

## **THE ROLE OF THE MOSQUE AND CHURCH IN RITES OF WORSHIP**

**Ahmad Reza Meftah**

*University of Religion and Denominations,  
Qom, I. R. Iran*

**Hossein Mottaghi**

*University of Religion and Denominations,  
Qom, I. R. Iran*

Three important and essential elements in the establishment of the religious rites within Islam and Christianity include the following: (1) a place to conduct these rites of worship, namely mosques and churches, (2) religious clerics or priests, and (3) ritual instructions. Of these, the mosque and the church hold great importance as the veritable cradle for the establishment of the religious rites and practices of these faiths. Hence, if we wish to understand what is transpiring today with regard to religious rites of Islam and Christianity, we must recognize the essential nature of the mosque and church and their utility.

In terms of establishing rites of worship for a religious community, the mosque and church have many benefits that cannot be ignored by Muslim and Christian clerics nor the general body of the faithful. Amongst these benefits are protection and strengthening of religion and faith in God, expansion of religious society, and instilment of unity amongst the faithful.

**Keywords:** *church, mosque, rites of worship, Islam, Christianity, strengthening faith*

### ***Introduction***

There are many groups and individuals who attempt to create a rift between Christians and Muslims by promoting and highlighting some of the differences that exist between Christianity and Islam despite the fact that commonalities between the two are greater. In contrast, the Qur'an has openly invited Christians and Muslims towards a unity-oriented dialogue (Qur'an 2: 64).

It is interesting to note that one of the methods which these aforementioned groups use in creating disputes between Muslims and Christians is the promotion of the idea that mosques and churches are positioned in opposition to one another. This is while both of these religious institutions are actively working with the same goal in mind (Qur'an 22: 40) – i.e. increasing faith in God within their respective congregations.

When we look at the religious institutions of the mosque and the church, we see that they function as a veritable cradle for the belief in God and this, in itself, is a natural basis for unity amongst all those who adhere to such beliefs. Muslims and Christians both have the duty, in light of this unity, to stand shoulder to shoulder against the forces of disbelief and atheism. It clearly follows that the best place for practical implementation of such unity and growth are mosques and churches.

In modern era, where religion is regarded to be a hostile to modern society, in particular when it comes to a secular world, strengthening of faith in God amongst the Christians or Muslims will play a mutually beneficial role to both faith-groups. Even if one of these faith-groups is strengthened in relation to the faith of the adherents, it will inevitably strengthen the position of the other faith-group as well. More than anything else, we must strive to better understand this religious institution and practically implement the inherent foundations of unity which exist amongst them. We must work towards strengthening the Abrahamic faiths and morality in the world around us and utilize such foundations in creating a healthier and more peaceful world.

### ***The Meaning of the Term Masjid (Mosque) and Church***

The term *masjid* is a word of Arabic origin and it comes from the Arabic root word *sajjada*. It possesses the meaning of a place related to the forehead and prostration. Most lexical dictionaries mention that the terms *masjid* and *masjad* refer to a place where prostration is performed and its plural form is *masājid*. In general, lexical scholars call any place of worship by this name. When we look at the detailed lexical meaning of this term, we see that the word *masjid* holds many distinct meanings. (see: Ibn Manzur 1993: III/204).

When we look at the way this word is used in common expression, we see that it refers to a place of worship particular to Muslims. The reason behind this is that the canonical prayer is the greatest form of worship in this faith and the most apparent aspect of this prayer is the act of prostration. It is for this reason that Muslim places of worship are called *masjids*. (see: Husayni Dashti 1990).

Even though the term *masjid*, as well as many other permutations, are mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an, some Qur'anic commentators and lexicologists express their belief that the word is actually Syriac in origin and that it entered the Arabic language at some point. Suyuti is of this belief and he mentions that the word *Sajjidā* is a word of Syriac origin. (Suyuti 2000: I/432)

When we look at the works of Orientalists, we find that they typically attempt to associate roots of various Islamic words with non-Arabic languages. One such Orientalist is Stanley Lane-Poole who opines that the word *masjid* is actually taken from the Italian word *meschita* or the Spanish word *mesqita* (Lane-Poole 2013: 188). Lane-Poole's claims appear to be quite improbable since the languages of Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Nabatean (in reality, all Semitic languages) all share a common root.

Therefore, even if certain similarities exist, these similarities are accidental in nature and it can even be said that the term *masjid* may have entered these other languages after a period of time, contrary to what Lane-Poole has mentioned. The reason behind this is that the word *masjid* was in common usage amongst Arabs before the rise of Islam. An example of this is found in the Masjid al-Haram, which possessed this name long before the coming of Islam, and which has similarly been mentioned in the Qur'an seventeen times (see: Qur'an 17: 1; 8: 34; 9: 7, 19, 28, 107; 22: 25). When we examine the Qur'an, we see that the language which it contains is in concordance with the language common at that time. The first verses of the Qur'an were revealed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, during the year 610, and the revelation continued until the year 633.

In any case, the term *masjid* was chosen to be used in this way and it means a place of prostration. When we look at the religion of Islam, we see that prayer is given a very high position in the faith, and it is considered one of the highest acts of worship. Here we do not wish to discuss lexical meanings of the word *masjid* nor do we wish to elucidate the physical construct of the building itself. Our focus, in this article, is to highlight the role of the mosque in relation to individual and social rites of worship.

When we examine Christian theology and Ecclesiastics, we see various ways in which the term *church* is used; the root of this word can be found in the Greek language (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesiā*, and *Ecclesia*). Overall, the concept of the church has two primary meanings which are typically used:

1. The first meaning is that of the church as a building in which Christians perform their various acts of worship. This meaning is considered to be a figurative understanding of the term since churches did not exist during the early history of the Christian faith in the same sense as today (see: Van Hove 1908).
2. The second meaning of the term *church* pertains to a Christian community and this can apply to any gathering of the Christian faithful. When we examine the German language, we find that the term *church* (or *Kirche*) is actually derived from the Greek term *Kyriake*, which comes from the root meaning of an attachment to God. This term was used with a meaning of a house or a community of God (Cong 2005: 50). In the New Testament, this word has been used in reference to the worldwide community of Christians (Matt 16:18), the Christians of a specific geographical location (Acts 5:11), as well as a group in a specific house of worship (Rom 16:5).

In the same way, the church has been called the 'Bride of Christ' (Rev 2:19), as well as the 'Body of Christ' (Col 1:18). In the Old Testament, the term *church* is used in reference to a holy gathering of the Children of Israel (Ex 21:27, 43:28, 4:29; Lev 7:4; Num 15:8, etc.) This term has been used more than 110 times in the holy books.

In this article, we are not going to discuss the church from the perspective of a specific building but rather, our goal is to discuss it from the social perspective in reference to its role as a place of Christian religious practices. What is of great interest to us in this matter is the holy concept of the church and mosque as places where the faithful gather towards performing their religious practices.

### ***Religious Practices in Islam and Christianity***

Islam is one of the religions which possesses a very specific code of law, and religious practices are an important part of this code of law. When we look at the various injunctions which are found in the Holy Qur'an and authentic traditions, it becomes clear that Islam possesses a great variety of religious rulings and religious practices. The variety and vastness of these rulings and practices encompass various facets of individual and social life such as prayers, fasting, the *hajj* pilgrimage, *i'tikāf*<sup>1</sup>, self-defense, marriage,

<sup>1</sup> A religious ritual where the worshipper remains in a mosque for a set period of time (usually three days).

business transactions, social interactions, competition, etc. (see: Yazdi 2001) Some of these practices are fixed for all Muslims, while others change in relation to gender or age (e.g. children, those who are *bāligh*, and the elderly). These injunctions and practices are based on more than 500 verses of the Qur'an and more than 36,000 traditions.

Religious practices of Islam fall into four categories: the obligatory, the prohibited, the recommended, and the detested. According to some Islamic scholars, obligatory injunctions are 1,535 in number, while prohibited injunctions are 1,448. At the same time, the rest of the injunctions in relation to what is recommended and what is detested are several times this number. Many of these injunctions are individual in nature and their implementation does not require any specific institution. Others, however, are social in nature and, therefore, do require the establishment of socio-religious institutions.

When we examine Christianity, we find that after Christ and in present time it does not contain the law in the same sense as Judaism and Islam. In essence, Christianity contains sacramental acts of worship which take the place of an abrogated the law. Some of these religious practices have roots in the holy texts of Judaism and Christianity, while others have roots in the culture of ancient Greece (see: Kelauser 1979: 7). At the same time, it is possible that these sacraments are practiced in a number of different ways due to the effects of the various cultures which they are practiced in.

Another important point which must be kept in mind is that according to Christians, the 'seven sacraments' were established by Christ himself (see: John Paul II 2005: n. 1114). Of course, we said that according to Christians. Actually, Catholic and Orthodox Christians claim that seven Sacraments established by Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Then, there are other religious practices which were established by the Church. Christian practices which have roots in the religious code of Judaic texts are much fewer in number when compared to religious practices of Islam. The reason behind this is that many of these practices are seen as being transformed according to Christian theology and thus their performance is not obligatory as it is in Islam.

In general, the Torah contains 613 religious rulings, of which 248 are things which must be performed, while 365 are things which must be avoided (see:

1 The subject of Sacraments is very complex, due to the very understanding of the Sacraments in Eastern and Western Christianity alike. The Orthodox concept can be found in works of Thomas Hobko, Alexander Schmemmann, Nikolaj Velimirovic etc. It is not that Orthodox claim that all of these seven are established by Jesus Christ. Matrimony, for example, existed before Christ and he blessed the Matrimony, and not established. Then, on the other hand, Jesus Christ established fasting on the fashion that we know today, given that he was fasting and praying 40 days in a desert. Yet, the fasting is not a Sacrament.

Dorsey 1991). Details of all these rules can be studied in depth and they are collectively known as Mitzvah (see: Eisenberg 2005). Since religious practices are undoubtedly affected by these religious rulings, it is natural that the breadth of religious practices based on the divine text of Islam will be more detailed.

At the same time, this does not mean that Christianity lacks such religious practices based on their divine text. In addition to their concept of the transformation of the code of law, they still do possess many religious practices. When studying in depth, one can find many commonalities between religious practices of Christianity and Islam.

These common points help solidify the connection between the mosque and the church in a greater and more fundamental fashion. Some of these common customs include respect for places of worship (Qur'an 22: 40), discourse with the People of the Book (ibid.: 29: 46; 16: 125), respect for one's parents (ibid.: 17: 23; 29: 8; 31: 15), fasting (ibid.: 2: 183), etc.

### *The Congregants of Mosques and Churches*

One of the factors which play a great role in the remembrance of God in the mosque and church are the individual members who make up that organization. Members of such organizations play an important role in revitalizing the remembrance and name of God. One of the potential dangers which has been seen all throughout history is when mosques and churches become affiliated with various governmental systems. When the affiliation is less and these organizations are run independently by the people, there is a greater level of success when it comes to nurturing faith. The reason behind this is that in such cases, faith arises from the hearts of the people themselves and various spiritual movements independently come about. Therefore, it can be said that the more grass-roots and independent that these organizations are, the more successful they will be.

When it comes to the vital role that members play in regards to a mosque or a church, both Islam and Christianity recommend that believers play an active role in establishing and advancing such institutions. In Islam, a Muslim can gift a piece of land or property towards the creation of a place of worship. Through reciting a religious formula which is found in jurisprudential sources, that piece of land or property henceforth becomes a mosque for all Muslims, regardless of their sect.

While the general body of Muslims plays a role in the maintenance and upkeep of the mosque, it is usually the case that a board of trustees fulfills this role. The upkeep of various churches also comes from faithful believers, while the organizational board is related to the specific denomination of

Christianity and their usual traditions in this regard. An interesting point is that even in highly structured churches such as the Catholic Church, after considering the role of the Vatican, we see that the faithful play a vital role and this is a role which is acknowledged and accepted by the Church itself.

As expected, each church has its own set of rites and rituals which they carry out. For example, the Catholic Church has certain officially recognized rites which are performed by priests under the overall guidance of the Pope. Such a church structure is considered a subservient structure and any leaders take their authority from Rome (Campenhausen 1969: 97). When we examine rites and rituals performed in these highly structured churches, we find that they must be performed by bishops or cardinals. But Islamic viewpoint promotes the concept that an average individual can become a congregational prayer leader (so long as they are just).

### ***The Role of the Mosque and Church in Religious Rites***

When we examine the Qur'an, we find that it mentions the term *masjid* (mosque) and its various etymological derivatives 28 times. Authentic Islamic traditions also mention many of the points and details in regard to religious rites which can be performed in a mosque. The mosque is considered one of the most effective places for spirituality and elevation. It is interesting to note that different mosques – for example, the local neighborhood mosque, the central city mosque, the Mosque of the Prophet, the Mosque of Sahlah, the Mosque of Kufah, etc. – have even been given various ranks and positions depending on their importance.

These different ranks and positions also play a role in the enactment of religious rituals which are performed within them. In light of various rituals, each one of these mosques plays its own unique role in relation to the rituals that are performed there. For example, the act of the *i'tikāf* can only be performed in the central mosque of a given city. In this way, a very unique role has been created for such a mosque in relation to this particular religious ritual. Nevertheless, a vast majority of religious rites can be performed in any of the mosques; one example is that of the congregational prayer.

When we look at the Church, we see that it, too, holds a position as one of the most spiritually important places in Christianity and it is a place where many religious rites of the faith are performed. In the same way that many of the mosques in Islam have varying ranks and positions, we also see a similar phenomenon within Christianity although on a lesser scale.

For example, when we look at a church which houses tombs of certain saints or holds particular relics of importance, we see that it holds a higher

position than a church which lacks this. The same rituals may be performed in both churches but they are performed with more fervor and splendor in the church with saints or relics; in essence, such churches are seen as being holier than others. Of course in this issue position of Mosque and Church isn't the same. Because ordered for performing of prayer in some places in Islam, but in Christianity ordered only for pilgrimage. Of course, it is true that sacraments in different places are the same, but same places are holier and many of Christians wish to go there for pilgrimage.

The mosque and the church play a critical role in increasing people's spirituality, both in material and non-material ways. In essence, one of the greatest and most valuable benefits of these two holy institutions can be found in their potential for increasing spiritual values of believers. When one looks at the common points in even the architecture of these two institutions, it is clear how their primary focus pertains to the issue of spirituality.

The existence of a prayer niche, the use of imagery and calligraphy, the utilization of spiritually-inspired wall motifs all point to the fact that the mosque and church are designed to nurture faith in God. Also, when one examines the clothing of the clergy, the clothing of the participants, the way that people sit, as well as other similar things, it is clear that all of these things are designed in order to establish and increase this sense of spirituality. One of the direct results of these religious rituals in the mosque and church is their role in promoting psychological well-being within society both in Islamic and Christian territories.

The social facet of these religious rites becomes a means whereby extreme aspects of introversion and extroversion are moderated in a positive fashion and by which people are led to respect social values. Through these religious rites, the mosque and the church become a catalyst in strengthening general facets of ethics, spirituality, and morality in society (Qur'an 9: 112).

Alleviation of depression, resolution of social problems, serving others, creating a sense of camaraderie, and growth of religious knowledge are all included in the benefits which religious rites give to members of these faith-based institutions. Both the mosque and the church can play this role as one of the best cradles for the performance of religious rituals. The role of the church in reforming its individual members can take place through the performance of these religious rites (Brantl 2002: 171).

Amongst the many benefits of the mosque and the church in establishing various religious rituals, there are three which are more fundamental in nature than the rest. They are as follows: strengthening faith, increasing the number of the faithful, and creating unity amongst the faithful. These three benefits cause the religious position to become stronger than the anti-religious one. Needless to say, the mosque and the church play a very important



role in spreading religious thought and behavior through discourse as well but this is not within the scope of our current discussion. Let us examine these three fundamental benefits in a more detailed fashion.

### *1. Strengthening Faith*

From the Islamic perspective, the mosque is an institution built upon the axis of faith. The criterion for leadership as a congregational prayer leader in a mosque is generally based on quality of faith. Nevertheless, this is not a condition for mosque participation. Even individuals who are at the lowest levels of faith are encouraged to participate in religious rituals which take place at a mosque.

The reason behind this is that such participation will serve to strengthen their faith. If a Muslim does not accept religion from the core of his heart and only verbally acknowledges his faith, he is still considered a Muslim and is free to participate in all religious rituals of a mosque. In Islam, the mosque is considered one of the purest places where people come in order to purify their souls and help others do the same.

The Prophet Muhammad is narrated to have said:

“God has mentioned: My houses on the earth are the mosques. These homes shine for the people of the heavens in the same way that the stars shine for the people of the earth during the nights. How fortunate is the servant who performs the ablution in his home and then visits me in my home (the mosque). Without any doubt, the one who is visited will hold the visitor in respect and he will do good by him. Give glad tidings to those who take steps towards the mosques in the heart of the night of a brilliant light on the Day of Judgment.” (Hurr Amili 1989: I/382)

There are many other traditions in Islamic sources that show that someone who visits the mosques has selected the best way to gain proximity towards God and to establish a strong relationship with him.

When we examine Christian beliefs, we see that their traditions are also similar in this regard. A Christian individual who performs religious rituals of their church (baptism, for example), strengthens their faith in Christ. This act, in essence, brings together the adherent to the “body of Christ”. According to Christian belief, this joining together of the Christian and the body of Christ can only take place in the church itself. It is for this same reason that the church is remembered as the virtual “body of Christ” (McGrath 2013: 16).

With regard to the question of how the mosque can help strengthen people’s faith, we must first clarify what we mean by the term “faith” (*īmān*).

From the Islamic perspective, there are many different definitions of the word “faith”. The most authoritative meaning can be found in the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, where the reality and foundations of faith are mentioned as comprising three elements: a) heartfelt recognition and belief, b) verbal confirmation, and c) implementation of this belief on the plane of action (Ibn Shu’bah 1983: 57, Ibn Babawayh 1999: I/227).

According to Shi’a scholars, a complementary relationship exists between faith and action. This relationship can be conditional, revelatory, or based on necessity. The clearest way to explain this type of relationship can be found in a tradition narrated from Imam ‘Alī which states: “One can build faith upon righteous actions and one can recognize faith from righteous actions”.

For our purposes, we would like to emphasize the revelatory relationship between faith and action. To use a metaphor, faith can be compared to a tree, while righteous actions can be compared to the fruits of that tree. When the spirit of faith settles in the heart of man, corresponding actions will come about as well.

From another angle, righteous actions consolidate and strengthen faith. To use another metaphor, faith can be likened to light, while righteous actions to the oil which fuels it. It is also said that just as light uses oil to fuel its luminosity, so the light of faith uses the oil of action to fuel itself and through repeated action, the heart of man becomes luminous (Kashani 1997: 285).

Amongst the righteous actions which strengthen faith and allow the heart to become luminous are religious rituals performed in the mosque such as congregational prayers and supplications, *i’tikāf*, and the like. In this way, the mosque plays a vital role in strengthening and stabilizing an individual’s faith.

## *2. Increasing the Number of the Faithful*

In the discussion regarding a faith-based society, the mosque plays the role of a place of worship for all faithful Muslims. In this matter, there are no differences between various Muslim sects; the mosque is something which is officially recognized by all of them. It is also interesting to note that the majority of rituals performed in mosques are performed by all Muslims in a similar fashion, with only minor variations in their particular details. From the Islamic perspective, the mosque does not belong only to the deeply faithful or to a particular race; it belongs to all Muslims.

From the Christian viewpoint, there are two different outlooks with regard to who the church actually belongs to. According to the viewpoint of Christian fundamentalists, the church belongs specifically to the Children of

Israel (Acts 10: 36, Rom 11: 1, Heb 8: 10, Matt 15: 24). When examining the meaning of the ‘People of God’ in Christian lexicon, we arrive at the conclusion that the aforementioned group had the greatest commitment towards fulfilling religious rituals in an authentic and diligent manner. It is for this reason that they were able to gain dominance over the rest of nations. The “chosen people of God” were charged with propagating monotheism and the worship of the one God (Ex 7: 14).

From the Islamic point of view, the issue of Jews being a chosen people did exist during the time of the prophets of the Children of Israel; however, it was not to be seen as an eternal pact.

The reason behind this is that the Children of Israel did not remain faithful to their covenant and they broke their pact with God (Qur’an 3: 112; 2: 40). According to the Old Testament, the Children of Israel were not faithful to their pact as the ‘People of God’ and in the end, they were replaced with another people (Ezekiel 21: 25). Therefore, the special position of these people and the relationship of the church as pertaining to the Children of Israel are under a serious question today according to both Christian and Islamic theology. The reason behind these questions is that their status as the chosen people was based upon meeting the necessary conditions. And due to their lack of fulfilling these conditions, this status was taken away from the Children of Israel.

The second outlook of Christianity with regard to the church and who it belongs to and which has now become the prevalent viewpoint is much broader in outlook, thereby bringing it much closer to the Islamic perspective on this issue. According to this viewpoint, the church is the first structure which gave organization to the body of the believers (Matt 16: 18; Acts 2: 47). Acting based upon foundational practices of the church and staying away from any sort of religious innovation is one of the criteria which differentiates between believers and disbelievers.

Christian faith was initially formed within the confines of the church (Acts 11: 26) and its perpetuation through a pledge to the church is something which can be proven. Even with such a viewpoint, one can still not strip the Christian faith from the history of the Children of Israel since the history of the Children of Israel is the source of spreading and propagation of the divine doctrine of the Christian church (Matt 16: 18); hence, this issue is closely related to the Old Testament and the Children of Israel.

From the perspective of those who see the church from a trans-ethnic point of view – which is the actual belief of traditional Christians – the church, in contrast to the first perspective, is not limited to the Children of Israel. Instead, the Children of Israel are just a part of the history of the church. In fact, one of the ideological focuses of various Christian denominations and groups

is that of charismatic divinity based on the church as a phenomenon pertaining to the Children of Israel.

This is a concept which is prevalent amongst the Christian theologians. When Jews decided to reject Jesus as a Messiah, they lost their status as the chosen people. It is obvious that under such circumstances, Jews cannot occupy such a select and critical position. This same viewpoint is found in Islam due to repeated oath-breaking incidents of the Children of Israel (Qur'an 2: 40, 61).

In general, Islam, just like the prevalent view in Christianity, holds that the performance of various rituals is not dependent upon a racially-based selection of individuals. It rather holds that any Muslim or Christian, regardless of sect, can perform religious rituals at a mosque or church without a need of resorting to a higher authority.

### *3. Creating Unity amongst the Faithful*

Another important element of the role of the church and mosque is the creation of unity amongst the faithful in the face of the growing influence of those who oppose religion – a matter which has become ever so important in recent years. The followers of all divine religions must work hand in hand towards monotheism and complete unity. Religious rituals of the mosque and church can play a vital role in this regard.

In Islam, the role of the mosque in relation to religious rituals is one that promotes unity between the different sects. The Qur'an commands believers with these words:

“Hold fast, all together, to Allah’s cord, and do not be divided.”  
(2: 103)

When the time for these acts of worship arrives, all Muslims, regardless of sect and ethnicity, come together in order to pray in a single way through one language. These faithful gather together in order to move towards the unity which God has called them to in order to connect and gain proximity with their Lord: “Say, ‘I give you just a single piece of advice: that you rise up for Allah’s sake, in pairs or singly’” (34: 46), and then reflect.

Individuals who attend a mosque are in reality a society at the very peak of harmony and unity. According to the Qur'an, God will take the hearts of these individuals in this congregation and make them one heart:

“Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds – the All-beneficent will bring about love for them. (19: 96)

It must also be stated that although certain differences in regards to religious rituals do exist amongst various Islamic sects, there is a consensus in regards to the daily congregational prayers which are recited in mosques.

In Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, the church is seen as the cradle which gives rise to the establishment of religious rituals and it is seen as a place which creates unity through these actions. The following passage appears in the first Epistle of Paul in Corinthians:

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” (Col 12: 12–14)

Further in the same chapter, the following appears:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (Col 12: 27–31)

In this section, Paul considered faithful Christians as individual parts of a body. The image of the human body presents a complete picture of multiplicity which can be transfigured into a complete unity and Paul called this unified body “Christ”. The church, which is the body of Christ, is likened to his physical presence in this world since it is the institution which continues his work. The intent of Paul here is that just as many body parts can be found in a singular body, Christ joins individual believers into a single body through the power of the church (Sayyar 2008: 185). In fact, Christians – namely community of believers – believe that Church is the body and Jesus is the head.

This unifying role of religious rituals of the church is witnessed more clearly in Catholic and Orthodox churches. When we examine other Christian denominations, it appears that this unity factor can be stronger in some respects, as well as weaker in other. For example, when we look at the Protestant church, out of the seven rituals, there are two rituals which are emphasized – the Eucharist and Baptism. The rest of the rituals are not really considered as part of normal practices of these churches.

At the same time, we see that certain new rituals have been created, particularly in Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions; due to new ways of thinking, new roles have been created for the church. Amongst these new rituals are the “Nine Gifts of the Spirit” which include the gift of power, specifically the gift of cures, prophecy, and miracles. Although the enactment of these “gifts” is seen as a religious innovation by other churches, they have been accepted in non-traditional churches as an innovative perspective and new methodology. These same differences of denominations have caused the role of the church as a cradle for the enactment of religious rituals to either become more potent or less potent depending on the specific circumstances in question.

An issue which Muslim and Christian scholars need to deal with in their religious institutes is how to abstain from creating new rituals that could potentially cause a rift between the faithful. Sometimes, rituals are created in order to attract greater numbers to the faith. While such methods may prove successful, they can also possess certain harmful aspects as well.

### *Conclusion*

At this point it has become clear that the mosque, as a place through which religious rituals are performed, and the church, as a cradle through which religious rituals are performed, both serve an important role in the growth and spreading of faith, as well as in the promotion of unity amongst the faithful. Both the mosque and church are a central axis for the spread and realization of religious rituals. In addition, rituals which are performed in the mosque and church are based on the holy texts of each respective religion. When we examine these rituals side by side, it is clear that they share many commonalities with one another.

Organizational systems of the mosque and the church are people-based systems and this is true both in relation to the participation of people in religious rituals, as well as their aid and support. At the same time, it must be recognized that there are differences in the structures of the executive systems of Islam and Christianity. When we look at the internal structure of various mosques and churches (in comparison to other mosques and churches within their respective faiths), we find that there are differences in this regard as well. For example, some mosques will sometimes have their own specific rituals that are limited to their locale.

In spite of this, there are important similarities between the mosque and the church which can place both of them under one umbrella. These similarities include strengthening of faith, increasing the number of the faithful,

and creating unity amongst them. When we look at these issues from an overarching perspective, just as the mosque does not pertain to any specific Muslim groups, the church also strives to reach out to all the faithful and not just a particular group.

Due to numerous similarities, the Qur'an has defended these centers of religious worship in the following verses:

“Had not Allah repulsed the people from one another, ruin would have befallen the monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which Allah's Name is much invoked. Allah will surely help those who help Him. Indeed Allah is all-strong, all-mighty.” (22: 40)

Based on these verses of the Qur'an, there are two important points which we can utilize. The first is that mosques, churches, monasteries, and synagogues are seen as a place where God is remembered and thus they are respected for this reason. Many of the religious rituals which are performed in the mosques and churches are a means of glorifying God and keeping up his remembrance. Even though some of these rituals have moved away from their origin, the holy sites are still places where God is essentially remembered. It is for this same reason that churches are viewed from the same spiritual perspective as mosques and thus respected by Muslims. In addition to this respected status, the mosque and the church also play an integral role in combating anti-religious forces – an important issue which cannot be overlooked.

The second point is that we must strive to protect and preserve these houses of worship. The Qur'an has mentioned that there must be individuals who work towards establishing mosques and churches and this work is in reality the same as helping the cause of God. In this way, anyone who aids God will in turn be aided by God.

Consequently, Muslim and Christian scholars must work together on a unified front towards the glorification of God's name in both mosques and churches. They must work hard in this regard and God will help them in return. The Qur'an has mentioned this issue in the absolute sense which means that even if an individual helping the mosque, synagogue, or church is not a scholar, this will still become a means of God aiding him; being a scholar is not a requirement for this task.

Received: September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Accepted: October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015

## References

- Ibn Bābawayh, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (1999), *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, compile and recherche by Mahdi Lājewardi, Tehran, Nashr Jahān Publishing House, Tehran.
- Ibn Shu'bah, Ḥasan ibn Alī (1983), *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl -An Āl al-Rasūl*, edited by 'Alī Ghaffārī, Qom, Mu'asasah al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Tābi'ah Lijamā'at al-Mu-darisīn bi Qum, 2<sup>nd</sup> Print.
- Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram (1993), *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr Li al-Tabā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 3<sup>rd</sup> Print.
- John Paul II (2005), *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Brantl, George (2002), *Catholic Rituals*, Translated by Ḥasan Qanbarī, Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Adyān va Mazāheb.
- Ḥurr 'Āmilī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan (1989), *Tafṣīl Wasā'il al-Shī'ah Ilā Tahṣīl Masā'il al-Sharī'ah*, Qom, Mu'asasah Āl al-Bayt Li ihyā' al-Turāth.
- Ḥusaynī Dashtī, Sayyid Muṣṭafā (1990), *Ma'ārif va Ma'ārif*, Qom: Ismā'īlīyān Publications.
- Sayār, Pīrūz (2008), *The Translete of the New Testament Based on the Holy Book of Jerusalem*, Tehran, Nashr Ney, 2<sup>nd</sup> Print.
- Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn (2000), *Al-Itqān Fī Ulūm al-Qurān*, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabī, 2<sup>nd</sup> Print.
- Cong, Hans (2005), *The History of the Catholic Church*, Translated by Ḥasan Qanbarī, Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Adyān va Mazāheb.
- Kāshānī, 'Izz al-Dīn Maḥmūd (1997), *Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāyah wa Miftāḥ al-Kifāyah*, Edited by Jalāl al-Dīn Hamāi, Tehran, Nashr Humā.
- Kelauser, theodor (1979), *A Short History of the Western Liturgy*, Oxford university press.
- Gandomī, Rezā (2005), "Andīsheh Qawm Bargozīdeh Dar Yahūdiyat", in: *Haft Āsemān* 7 (2): 63–102.
- Yazdī, Muḥammad Kāẓim (2001), *Al-Urwat al-Wuthqā Ma'à Ta'ālīq al-Imām al-Khumaynī*, Tehran: Mu'asasah Tanẓīm wa Nashr Āthār Imām Khumaynī.
- Campanhausen, H. V., & Freiherr, H. C. (1969), *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, Stanford University Press.
- Dorsey, D. A. (1991), "The Law of Moses and the Christians: a compromise", in: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 34 (3): 321–334.
- Eisenberg, R. L. (2005), *The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism*, Schreiber Pub.
- Lane-Poole, Stanley (2013), *The Story of Cairo*, London, Forgotten Books.
- McGrath, Alister E. (2013), *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Chichester, West Sussex, U.K., Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Van Hove, A. (1908), *Ecclesiastical Buildings in the Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Robert Appleton Company.