death as the pagan Arabs – this is the rule that the Saudi *salafī*s and modern radicals are reaffirming. But even without that rule *jihād* is a problem, for forcing non-Muslims to live as *dhimmī*s under Islamic law is obviously a form of religious coercion, as was generally admitted in pre-modern times. Forcing people to become Muslims and forcing them to become *dhimmī*s were different forms of *ikrāh ʿalā dīn al-ḥaqq*, as al-Khaṭṭābī said without the slightest embarrassment; was the infidel fought for anything *other* than religion, as Ibn al-ʿArabī so memorably asked[156]? Simply to show that conquered peoples could keep their religion as *dhimmī*s did not solve the problem.

b. A more drastic response, then, is to rewrite *jihād* as mere political expansionism. This is how Ibn ʿĀshūr presented it (after the conquest of Mecca), as we have seen, and also how *jihād* was explained to students of Islamic studies in Britain in the sixties and seventies, thanks to Watt and others. In terms of Ḥanafī and Mālikī law, it is half correct: it brought non-Muslims under the political rule of Islam while leaving them to practise their own religion. The half that is omitted is that it was God who ordered that they be conquered, that the purpose of the efforts was to "make God's word uppermost", that the long-term hope was that the victims would see the light and convert, and that the rewards for the participants were heavenly unless they fought for worldly purposes (in which case their efforts did not count as *jihād*). Characterising expansionism of this type as purely political is about as accurate as characterising British imperialism as purely religious on the grounds that the conquered peoples were often allowed to retain their own government under British control. In any case, nobody likes imperialism of any type any more, so this argument is not often heard these days.

c. A far more popular solution is to claim that *jihād* is purely defensive. This view, which seems to have originated in British India[157], has enjoyed something close to dogmatic status among modern-educated Muslims till recent times, and it is well represented among the Islamists too, both Sunni and Imāmī. It enjoys a venerable ancestry inasmuch as both the tenth-century philosopher al-ʿĀmirī and the fourteenth-century traditionalists, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, presented *jihād* along these lines[158]. Al-ʿĀmirī found it impossible to go so far as to claim that the Prophet's warfare was defensive, but Ibn Taymiyya and his pupil were less pusillanimous, and the same is true of the modernists, who commonly cast the conquests as defensive or pre-emptive too[159]. The pre-emptive argument is also encountered as far back as the tenth century: the Muslims had to fight the infidels until they accepted either the truth or *dhimmī* status in order to have peace of mind and not to worry about being tricked or plundered by them, as the *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* explained. Faḍlallāh agrees in his publication of 1983 (though clearly not today): if the Christians and Jews will not accept either *dhimmī* status

150. *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 26f. The Iranian Sabzawārī also postulates a move from militance to tolerance, in a somewhat vaguer way (Sabzawārī, *Jadīd*, vol. 1, p. 326f).

151. W. M Watt, "The significance of the theory of jihād", in *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, ed. A. Dietrich, Göttingen 1976, p. 390; idem, "Islamic conceptions of holy war", in T. P. Murphy (ed.), *The Holy War*, Columbus 1976, p. 149.

152. "He who looks carefully at the conduct of the Prophet will see that he did not ever force anyone to adopt his religion" (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Badāʾiʿ al-tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 414).

153. Cf. P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 382f.

154. Cf. the reference given above, note 104.

155. M. Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*, Lahore 1977, p. 172, para. 326.

156. See the references given above, notes 15, 56.

157. Cf. Cheragh Ali, *A Critical Exposition of the Popular "Jihad": Showing that all the Wars of Mohammad were Defensive, and that Aggressive War, or Compulsory Conversion, is not Allowed in the Koran*, Calcutta 1885 (reprinted Karachi 1977). For the context, see P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge 1972, ch. IV.

158. "He only fought those who fought him", as Ibn al-Qayyim says. For al-ʿĀmirī, see above, note 153.

159. E.g. Ḥijāzī, *Tafsīr*, I/8; Sayyid Quṭb, *Ẓilāl*, 293f; Shiḥāṭa, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 29; Zuḥaylī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 21f.

or Islam, then they have in effect declared war on the Muslims, who must fight a defensive war against them[160].

The most interesting argument in favour of *jihād* as purely defensive is by Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1965), a rector of al-Azhar who wrote a well known treatise on the Qur'ān and *jihād*. He argued that the Qur'ān gives mankind the freedom to choose between faith and unbelief, that it nowhere permits coercion in matters of religion but on the contrary forbids it (in Q. 2:256 and other verses) and that the permission to fight was revealed in response to the persecution endured by the Muslims in Mecca. All this is squarely based on the Qur'ān itself with almost complete disregard of traditional interpretations, and his apologetic intent notwithstanding, he often seems to come much closer to what a historian would consider likely to be the original meaning of the verses than his traditionalist predecessors. He achieves his radical results by refusing to write in the *musalsal* genre, which he declares to be based on extra-Qur'ānic principles that cause verses to be explained "in ways completely opposed to their real meanings", or "even considered to have been abrogated", so that for example no less than seventy verses are declared to have been abrogated because they are incompatible with the legitimacy of fighting; this, he says, clashes with the fact that the Qur'ān is supposed to be the primary source of Islam[161]. He could have added that commenting verse by verse makes it almost impossible not to be swept away by the tradition (the only exegete who has managed to be completely original in that genre seems to be Sayyid Quṭb). Shaltūt's reluctance to invoke the theory of abrogation is characteristic of all modern exegetes: not one of them, whether modernist or Islamist, holds Q. 2:256 to be abrogated. But though thematic *tafsīr* has risen to prominence since he wrote, the *musalsal* genre seems to be as popular as ever.

d. Another solution, particularly popular in the West today, is to imply that *jihād* in the sense of holy war is an Orientalist misconception, usually on the grounds that the word *jihād* does not really mean fighting and that true *jihād* is spiritual battling against one's own evil inclinations, often known as the Greater *Jihād*[162]. This is really more of a diversionary tactic than a solution since spiritual *jihād* was never meant to replace the type enjoined in the law, however important it was deemed to be. One does not find this solution in *tafsīr*s.

All in all, it is probably fair to say that just as most educated Muslims today assume the *lā ikrāha* verse to be a declaration of universal tolerance, so most of them hold *jihād* to be defensive and dismiss Western-style historians who say otherwise as biased against Islam. It is of course up to the believers to decide what they want their Islamic institutions to be today, and most people are probably cheered by their definition of *jihād* as defensive, as also by the modernist understanding of the *lā ikrāha* verse. What Western-style historians deny is simply that this is how either was understood in the past.

Historians and believers tend to misunderstand each other because the believers typically reinterpret their doctrines without acknowledging that this is what they are doing, projecting their modern beliefs back into the past. Historians who show that Muslims held different views in the past are seen as trying to undermine the validity of beliefs prevailing today, sometimes because the believers find it impossible to distinguish past Muslims from themselves (unless they disagree with them) and sometimes because doctrinal change is not recognized as legitimate. There is an instructive example of such backprojection in the furore over Pope Benedict XVI's treatment of the *lā ikrāha* verse in his speech at Regensburg on 12th September, 2006. The Pope mentioned that according to some experts, Q. 2:256 probably dated from "the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat" and that other rules had later been added concerning holy war; in other words, he adopted the traditional interpretation according to which the verse had been revealed in Mecca and abrogated in Medina[163]. Thirty-eight Muslim scholars responded (as did an Islamicist) that he was wrong[164]: the verse had been revealed in Medina in connection with some Jews or Christians who had wanted to force their children to convert to Islam, as one could read in al-Ṭabarī and other early commentators; it did not date from the period when the Muslims were weak and powerless, but rather from their period of political ascendance, and it taught them that "they could not force another's heart to believe"[165].

The Pope's choice of the interpretation according to which the verse had been abrogated is unlikely to have been innocent. One can however read the interpretation he discussed in al-Ṭabarī, too, and the Pope did at least acknowledge that there were other views on the meaning. One might have expected the thirty-eight Muslim scholars to respond that he was out of date, and that he was about as right about modern Islam as a Muslim cleric citing Thomas Aquinas would be about modern Christianity. But this is not what they said. Instead, they wrote as if the interpretation adopted by the Pope was simply mistaken, and corrected him with reference to another traditional interpretation; and in so doing, they read the verse as a negative prohibition in connection with the Anṣārīs, but reformulated it in their presentation of its enduring message as a factual statement about the impossibility of coercing the inner man: it was this hybrid that they claimed to have read in al-Ṭabarī and other early exegetes. (Whether they were tacitly reserving the right to use force against outer man one cannot tell.) In other words, they engaged in what to a historian was misrepresentation of their own tradition, refusing to

160. Faḍlallāh, *Waḥy*, vol. 5, p. 27; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, vol. 3, p. 162f; compare Shaltūt in Peters, *Jihad*, p. 99f.

161. M. Shaltūt, *al-Qur'ān wa-l-qitāl*, tr. Peters, *Jihad*, 60ff and cf. the analysis, p. 103ff. Cf. also K. Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, Oxford 1993, ch VIII; his reluctance "to evaluate the Qur'ān by any criterion except itself" is noted at p. 161.

162. For an example A. Rahman, *Islam: Ideology and the Way of Life*, London 1980 (distributed by the Muslim Schools Trust), ch. XV, where *jihād* is declared the most misunderstood Islamic concept: non-Muslims always take it to mean war and fighting, and many Orientalists take it to be a duty to propagate Islam by means of force. Like Shaltūt, he bases his account entirely on the Qur'ān (including Q. 2:256).

163. Zenith News Agency – The World Seen from Rome, at http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=94748. The response of the thirty-eight Muslim scholars quote the Pope as saying "according to the experts" rather than "according to some of the experts", which makes the claim unduly sweeping. What he actually said I do not know. The web-site identifies the version quoted as the version he read.

164. The Islamicist is Juan Cole, who thinks the Pope ought to apologize to the Muslims for getting his facts so wrong as to claim that the verse was revealed in Mecca and later abrogated, cf. his "Informed Comment" at http://www.juancole.com/2006/09/pope-gets-it-wrong-on-islam-pope.html.

165.http://www.islamicamagazine.com/online-analysis/open-letter-to-his-holiness-pope-benedict-xvi.html.

acknowledge that past Muslims had subscribed to doctrines that they themselves no longer believed to be valid.

Modern-educated Muslims who dismiss Western-style historians as biased against Islam are more often than not ignorant of their own tradition, but that certainly cannot be true of the thirty-eight scholars. They were writing as theologians staking out a position, not as historians, however; and to a historian they were guilty of traducing the past. Had one put this to them, however, they might have responded that historians are guilty of traducing the present, for by insisting that the past must be understood in its own light, historians remove the support of the tradition from the present; if change is a sign of falsehood, historians undermine the authority of current interpretations by showing them to be historically conditioned rather than perennial truths. The relationship between believers and historians would not be so tense if the possibility of legitimate doctrinal change were acknowledged, but it rarely is, in part no doubt because Muslims are feeling on the defensive. So the two parties tend to misunderstand each other, as one sees with depressing frequency in discussions of *jihād*.

Apostates and heretics

If Q. 2:256 is a declaration of religious freedom, how can Islamic law decree death for apostates? The pre-modern exegetes do not often discuss this question. As we have seen, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) explicitly notes that apostates are an exception to the grant of tolerance (they are not in the category of infidels from whom *jizya* can be taken, as the jurists will say). In the same vein the modern Saudi exegete al-Ḥamd presents the death penalty for apostasy as a given fact in the light of which the Qur'ānic verse has to be interpreted, and since he explicitly rejects the concept of religious freedom, this is perfectly coherent[166]. Others only discuss forced apostasy, i.e. the secularisation they see their governments as imposing on them: the verse shows that nobody can be forced to enter Islam or to leave it, al-Khaṭīb al-Mawṣilī says, deftly avoiding the question whether one can be forced to stay in it. There can be no *ikrāh ʿalā tarkihi*, as the Iranian Ṣādiqī says, again without a word about apostates[167]. There is much discussion of apostasy in English, often in the context of human rights and often on the web, almost always in a liberal vein. The website Religioustolerance.org, for example, tells us that "There is a very strong movement within Islam which argues '*Let there be no compulsion in the religion*...'. They also point out that there is no historical record which indicates that Muhammad (pbuh) or any of his companions ever sentenced anyone to death for apostasy. The hadiths (sayings of Muhammad) which seem to call for execution are very weak and suspect"[168]. Even if all the reports were authentic, the fact that the infallible Imams are no longer with us means that we

166. al-Ḥamd, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, p. 182.

167. Ṣādiqī, *Furqān*, vol. 3, p. 223.

168. http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_apos.htm. It is a fair summary of the argument of Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy*. Cf. also M. H. Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam*, revised edition, Cambridge 1997, ch. IX, where Q. 2:256 is endorsed as the Qur'ānic norm and the traditional doctrine is rejected as politically motivated. Note also the objections of Radzuan Halim to the Islamic State Document issued by Parti Islam SeMalaysia which invokes Q. 2:256 for non-Muslims alone, insisting that Muslims must abide by their religion ("Radzuan's reasons: the Islamic state document", *The Edge* (Singapore), 22nd December 2003, p. 4 of 6 in my ILL copy).

cannot execute the penalty they call for, the Imāmī Kadivar observes[169]. "Islam does not punish departure from it (*al-khurūj ʿan al-islām*), only revolt against it" (*al-khurūj ʿalayhi*), as an article on Q. 2:256 in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Ḥayāt* declared in July 2006[170]. But the debate still comes across as subdued; and as might be expected, no *tafsīr musalsal* seems to voice such views.

Muslim dissenters

If apostates are rarely mentioned in discussions of Q. 2:256 (at least in the works known to me), dissenters are completely absent, except, as has been seen, in Ismaili works. To this day the Ismailis remain the only Muslims to have interpreted "no compulsion in religion" as an affirmation of the right to hold dissident views without being outlawed. Other Muslims assumed the *lā ikrāha* verse to be about infidels alone, taking the verses on correcting wrong practices and beliefs (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*) to be about fellow-Muslims. The two injunctions were rarely considered together, and this remains true today as well, even though it is common for *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* to be considered in relation to modern freedoms of other kinds.[171] But a few attempts have been made to relate them, in the context of the enforcement of public morality rather than belief.

One pre-modern example seems to be known: the Damascene scholar ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī (d. 1143/1731) invoked *lā ikrāha* and other tolerance verses to forbid the use of force in the performance of the duty of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* by laymen[172]. Nowadays, people also seek protection in the *lā ikrāha* verse when they are tyrannized by Islamists. Thus the Lebanese Faḍlallāh complains in his publication of 1983 that some people have impugned the legitimacy of using force in the performance of the duty to correct "with the hand" on the grounds that coercion in religious matters is forbidden (his response is that there is no point in having a law if people are free to disobey it and that "Islam does not believe in this individual freedom, but rather legislates for the individual in his private as in his public life"). It is presumably in response to similar objections that the Iranian Imāmī al-Ṣādiqī claims that the use of force by way of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* is not really compulsion, given that people are being made to practise what they themselves believe[173]. On November 19th, 2005, the Lebanese newspaper *al-Ḥayāt* carried an article by a Lebanese professor of Islamic studies suggesting that the *lā ikrāha* verse should be read as forbidding Muslims to compel fellow-Muslims in matters Islamic[174]. Explicitly directed against the use of *takfīr* and religious violence today, it argued that this was compatible with the duty of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* on the assumption that changing things "with the hand" did not mean using violence, but rather engaging

169. Kadivar, "Freedom of thought" 19 (dismissing the traditions on the grounds that they are *āḥād*).

170. Al-Ṭayyib Bū ʿAzza, "Dalālat āyat 'lā ikrāha fī al-dīn' ... qirāʾa lughawiyya wa-ukhrā muʿāṣira", *al-Ḥayāt* 15th July 2006, issue no. 15807 (drawn to my attention by Mona Zaki). Q. 10:99 is also cited.

171. Cf. Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 512ff.

172. Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 326.

173. Faḍlallāh, *Waḥy*, vol. 5, p. 28f; Ṣādiqī, *Furqān*, p. 223.

174. Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, "'lā ikrāha fī al-dīn' ... qirāʾa jadīda fī maʿnā al-ḥurriyya al-dīniyya", *al-Ḥayāt*, 19th November 2005, issue no. 15571, supplement on *turāth*, 18 (drawn to my attention by Mona Zaki).

in any practical activity likely to change to world for the better; in the author's view, the duty of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf* had so far been understood in too narrow a vein as concerned with alcohol, entertainment and women's clothing rather than moral issues. How this was received I do not know, but it seems likely that there will be further developments along these lines in the future.

Late antiquity and the Qur'ān

The reader who has got this far has now read some 17,000 words in explanation of a mere four. Just what did those four words mean when they were first uttered?, he or she may wearily be asking. The short answer is that we do not know. The long answer is that while we do not know, some suggestions can be made.

The first point to note is that the words plainly are not meant in a lawgiving vein. They are preceded by the throne verse, a sublime description of God: "There is no god but He, the living, the everlasting. No slumber seizes Him, nor any sleep. His are all things in the heavens as on earth. Who can intercede with Him except with His permission?..." (2:255). Our verse continues in the same exalted style: "No compulsion is there in religion. Right guidance has become clear from error. Whoever rejects idols (*al-ṭāghūt*) and places his faith in God, he has grasped the firm rope which cannot break...". And 2:257 concludes, still in the same elevated style, that "God is the friend of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them into His light. Those who reject faith, their friends are idols (*al-ṭāghūt*), who will lead them from light into the depths of darkness...". The pericope is a glorification of God intended to persuade the audience to join His side, not to introduce a new rule of conduct. That there is no place for compulsion in religion is mentioned as a well-known fact which serves to highlight the self-evident nature of what you must do: nobody is forcing you, choose what you like, but do you want to end up in Hell? The alternatives are presented in such a way that no sensible person could choose not to be on God's side, as many exegetes commented.

That this seemingly obvious reading of the verse is not standard in the Islamicist literature reflects the fact that modern Islamicists tend to be remarkably faithful to the mediaeval method of *tafsīr*, which they imbibe as part of their training: they do not read the verse as part of the pericope in which it appears, but rather detach it from its context to interpret it in the light of the history of the early Muslim community as known from tradition[175]. That the throne verse and Q. 2:256 belong together is a common exegetical view, and that the entire passage from 2:255 to 2:257 should be read as a unit had been proposed by unknown exegetes already by the time of Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854)[176]. The trend that they and others (such as Shaltūt) represent is important. In general, scholars who study the Qur'ān as historians, writing mainly in Western languages, seem to be lagging behind those who study

175. It is this method that Shaltūt rebelled against (cf. above, note 161), as did others in Pakistan about the same time (cf. M. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, Indianapolis, IN, 1986, drawn to my attention by J. Witztum). For a good example, see R. Paret, "Sure 2, 256: *lā ikrāha fī d-dīni*. Toleranz oder Resignation?", *Der Islam* 45 (1969), p. 299f; or id., *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart 1980, *ad* 2:256.

176. Ālūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol. 3, p. 18 (where the view is rejected). It is also reported in Aṭfayyish, *Taysir*, vol. 1, p. 412. For its likely roots, compare M. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, p. 17ff.

it as believers, writing mainly in Arabic: for purposes of understanding what the book originally meant, as opposed to what its readers later made of it, we too must read it independently of the tradition.

That still leaves us with the question whether it is God or humans whom the verse declares not to be forcing you. The Mu'tazilites could be right that it is God, but it is not the most obvious reading. For one thing, God is the subject of verses 255 and 257, but not of 256, suggesting that a different agent is envisaged. For another, the statement that coercion has no place in religion implies that it does have a place elsewhere, which would be an odd distinction to make with God in mind. Above all, there are several other "tolerance verses" in the Qur'ān, above all Q. 10:99, so often adduced as a parallel by the exegetes: *If your Lord had wanted it, all those on earth would have believed together. Will you then force people* (a-fa-anta tukrihu al-nāsa) *to become believers?* Here it is explicitly *ikrāh* by humans as distinct from God which is being rejected. By contrast, Q. 2:256 would be the only verse in which God is said to abstain from *ikrāh*. One would thus be inclined to agree with the earliest exegetes that *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* refers to the absence of human coercion.

If this is accepted, the pericope reflects a milieu in which everyone knew that one could not use compulsion in matters of religion, in the sense that it was wrong to do so (whether actually forbidden by the law or otherwise). This in its turn tells us that we are within the orbit of Greco-Roman culture in its late antique phase. The concept of religious freedom was pioneered by the North African Christian Tertullian (d. after 220), who also gave the concept its name (*libertas religionis*). "It is ordained by both man-made and natural law that each person may worship whatever he wishes", he said. "It is not for religion to compel religion (*nec religionis est cogere religionem*), which is something taken up voluntarily, not under duress"[177]. In the same vein another North African, Lactantius (wrote c. 300-317), merging prescription and description, said that "There is no need of force and injury, because religion cannot be forced..."; "religion ought to be defended, not by killing but by dying, not by fury but by patience, not by crime but by faith... There is nothing so voluntary as religion"[178].Thereafter we encounter the concept in Greek: "I do not consider it good practice to coerce people instead of persuading them", Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389 or 90) said, gently chiding the emperor Theodosius while at the same time praising him for "winning over everybody gently and setting up voluntary action as the unwritten law of persuasion"[179]. "Christians are not allowed to use force or violence to combat error. They must provide for the salvation of men by persuasion, reason, and gentleness", as John Chrysostom (d. 407) said[180]. By his time, the claim was widely out of step with actual practice, and indeed with his own recommendations elsewhere ("Slap them in the face, strike them around the mouth, sanctify your hand by the blow", as he famously told the Antiochenes with

177. Tertullian (d. after 220), *Ad scapulam*, 2.2; cited in P. Garnsey, "Religious toleration in classical antiquity", in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Persecution and Toleration*, Padstow 1984, p. 14f and cf. p. 16.

178. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, v. 19.11, 22f (tr. M. F. McDonald, Washington 1964, p. 378, 379f).

179. Gregory Nazianzus, "Concerning his own life", tr. D. M. Meehan, *Three Poems*, Washington 1987, p. 113.

180. John Chrysostom, *Discours sur Babylas*, ed. and tr. M. Schatkin, Paris 1990, p. 13.

reference to blasphemers)[181]. None the less, the Christians continued to see themselves as people who converted and corrected others without recourse to force, since this was how they were described in the Gospels and other foundational sources. That their religion had spread without use of the sword was a point they were to make time and again in polemics against Islam[182].

By the fourth century it was the turn of the pagans to stress the voluntary nature of religion: "There are things which escape constraint and are superior to threat and injunction, such as all the virtues and above all, reverence for the Divine", the philosopher Themistius (wrote 364) said, stressing that the emperor had provided legal freedom for every citizen to practise his own faith in imitation of God who "has decreed that the manner of worship be left to the decision of each individual: the man who applies force takes upon himself the authority which God has given up"[183]. Libanius (d. c. 393) repeatedly pleaded with the authorities for tolerance of non-Christian religions (not just his own): "In such matters one must persuade, not compel"[184] .The orator Symmachus (d. 402) goes so far as to endorse pluralism: "What does it matter by which wisdom each of us arrives at truth? It is not possible that only one road leads to so sublime a mystery"[185].

By the end of the fourth century, however, Theodosius I (379-95) had ordered the pagan temples to be closed and banned public and private sacrifices along with other pagan devotional acts, classifying them as treason punishable by death (though well over half the population of the Roman empire may still have been pagan at the time)[186]. Thereafter life became increasingly difficult for pagans, and for Jews, Samaritans and dissident Christians too. Under Justinian (d. 565) even

181. M. Gaddis, *There is no Crime for Those who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2005, 15, citing his *Homilies on the Statues*, 1.32; cf. R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, New Haven and London 1997, p. 169, note 35.

182. See for example Abū Qurra and Abū Rā'iṭa in S. H. Griffith, "Faith and reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on discerning the true religion", in S. Kh. Samir and J. S. Nielsen (eds.), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, Leiden 1994, 21f, 37; 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, ed. M. Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, Beirut 1977, 33ff; Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq in Kh. Samir and P. Nwyia (eds. and trs.), *Une correspondance Islamo-Chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munağğim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā* (Patrologia Orientalis 40, fasc. 4, no. 1850), Turnhout 1981, "Risāla" 4, no. 185; cf. 'Abd al-Jabbār's summary of their arguments, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. 'A.-K. 'Uthmān, Beirut 1966, p. 173f. For the charge that Islam had been spread by force, see also 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, *Risāla*, tr. G. Tartar, *Dialogue Islamo-chrétien sous le calife al-Ma'mūn*, Paris 1985, p. 144, 167ff, 227; P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 375ff.

183. Themistius (wrote 364), *Oratio* 5, 67c, in L. J. Daly, "Themistius' plea for religious tolerance", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 12 (1971), p. 73 (slightly modified); also tr. P. Heather and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*, Liverpool 2001, p. 166.

184. R. van Loy (tr.), "Le 'Pro Templis' de Libanius", *Byzantion* 8 (1933), 30 (§ 29). This speech was occasioned by the rampages of the fourth-century equivalent of the Taleban. Cf. also his letter in defence of Manichaeans (Ep. 1253) in S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*, Leiden 1994, p. 55.

185. Symmachus, *Relatio III*, 10, cited in MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, p. 169, note 35 (ed. and tr. in J. Wytzes, *Der letzte Kampf des Heidentums in Rom*, Leiden 1977, p. 207); cf. also Garnsey, "Religious Toleration", p. 23.

186. K. W. Harl, "Sacrifice and pagan belief in fifth- and sixth-century Byzantium", *Past and Present* 126 (1990), p. 7, 15.

pagans who had "decided to espouse in word the name of Christians" were persecuted along with Manichaeans, Samaritans, Jews, Sabbatians, Montanists, Arians and others[187]. ("These crucifiers of the son of God should not be allowed to live at all", as a sixth-century Syrian saint declared before setting fire to a synagogue.)[188] Tiberius II (d. 582) and Maurice (d. 602) also persecuted pagans[189]; and in 632, under Heraclius (d. 641), the Jews and Samaritans were forcibly converted[190]. Justinian's policies did strike some as excessively intolerant. "As the Deity allows various religions to exist, I do not dare impose one alone. For I remember reading that we should sacrifice to the Lord of our own will, not at the command of anyone who compels us. He who tries to do otherwise clearly opposes the heavenly decree", the Ostrogothic king Theodahad (d. 536) wrote to the emperor[191], using much the same argument as Q. 10:99. The historian Procopius (d. after 562) also disapproved, though he obviously could not be so outspoken. According to him, when the rural people were compelled to abandon their ancestral faith, they rebelled, to be cut down by soldiers or to take their own lives, in the case of the Montanists by shutting themselves up in their churches and setting fire to them, or fleeing from their homelands, so that "the whole Roman empire was filled with murder and with exiled men", while the Samaritans, resenting being made to change the beliefs of their fathers, "not by their own free choice, but under compulsion of the law", instantly inclined to the Manichaeans and "the Polytheists, as they are called"[192]. Procopius also deemed it folly to enquire into the precise nature of God when humans could not even understand human things properly: "let each say about these things whatever he thinks he knows, both priest and layman"[193].

Sura 2:256 must be downstream of all this, for what it expresses is a principle inconceivable in a genuinely pagan world. There was no religious freedom in the pagan Near East and Mediterranean before the rise of Christianity because civic religion was separate from the pursuit of absolute truths and otherworldly salvation (if any). Each ethnic and political community had its own gods; with the partial exception of the Jews, no one claimed exclusive access to the divine or denied other people's gods, not because everybody was tolerant, but rather because what religion stood for was a particular a set of laws and customs to which one adhered by virtue of having been born into the community in question. Religion was the ways of the ancestors, the worship that had kept your community alive, not a set of

187. Procopius, *Anecdota*, tr. H. B. Dewing, London and Cambridge, Mass. 1969, vol. 11, p. 32; M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, Göttingen 2003, p. 202ff, 298ff.

188. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and tr. E. W. Brooks, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau, vol. 17, Paris 1923, p. 90f.

189. Dionysius of Tell-Maḥré (reconstituted from the *Chronicle ad 1234* and Michael the Syrian) in A. Palmer, S. Brock and R. Hoyland (trs.), *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool 1993, p. 114 (§ 5, on Ḥarrān); I. Rochow, "Die Heidenprozesse unter den Kaisern Tiberios II Konstantinos und Maurikios", in H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann (eds.), *Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz. Probleme der Herausbildung des Feudalismus*, Berlin 1976.

190. G. Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'orient du VII[e] siècle", *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), p. 30ff.

191. A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, p. 168, citing Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10:26.

192. Procopius, *Anecdota*, vol. 11, p. 21-27.

193. Kaldellis, *Procopius*, p. 170, citing Procopius, *Gothic Wars*, vol. 5, p. 3, 6.

universally true beliefs[194]. It was in philosophy that universally valid tenets were to be found, and one was certainly free to choose one's own philosophy, just as one was free to seek individual salvation in mystery religions and additional cults of other kinds. But this freedom did not rest on a principle, merely on the fact that such pursuits were not a matter of public interest as long as the demands of civic religion were respected.

The rise of Christianity changed all this by postulating a God who was true for everyone, irrespective of who or where or what one was, and who had to be worshipped, not in addition to one's ancestral religion or imperial cult, but rather instead of them. The Christians behaved as if civic religion was a matter of choice, and it was in response to the persecutions that they thereby brought upon themselves that they stressed the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own beliefs. The rise of Christianity deeply affected the pagan concept of religion as well, not only in the sense that the pagans began to defend the diversity of religions that they had hitherto taken for granted, but also in the sense that they too came to see religion as a matter of individual choice. Themistius's claim that moral and religious matters lay outside the sphere of legislation is an astonishing one for a champion of Hellenism, as Garnsey remarks[195].

Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn is closer in wording to the snappy formulations of Tertullian and Lactantius than to those of the Greek Christians, let alone the pagan philosophers (whose views on the many roads leading to the same truth reappear in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*)[196]. But what matters is that the concept of religion reflected in the verse is that of late antiquity, not that of a genuinely pagan world beyond it. In Q. 2:256 as elsewhere in the Qur'ān, religion is a set of beliefs about a single universal God freely chosen by the individual, not communal ways centering on an ancestral god or gods. The Qur'ān nowhere addresses its message to an ethnic or political group in the manner of the Old Testament. It opens its statements with vocatives such as "O you who believe", never "O you Arabs" or "O you Quraysh" (*yā ma'shar al-'Arab/Quraysh*); it never casts Allāh as the ancestral god of the Arabs, as opposed to of mankind at large; and though the *mushrikūn* frequently justify their beliefs as ancestral, they never charge the believers with treasonable neglect of the civic/tribal cult by failure to venerate the deity or deities of the forefathers, to perform the customary sacrifices, or engage in other venerable rites. The issue between the believers and the polytheists (and Jews and Christians) in the Qur'ān is universal truths to do with God's relationship with lesser beings on the one hand and the reality and imminence of the judgement and resurrection on the other, not civic religion. Wherever exactly we are in Arabia, we are in a place that formed a cultural continuum with the Christian world around it, sharing its basic presuppositions and speaking the same cultural language, except that it formulated itself in a distinctive local idiom of its own and was somewhat out of date: Q. 2:256 articulates a norm which had come to be honoured more in the breach than in the observance in the region in which it had originated.

What we encounter here seems to be a time-lag in the exchange of ideas between populations separated by linguistic, cultural and geographical distance,

194. Garnsey, "Religious toleration", p. 11, 13, 24.
195. Garnsey, "Religious toleration", p. 21 and cf. 23.
196. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, Beirut 1957, vol. 3, p. 30f.

yet close enough in all these terms to engage in polemics. We see it today too. Just as Westerners tend to envisage Muslims as embodiments of their pre-modern heritage (and, in the case of Islamicists, to interpret the Qur'ān in the light of pre-modern exegesis), so Muslims are given to presenting Islam as endorsing free will and casting its founder as unaffected by sexual desire, in both cases in response to ideas which emanated from the West, but which are now of dwindling significance in the West itself. Similarly, freedom of religion no longer prevailed in the Roman Empire, but among some people of Arabia it was still a live principle, as the many "tolerance verses" of the Qur'ān show: converts had to be won by persuasion; fighting over religion was regarded as morally wrong, so that war, when it came, required much justification[197].

Both Christianity and Islam began as freely chosen systems of belief about the nature of ultimate reality, but both had strong implications for the social and political order in which they had grown up, and both eventually became civic religions as well. One could still convert to Christianity and Islam after they had become state religions (whereas one could not in any real sense of the word convert to a pagan religion, as opposed to simply add a cult or a philosophy); but one was not free to abandon the religion again, for it now embraced the laws and customs to which all members of the polity were expected to adhere. Apostasy was treason; the only way to abandon the religion was to go and live elsewhere. Religion now performed the function of nationality in the modern world, that is to say it gave people their civic status: to be without a religion was to be stateless, an outlaw without rights or duties. Under these circumstances religious freedom became undesirable. You cannot be free to choose your own nationality while continuing to claim the rights and duties of a citizen, nor can you be free to adopt whatever definition you like of what being a citizen entails; and if you want to live in a country as a non-citizen, you cannot choose your own rules for foreign residents. A modern citizen can renounce his citizenship without being regarded as a traitor, but it would be strange for him to do so without going to live elsewhere. In the same way, people were not free to adopt any religion they liked while claiming status as members of a Christian or a Muslim polity, nor were they free to interpret the official religion in any way they liked; and if they wanted to live in these polities without adhering to the official religion, there were rules for protected peoples to be obeyed. In short, there cannot be religious freedom where the political community is based on religion. This was why the exegetes had to interpret the *lā ikrāha* verse by recourse to the postulates of abrogation and the far-fetched interpretations that Shaltūt spoke so scathingly about.

There were times in Islamic history when the tension between Islam as beliefs about ultimate reality and Islam as civic religion was strongly felt: the tenth and eleventh centuries are the most obvious example. But though the intellectual elite at the time began to go down the road that Europe was to take from the sixteenth century onwards, they only belittled the importance of the civic sphere; they never went so far as to define it out of the religion. Religious freedom was still something undesirable when the rise of a by now secularised Europe made it something so prestigious that Islam had to have it even though it contravened the principle of religion as nationality. Thus began the great rediscovery of the fact that there is

197. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe, Leiden 2001-6, s.v. "War", p. 456f.

freedom of religion in the Qur'ān and the gradual dismemberment of the tradition. As the Islamists so clearly see, there is only one way to stop this dismemberment, namely to restore a political community based on religion. Whether they can do it is another question.

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AL-QĀḌĪ AL-NUʿMĀN, ISMĀʿĪLĪ LAW AND IMĀMĪ SHIʿISM

Farhad DAFTARY

The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London

The Ismāʿīlīs split off from the rest of the Imāmī Shiʿis on the death of the Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in 148/765; other Imāmī groups were eventually consolidated in terms of the Twelver (Ithnāʿasharī) community. The Imāmī Shiʿi doctrine of the imamate, which was conceptualized already in al-Ṣādiq's time, retained its centrality in the theological thought of both branches of Imāmī Shiʿism, the Ismāʿīliyya and the Ithnāʿashariyya, despite pronounced differences in their political strategies. It was however in the Fatimid state, representing the crowning success of the revolutionary movement of the early Ismāʿīlīs, that the doctrine of the imamate also served to characterize the newly-founded legal system of the Ismāʿīlīs.

The modern progress in Ismāʿīlī studies, based on a large number of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts recovered in the twentieth century, has shed light on many aspects of Ismāʿīlī history and thought. As a result, centuries-old misrepresentations of this branch of Imāmī Shiʿism have also been increasingly replaced by factual evidence substantiating a completely different, and equally astonishing, picture. The Ismāʿīlīs had been accused from early on by their detractors, especially the Sunni polemicists among them, of having dispensed with positive law or the commandments and prohibitions of the *sharīʿa*, because they had found access to its hidden, true meaning concealed in the *bāṭin* or esoteric dimension of religion as interpreted by their Imam. This explains why the Ismāʿīlīs were also pejoratively designated as the Bāṭiniyya (Esotericists) by their enemies. Modern scholarship in Ismāʿīlī studies, however, has revealed that the Ismāʿīlīs, at least from the time when their *daʿwa* led to the foundation of a *dawla*, the Fatimid caliphate, in 297/909, did indeed concern themselves with legal matters. In fact, Ismāʿīlī literature of the Fatimid period generally emphasizes the inseparability of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, the letter of the law and its inner, spiritual significance. Modern scholarship has shown that Ismāʿīlī law and jurisprudence were founded in early Fatimid times, mainly as a result of the efforts of the foremost Fatimid jurist, Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān b. Abī ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Manṣūr b. Aḥmad b. Ḥayyūn al-Tamīmī al-Qayrawānī. However, in the pre-Fatimid, secret and revolutionary phase of the Ismāʿīlī movement, Ismāʿīlī law did not exist; and the then dissimulating Ismāʿīlīs observed the law of the land wherever they lived.

After a pioneering study by Richard Gottheil (1862-1936), based on Ibn Ḥajar's *Rafʿ al-iṣr ʿan quḍāt Miṣr*[1], it was mainly Asaf A. A. Fyzee (1899-1981) who first called the attention of modern scholars to the work of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān as an Ismāʿīlī jurist and to the resulting independent Ismāʿīlī school of jurisprudence,

1. Richard J. H. Gottheil, "A distinguished family of Fatimide cadis (al-Nuʿmān) in the tenth century", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 27 (1906), p. 217-296.