

Comments on the Opening Prayer in the Iowa Senate

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On April 7, 2014, the Opening Prayer in the Iowa State Senate was given by Imam Mohammed Khan of the Islamic Mosque in Des Moines.¹ With regard to this prayer, Khan stated, "I shall say it in, in Arabic first, and then in English." He then proceeded to do so.

I asked a native Arabic speaker to listen to the Arabic. He advised me that Khan had recited *Al-Fatihah*, which is the first chapter of the Koran and consists of only seven verses. The prophet Muhammad said this was the "greatest" chapter in the Koran. Muhammad said that any prayer that did not include *Al-Fatihah* was "invalid." So the recitation of *Al-Fatihah* is still included in each cycle of the five daily, obligatory Muslim prayers. Here is what that chapter says:

1. *In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*
2. *All praise and thanks are Allah's, the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists).*
3. *The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*
4. *The Only Owner (and the Only Ruling Judge) of the Day of Recompense (i.e. the Day of Resurrection).*
5. *You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything).*
6. *Guide us to the Straight Way.*
7. *The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger, nor of those who went astray.*

The Noble Qur'an (Khan/Al-Hilali)

For our purposes, let's focus on Verses 6 and 7. The prophet Muhammad had explained that the *Straight Way* mentioned in Verse 6 was Islam; so Muslims ask Allah to guide them to Islam. Muslims then ask not to be guided to the way of those who have earned Allah's anger or to the way of those who have gone astray. So who are those who have earned the anger of Allah? Muhammad said,

Verily, the Jews have earned the anger (of Allah)...

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 4, p. 410

¹ A video of this opening prayer can be seen at:
<http://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=Senate&Service=ArchiveDay&vid=1030&iDate=2014-04-07>.

And who has gone astray or become misguided? Muhammad said,

...the Christians are misguided.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 4, p. 410

In his Koran commentary (*tafsir*), the authoritative 14th Century Muslim scholar Ibn Kathir wrote that in *Al-Fatihah* Allah stated that Islam was the true religion and warned Muslims against following *the paths of misguidance* (Judaism and Christianity), because the Jews and Christians would be gathered up with the sinners on the Day of Resurrection:

Al-Fatihah directs the believers to invoke Allah to guide them to the straight path, which is the true religion, and to help them remain on that path in this life...The Surah [chapter] also warns against following the paths of misguidance, so that one does not end up being gathered with those who indulge in sin, on the Day of Resurrection, including those who have earned the anger and those who were led astray.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, p. 89

And this understanding of *Al-Fatihah* has not changed over the centuries. One 20th Century Koran commentary provided this explanation:

Hence, those who want to follow the Straight Way should avoid the errors of both Jews and Christians, the Jews because they deliberately followed the wrong way, tampered with the verses of their Book, played tricks, called prophet 'Uzair a son of God, and gave their rabbis the authority to prohibit or permit. And the Christians, because they elevated 'Isa [Jesus] to the level of "son of God" and "the third of three."

Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan, Vol. 1, p. 24

Another 20th Century Koran commentary explained:

...not the path of those who incurred Your Anger, such as the Jews, who despite recognizing the truth did not accept it, or the way of those who have gone astray, like the Christians and others like them, who, after accepting the truth, abandoned it out of ignorance and error.

Tafsir As-Sa'di, Vol. 1, p. 3

It is interesting to note that when Imam Khan recited *Al-Fatihah* in English, he made a slight change to Verse 7 when referring to the Jews:

6 *Guide us in the Straight Path.*

7 *The Path upon those whom you have honored. Not upon those who have erred [?]. Nor those who have gone astray.*

So why would Allah be angry with the Jews? Probably because Allah said that the Jews were among the worst enemies of Islam (5:82), and he curses the Jews because they had supposedly proclaimed the prophet Ezra as the son of Allah (9:30)

How had the Christians gone astray? The Koran states that Jesus was not crucified; rather Allah took Jesus bodily into Paradise and an imposter Allah made to look like Jesus was crucified instead (4:157-158). No Crucifixion, no Resurrection. And Allah curses the Christians for saying that Jesus was the Son of God (9:30). So Islam teaches that Christianity is a false religion, based on a fraud.

And Allah prohibits Jews and Christians from entering Mecca because they are spiritually unclean (9:28), and he commands Muslims to fight Jews and Christians (9:29).

So in the Iowa State Senate on April 7, 2014, Jews and Christians stood with their heads bowed in reverence as they and their religions were being maligned.

Imam Mohammed Khan had been the guest of State Senator Janet Petersen and State Representative Ako Abdul-Samad. In December 2014 and early January 2015, I sent two e-mails each to Khan, Petersen, and Abdul-Samad, requesting a meeting to discuss the use of *Al-Fatihah* in the State Senate; I have yet to receive a reply from any of the three.