

# The Reformation and Islam: Karl Barth in conversation with Tariq Ramadan and Ali Gomaa<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the use of Barth's understanding of the "Just State" to see how contemporary Western society can accommodate religious pluralism, so that communities of different religious beliefs can strive towards a society which does not simply tolerate one another but finds a way to come together to cohabitate and create an egalitarian and just society for all. The article will attempt to bring into discussion Karl Barth, a twentieth century theologian, Tariq Ramadan, a leading European Muslim scholar and Ali Gomaa, the Egyptian former Grand *Mufti*, with the scope of demonstrating that, despite their different religious backgrounds, it is possible to bring Christianity and Islam into a fruitful conversation that will foster collaboration and understanding of the other.

**Keywords:** Pluralism, Just State, Christian-Muslim debate, Reform Tradition.

Daniel Migliore, in his Gunning Lecture on March 6, 2007, at the University of Edinburgh, argues that the contemporary encounter between Christianity and Islam is "the greatest religious issue of the twenty-first century." Migliore highlights that since 9/11 world events have catapulted Christianity and Islam into a new, complex, and highly charged encounter. In the years since this lecture the litany of events has only increased. Globally there has been a rise in violent extremism, primarily conducted by the group which refers to itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). However, the Province of Quebec has also seen its share of violent extremist acts, leaving the population concerned about the reported rise in Islamophobia and right-wing extremism.

The entire country was shocked when a Quebec City Mosque was attacked by an armed gunman on January 29, 2017. An incident which only added fuel to the debates about religious accommodations and the integration of minority communities within Quebec culture and society. Recently, the Quebec government chose to respond to these issues by enacting Bill 21, which bans all religious symbols for all state employees, a religious neutrality bill which is causing many Muslims to feel targeted and to question whether or not they have become second class citizens.<sup>2</sup> The question that now arises is how do we try to bridge these differences and come to a discourse of cohabitation which is equal and just for all?

To many Karl Barth (a significant theologian in the Reformed tradition of Luther and Calvin) might seem an unlikely interlocutor to facilitate this encounter and discourse between Islam and Christianity as there are only a few passages in his *Church Dogmatics* and other writings where Barth is explicitly concerned with other religions. When he does speak of them, he usually does so in the context of his examination of the understanding of "religion," a term which really does not have the

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1. Paper presented at McGill University on October 31st, 2017, for the Colloquium "500 Years of Reformation & the World Religions." Organized by the Centre for Research on Religion (CREOR), McGill University.

2. The National Assembly of Quebec recently passed Bill 21 which prohibits people from wearing religious symbols while exercising their function as agents of the state. Many see this as a form of discrimination, especially against Muslim women.

religions of the world primarily and concretely in view. Indeed, §17 reserves the term “revelation” solely for revelation in Christ. It denotes God’s own self-disclosure as this is understood in Christian faith. Other religions cannot become the “true religion,” whereas this may be claimed of Christianity, within which human religious capacity is determined by God’s revelation.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the other religions stand a priori under the verdict of being false.

While any discussion about Barth and Islam must recognize this general understanding, this paper will argue that Barth’s understanding of the Just State can accommodate religious pluralism, where members of different religions can come together to discuss justice and the common good of all citizens. Barth’s work can also provide an understanding of truth claims which offers unexpected potential for inter-religious encounter and co-operation. This has a contribution to make to the wider conversation between Muslims and Canadian society. The paper will investigate what such an encounter might look like between Barth, a twentieth century theologian within the reformed tradition, and Muslim scholars such as Tariq Ramadan, Europe’s leading Muslim intellectual once dubbed a “Muslim Martin Luther,” and Ali Gomaa, a former Grand *Mufti* of Egypt and one of the foremost Islamic scholars in the world, on topics ranging from gender equality, to social and economic justice and war.

## I. Barth and Islam

### Islam in Barth’s Early Writings and During the Nazi Era

However, before we begin to use Barth’s Just State, it is imperative that we understand Barth’s perception and understanding of Islam. Hermann Schmidt believes that Barth’s early knowledge of Islam is heavily influenced by the work of Conrad von Orelli’s *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in the confirmation classes of 1909–1910 and 1915–1916 in Safenwil, Barth teaches on world religions. These classes are a mix of fact and opinion. The notes for the 1909–1910 session include some general facts about the Prophet and Islam as understood at that time from a western perspective. This particular session presents Barth’s opinion of Muhammad as “religious and intelligent,” yet self-deluded, deceptive and polygamous, and of Islam as a mechanical religion that is outwardly moral but promises a sensual afterlife.<sup>5</sup>

Jürgen Fangmeier’s footnotes to Barth’s 1915 lesson *Die Religionen* confirms Schmidt’s thesis, citing similarities between Barth’s statements about different world religions and statements made by von Orelli on the same topics.<sup>6</sup> The first glimpse of Barth’s understanding of Islam as a particular threat to contemporary “Christendom” is in an article entitled *Questions to Christendom*, published in 1931. Here Barth states that Christendom is faced with “a whole series of alien religions different from those of the past.”<sup>7</sup> The “new religions” listed by Barth are “Genuine Communism (Russian),” “International

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2. Cf. Barth’s portrayal of Christian life as “true religion” in Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), vol. 1, part 2, 325–361.

3. Conrad von Orelli, *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber’s Verlag, 1911), 380.

4. Anton Drewes ed., *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921* (Zürich: TVZ, 1987), 63–64.

5. Drewes, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe*, 127–130.

6. Karl Barth, *Questions to Christendom (or Christendom’s Present-Day Problems)*, trans. R. B. Hoyle (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1932), 3.

Fascism,” “Americanism” and “New Islam.”<sup>8</sup> Of the new religions listed, the two most closely tied to each other for Barth are International Fascism, in the form of German National Socialism, and New Islam. In December 1938, Barth delivered the lecture “The Church and the Political Questions of our Day” – an analysis of Hitler’s attack on the Jewish people. Here he describes National Socialism as a “proper Church.” Controversially, he speaks of a “new Islam, its myth as a new Allah, and Hitler as this new Allah’s prophet,” against which decisive and final action must be taken.<sup>9</sup>

Barth’s understanding of National Socialism as an all-encompassing threat to Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s (as a false religion) bears similarities to the understanding of Islam “as a strong political force and [...] perpetual threat” in the Europe of Martin Luther’s time.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, Barth understands Islam as a cipher to speak of National Socialism and like National Socialism, Islam’s image of God is idolatrous<sup>11</sup> and hence false.<sup>12</sup> The worship of God by the Turks (Muslims) of Luther’s time was a form of natural religion which parallels Barth’s view of the pseudo-religion of National Socialism.<sup>13</sup> Luther clearly saw the Turks as “an instrument of the devil” – Allah.<sup>14</sup> By comparison, Barth sees devotion to Adolf Hitler – the new Mohammed – as evil. He endorses Luther’s attitude to the Turkish War as providential.<sup>15</sup> Islam was a tangible threat to the Christian world in the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> The Turks had to be repelled then<sup>17</sup> just as the Nazis must be now.

### Islam in Barth’s Dogmatic Writings: Monotheism

In Barth’s *Göttingen Dogmatics*, he discusses the uniqueness of the “oneness” of God. Barth uses Islam as an example of how God’s oneness is misunderstood as monotheism and that Christianity has this attribute in common with Islam.<sup>18</sup> The oneness of God is again addressed in the *Church Dogmatics*, in section I/1 §9, under the header “The Triunity of God.” Here, Barth warns that the Church must speak very carefully about God’s “oneness.” Reiterating his discussion from the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth contends that it is only in revelation that the Church recognizes that it must speak of God as both one and three, and that the “oneness” of God is only such that it includes the idea of the “threeness.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Barth affirms that revelation must be allowed to serve as the only source for describing the being of God.<sup>20</sup> In God’s revelation God discloses Godself to be the God of unity in trinity in whom only the equality of Father, Son and Spirit is compatible with true monotheism – not the monotheism of

7. Barth, *Questions to Christendom*, 4–6.

8. Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 43.

9. J. Paul Rajashekar, “Luther and Islam,” *Lutherjahrbuch*, 57 (1990), 179.

10. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 2, 302.

11. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 875.

12. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 2, 287. Barth uses the word *Turk* in the same sense as Luther. Rajashekar contends that this was a common medieval expression that is synonymous with Islam or Muslims (“Luther and Islam,” 177).

13. Rajashekar “Luther and Islam,” 184.

14. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 25.

15. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 20.

16. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 100.

17. Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 430.

18. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, 351.

19. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, 351–353.

abstraction (e.g. the monotheism of Islam), but the Father, Son, and Spirit are “three distinctive modes of being of the one God subsisting in their relationships one with another.”<sup>21</sup> He quotes Luther in arguing that this relationality guards against false religions, including Islam.<sup>22</sup>

### Islam in Barth’s Dogmatic Writings: A “Paganised” Form of Rabbinic Judaism

Islam is referred to in the *Church Dogmatics* as a “paganised” form of “the semi-biblical religion of post-Christian Judaism,” i.e., Judaism devoid of the doctrines of election and grace.<sup>23</sup> Barth denies that belief in a divine creator, such as that found in the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity is anything more than a superficial similarity between them. The Christian God is different from the God of Judaism and of Islam,<sup>24</sup> where Islam is understood as a “later caricature” of Jewish monotheism.<sup>25</sup> In particular, Barth portrays the synagogue as the enemy of God which practices Jewish obstinacy to the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> This leads Katherine Sonderegger to create a contrasting portrait of Barth as a political supporter of Israel and a portrait of him as an anti-Jewish theologian attached to his anti-Jewish presuppositions. She argues that while Barth has a deep interest in Jews, he has almost no interest in Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

While Barth retains a place for Israel in the economy of salvation, it is as the negative counterpoint to the Church. The Jewish people exist because the promises of God are irrevocable, and the Jews remain elect in spite of their blindness. Sonderegger cautions the reader not to make the association between biblical and rabbinical Judaism as quickly or directly as Barth arguably does. Contemporary Judaism and Jewish practice, are post-biblical and rabbinic – they are Judaism without “temple worship.”<sup>28</sup>

In a parallel vein, one should not make the hasty assumption that Islam is, in Barth’s words, a “paganised” form of “the semi biblical religion of post-Christian Judaism.”<sup>29</sup> As has been shown, Barth had very little interest in Islam or understanding it throughout most of his life, except in its guise as a threat to Medieval Christendom, which he used as a cipher for National Socialism and as an example of absolute or abstract form of monotheism. This is consistent with his general disinterest in and impressionistic understanding of world religions in general. It could also be argued that Barth’s limited understanding of Islam as a “paganised” form of post-Christian Judaism corresponds to his residual anti- Semitism. This can be seen most clearly in his understanding of Ishmael, which in many ways parallels his understanding of the Synagogue:

20. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, 366.

21. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, 365.

22. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 28.

23. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 30.

24. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 1, 453.

25. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 263.

26. Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth’s “Doctrine of Israel”* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 142.

27. Katherine Sonderegger, “Response to Indissoluble Unity,” in *For the sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 82.

28. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 28.

Ishmael, who according to Islamic tradition is the progenitor of the Arab nations and, along with Abraham, the co-founder of the Ka'bah (the central sanctuary of Allah) in Mecca, is described by Barth as being excluded by God in favour of Isaac as the 'repetition and establishment' of God's election of Abraham[...] But Ishmael is not rejected because of some fault of his own. Consequently, Barth recounts that Ishmael is not forsaken by God, but instead will in time become the founder of a great nation. For Barth, Ishmael is clearly aligned with the 'refractory Synagogue' of those who are rejected within elected Israel.<sup>30</sup>

But like that of Judas, Ishmael's rejection is "superseded and limited"<sup>31</sup> because of Jesus Christ, "who died on the cross for the justification of God."<sup>32</sup> In fact, the future of the lost people of Israel, which according to Barth's logic must include Muslims as paganised Jews, is present in the calling "of the Gentiles," which – according to Barth – justifies "the God of Israel even as the God of Ishmael."<sup>33</sup> Through ambiguity, controversy and complexity, theologically, it would seem that Barth not only justifies the future of Jews but also justifies the future of Muslims. This contention is strengthened by Barth himself when he encourages the reader "to recognize Jesus Christ not only in the type of [...] Isaac and his sacrifice but also in the very different type of Ishmael and his expulsion and miraculous protection [...] not only in the type of the Israelite nation but also in the very different type of the excluded and yet not utterly excluded heathen nations."<sup>34</sup> The notion of recognizing Jesus Christ outside Christianity is more fully developed in a small section in his fourth dogmatic specifically in paragraph §69.2, which we will now discuss in further detail.

## II. Truth Outwith the Church

### The First Sense of §69.2 – "The Word and the words"

In §69.2 Barth asks: "Are there 'true words' distinct from the one Word of God, Jesus Christ?" In an attempt to answer this question, Barth introduces the concept of "parables of the kingdom." Whereas the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ, human words can, by God's grace, disclose the kingdom. One set of parables is found in scripture and the church's proclamation. The word of witness as scripture is described as the "direct witness" whereas the word of witness in the church is categorized as the "indirect witness," reflecting the relative proximity of each to the Word of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

If scripture and church proclamation constitute an "inner sphere" of a circle with Christ as the centre, then the secular world constitutes an "outer sphere": true words can be found in both.<sup>36</sup> Secular words which are distinct from that of Jesus Christ are "true" insofar as they stand "in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God."<sup>37</sup> A true secular word will "materially say what [scripture] says, although from a different source and in another tongue."<sup>38</sup> Secular words should also be compatible with the dogmas and confessions of the church, and might even provoke

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29. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 214; 216–217.

30. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 226.

31. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 223.

32. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 231.

33. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 2, 366.

34. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 96.

35. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 97.

36. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 111.

37. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 115.

dogmatic revision.<sup>39</sup> They must also be both comfort and correction for the church.<sup>40</sup> The church, in other words, will be both challenged by secular parables to repent for past sins and to live up to its calling and will be confirmed in that calling, i.e., in its submission to Jesus Christ.

But as useful as secular parables may be, they cannot become norms, unlike the Bible.<sup>41</sup> For Barth, their use will always be provisional and done on an ad hoc basis. Paul Louis Metzger is correct when he says that:

It appears safe to assume that implicit in Barth's statements [...] is the idea that witnesses may emerge from within the context of non-Christian religions. Here then 'secular word' is taken to refer to the whole domain, which stands outside the parameters of the Bible and the church.<sup>42</sup>

Metzger's position is validated by Geoffrey Thompson, who in his unpublished PhD thesis of 1995, recounts a conversation he had with Hans Küng in 1992. During this conversation Küng stated that Barth had confided to him "that although he [Barth] had not explicitly referred to them, he did have the other religions in mind when he was writing the account of extra-ecclesial truth."<sup>43</sup> Barth's concept of secular parables of the kingdom therefore provides some theological justification for a way of conceiving how the words (and actions) of non-Christian religions (which of course could include Islam) might be affirmed as 'signs' or 'parables' of the one Word of God, Jesus Christ.

### **The Second Sense of §69.2 – "Creation and Its 'Lights'"**

Most discussions concerning Karl Barth and truth *extra muros ecclesiae* focus on that part of §69.2 known as "The Word and the words."<sup>44</sup> Thompson argues that for the purposes of inter-religious encounter, any discussion concerning Barth and truth *extra muros ecclesiae* should be extended to include what is commonly termed "Creation and its 'lights.'"<sup>45</sup> Here one finds a second and less commonly noticed sense of Barth's understanding of truth *extra muros ecclesiae*, one which points to aspects of the created order and human creativity that relate indirectly to Jesus Christ. Such truths declare the "orders," "limits," and "directions" in which human and all other creaturely life is lived.<sup>46</sup> Under the heading of "lights which illumine the cosmos," Barth includes as examples: scientific discovery, artistic intuition and

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38. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 127.

39. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 128

40. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 131.

41. Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 127.

42. G. J. Thompson, "'...As open to the world as any theologian could be'? Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions," PhD diss. (University of Cambridge, 1995), 3.

43. See, for example, George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), and David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

44. The titles "The Word and words" and "Creation and Its 'Lights'" are borrowed from Geoff Thompson, "Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 1 (January 2006): 3–24.

45. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 157.

creation, political revolution, moral reorientation and rearmament.<sup>47</sup> Whereas in another list, under the heading of the “essential constants of human existence,”<sup>48</sup> he includes the “state,” “work,” “trade,” the “different forms of human culture,” and “religion.”<sup>49</sup>

### The State as “Truth Outwith the Church”

Even though Barth does not explicitly state that the lights of creation can become parables of the kingdom of heaven, Thompson correctly believes that the argument in which they are set almost exactly parallels that which is associated with Barth’s application of the just state as a parable (analogy) of the kingdom of God.<sup>50</sup> This is seen most clearly in Barth’s essay *The Christian Community and the Civil Community* which is his most concrete expression of the just state.<sup>51</sup> For Barth the just state is a state which strives for justice, peace and the common good for all of its citizens, Christians and non-Christians alike. Christians submit to the authority of the state as this is the ordered context within which the “common life” of humanity can be maintained, and the Gospel preached.<sup>52</sup> The service of the church to the state is therefore directed towards the establishment of a just political order. The church must always hope for a just state which is interested primarily in human beings and not in abstract causes, which is constituted by a commonly acknowledged law which protects all citizens and from which no citizens are exempt.<sup>53</sup>

The church must always hope for a just state which recognises that it must also have special responsibility for those citizens who are socially and economically weak and threatened, and which guarantees its citizens an equality of responsible freedom, i.e., freedom properly balanced by duties towards the common good.<sup>54</sup> In striving for the common good, Barth believes that members of the church can make similar political decisions about “non-Christians” because of their mutual dependency upon God.<sup>55</sup> This is exemplified in a monograph he wrote in 1952, *Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith*.<sup>56</sup>

As a parallel argument to “Creation and its ‘lights,’” Barth’s model of the just state (as a parable of the Kingdom of God) promotes an understanding of democratic society which respects freedom and difference. It represents the desire for a political community which in Nigel Biggar’s words “transcends racial, national, economic, and ideological interests”<sup>57</sup> in the quest for justice for all citizens. Biggar moves on to explain that “it represents the hope for a [political] order ... in which the rights and liberties

46. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 501.

47. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 743.

48. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 3, 743.

49. Thompson, “...As open to the world as any theologian could be,” 194.

50. Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” in *Community, State and Church* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960), 149–189.

51. Barth, “The Christian Community,” 150.

52. Barth, “The Christian Community,” 171–2.

53. Barth, “The Christian Community,” 173.

54. While Barth’s understanding of “non-Christians” does not have adherents of Judaism or Islam explicitly in mind, there is no reason to suggest that this term should not apply to them. For Barth they are fellow-humans and can be caught up in God’s divine promise to be covenant partners with God.

55. Karl Barth, “Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith,” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946–1952* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 149–164.

56. Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth’s Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 168.

of its constitutive peoples are guaranteed.”<sup>58</sup> This is because “each constitutive group and each of its members is assured the freedom to live and grow and act, provided that they respect and co-operate with other such groups – whether linguistic, regional, social, or confessional – and their members.”<sup>59</sup>

In this understanding then, Christians and Muslims are not only able to make similar political decisions, they should also be able to co-operate with each other and make common cause with each other for the betterment of society whilst still maintaining their differences and diverse belief systems. Thompson proposes two formulae which helpfully clarifies this understanding:

The two ‘religious traditions’ [i.e. Christianity and Islam] could be designated RT1 and RT2. The constituent elements could be designated as e1, e2, e3, etc. These elements would combine in ways determined by the respective ‘purposes’ and ‘goals’ of RT1 and RT2. Diversity and overlap combine as follows:

RT1: e1 + e2 + e3 + e4 etc.

RT2: e4 + e5 + e6 + e7 etc.

At the point of overlap, i.e., e4, the religious traditions are brought into a relationship which does not violate the more comprehensive differentiation between RT1 and RT2, a differentiation located in the lack of overlap between the remaining elements in each tradition. The relationship between e3 and e6 may be one of disagreement; that between e2 and e7 may be one of non-oppositional difference.<sup>60</sup>

### III. Barth in Conversation with Contemporary Islamic Scholars

From an Islamic perspective, and in some ways parallel to Barth, Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan<sup>61</sup> argues that the central notions of “modernity” such as democracy, pluralism, human rights, and the protection of minorities are compatible with a true Islamic perspective.<sup>62</sup> Muslims must, however, make clear that there is no particular “Islamic State” to be imposed upon the West and that their social engagement in Western society is not necessarily missionary. It is important therefore for Muslims to learn that their faith contains no injunctions against democratic government.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, Muslims should consider themselves full citizens of the Western nations in which they reside and so participate fully in the organizational, economic, and political affairs of the country without compromising their own values.<sup>64</sup> This aspiration is compatible with Barth’s aspiration for all members of democratic society. Ramadan is also sympathetic to “shared involvement” and “joint action” among religious traditions. In this context, he believes that there has to be recognition that people of differing faiths “hold a great number of convictions and values in common.”<sup>65</sup> Again this is something that the

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57. Biggar, *The Hastening*, 168.

58. Biggar, *The Hastening*, 168.

59. Thompson, “...As open to the world as any theologian could be,” 165–6.

60. Tariq Ramadan is a Swiss Muslim academic, philosopher, and writer. He was a Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at St Antony’s College at the University of Oxford.

61. Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, trans. Saïd Amghar (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2004), 201; 307.

62. Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158–160.

63. Tariq Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery,” in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 161.

64. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 211.



Reformed tradition, through the optic of Barth's work, can agree to; Common Cause with Islam and Gender Equality.

Ramadan is scathing of discrimination against Muslim women in both Eastern and Western societies. But he contends that women's liberation 'Islamic-style' can only come from within, and through, Islam, e.g. from a more gender-balanced reading of Islamic sources.<sup>66</sup> Even though Ramadan sees this as an inherently Islamic issue, it serves to remind Christianity of its role in promoting "women's rights, decision making within couples ... social involvement and female participation in academic and political debates."<sup>67</sup>

Christians and Muslims are duty bound to show solidarity with women of all religious backgrounds as they fight "for [the] recognition of their status, for equality, for the right to work and to equal pay" within society."<sup>68</sup> This complements Barth's understanding that the state must stand for the equality, freedom and responsibility of all citizens and that this equality must not be "restricted by any differences of religious belief or unbelief."<sup>69</sup> In fact, Christians should "urge that the restriction of the political freedom and responsibility not only of certain classes and races but, supremely, that of women is an arbitrary convention which does not deserve to be preserved any longer."<sup>70</sup>

### Social and Economic Justice

In his book *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Ramadan argues that:

The Age of globalization is an age of upheaval, or more accurately of reversal, that condones the domination of economics and financial markets over all other areas of human activity. Globalization is first and foremost economic, rather than political, cultural, or technological.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, Ramadan contends that Muslims should produce economists but avoid the reductiveness of regarding people as homo economicus.<sup>72</sup> He advocates a moral framework which recognizes that collective interests have to be taken into account over and above individual ones.<sup>73</sup> Central to this notion is the belief that "everyday, simple, and natural economic activity contains a moral quality."<sup>74</sup> Ramadan finds support for this point of view from an unlikely source – George Soros, the billionaire New York financier. In an interview about his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, Soros states:

The markets are good for expressing individual self-interest. But society is not simply an aggregation of individual interests. There are collective interests that don't find expression in market values. Markets cannot be the be-all and end-all. These collective decisions, and even individual decisions, must involve the question of right and wrong. People have to be treated as people. [...] I am worried about the replacement of professional

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65. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 140.

66. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 141.

67. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 142.

68. Karl Barth, "The Christian Community," 175.

69. Barth, "The Christian Community," 175.

70. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 174.

71. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 177.

72. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 178–182.

73. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 178.

values by market values. Turning law or medicine into businesses. I think it changes the character of those activities. In the case of politics, the huge role of money in elections undermines the political process.<sup>75</sup>

C. J. Green notes that markets have long antedated modern capitalism and there are fundamental ethical and policy issues that the market can never answer.<sup>76</sup> Capitalism has proved to be a very successful generator of wealth that is needed to improve living standards among the poor, but it should also be recognised that “even moderately controlled capitalism cannot equitably distribute that wealth.”<sup>77</sup> Green is therefore correct in arguing that “structuring a just economic global economy is a complex and demanding task.”<sup>78</sup> The question then becomes, could Christians learn more from Islam on this socio-economic aspect?

Ramadan draws our attention to the Muslim community’s management of *zakat*. *Zakat* (almsgiving) is the third pillar of Islam. According to Ramadan, its very essence

[...] projects the believer into the sphere of the community, which is thus permeated by Transcendence and the sacred. At the same time, what underpins *zakat* is a full and ethical conception of social organization and human relations: those who have possessions have duties; those who are unprovided for have rights before God and among men. Islam does not conceive of poverty as a normal feature of the social arena and does not envisage that the remedy for this distortion should be the free generosity of some toward others in the hope that the wealth of the rich and the destitution of the poor may somehow miraculously find a point of balance. The obligation of *zakat* puts this question into the realm of law and morality and cannot be left to anyone’s discretion. Social solidarity is part of the faith and is its most concrete testimony: to be with God is to be with people [...] <sup>79</sup>

Ramadan contends that “different kinds of support are needed for unemployed people and disabled people, for educated people and people with no education, and so on. In order to build such programs, it is necessary to study one’s society and one’s community, to get close to the poor, the unemployed, the disabled, to understand the logic of marginalization, the various kinds of social and financial breakdowns, and the range of difficulties.”<sup>80</sup>

This is because “[t]he philosophy of the ‘right of the poor’ and solidarity that is written at the heart of the requirement of *zakat* requires a long-term global vision that will set in motion a dynamic for socialization through employment, economic participation, and financial independence.”<sup>81</sup> This envisions creating “enterprises, businesses, and insurance and other companies that will make it possible for them [the poor] to live and develop in their respective societies.”<sup>82</sup> Barth’s understanding of human work can help Christians make common cause with thinkers like Ramadan in trying to develop in Ramadan’s words “authentic solidarity programs that will help men and women toward social and economic autonomy.”<sup>83</sup>

74. George Soros and Jeff Madrick, “The International Crisis: An Interview,” *New York Review of Books*, January 14, 1999, 40. Cited by C. J. Green, “Freedom for Humanity: Karl Barth and the Politics of the New World Order,” in *For The Sake of The World: Karl Barth and The Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), 97–8.

75. Green, “Freedom for Humanity,” 97–8.

76. Green, “Freedom for Humanity,” 97–8.

77. Green, “Freedom for Humanity,” 105.

78. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 178–9.

79. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193.

80. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193.

81. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 197.

82. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193.

For Barth, “work” refers to a person’s active affirmation of his or her existence as a human creature. It embodies “the desire of men to ‘prolong’ their own lives and those of their relatives, i.e., to maintain, continue, develop and mould them, to secure and hold at the common table of life a place in closest keeping with their desires and requirements, or, in less grandiose terms, to earn their daily bread and a little more.”<sup>84</sup> For Barth, then, work establishes a level of autonomy in caring for one’s own life which doesn’t necessarily exclude being assisted by others.<sup>85</sup> Barth posits that work ought to take place in cooperation with others, but often it appears primarily as an isolated or hostile “struggle for existence.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, what should be governed by mutual co-ordination of human needs is perverted by the lust for security that superabundance brings, for possessions and for power over others.

However, “[t]he genuine and vital claims of man are not empty and inordinate desires of this kind.”<sup>87</sup> Whenever the organization of work involves concentrated private ownership of the means of production, the opportunity arises for these desires to be expressed structurally in the exploitation of persons who, possessing limited economic power, are unable in truth to deal on fair terms with their employers regarding the contract of labour. Barth challenges Christianity to champion “the weak against any encroachment on the part of the strong”<sup>88</sup> through “counter-movements” which may be described as “socialism in the form most helpful in a specific time and place and in a specific situation.”<sup>89</sup> But the Church’s “decisive word cannot consist in the proclamation of social progress or socialism. It can consist only in the proclamation of the revolution of God against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man” (Rom. 1:18), i.e., in the proclamation of His kingdom as it has already come and comes.”<sup>90</sup>

Barth’s call for counter-movements to champion “the weak against any kind of encroachment on part of the strong” demonstrates in fact a “preferential option for the poor,” a concept that is parallel to Ramadan’s “right of the poor.”<sup>91</sup> His understanding thus encourages Christians to see that what Ramadan is proposing is in fact a counter-movement, of the type Barth advocates and one that is a challenge to the Church. William Werpehowski states that this understanding “completes and does not jeopardize the commended community of mutual assistance; for those who are most marginalized and powerless to take part in communal life are cherished and honoured, as the human creatures they are, through special efforts to enable and empower them to participate in this way.”<sup>92</sup> A sentiment that parallels that of Ramadan.

### War: Islamic Jihadism

Shaykh Ali Gomaa (the former Grand Mufti of Egypt) notes that the concept of Jihad in Islam is surrounded by a “cacophony aiming at equating jihad with mass murder and random shooting sprees.”<sup>93</sup>

83. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, 525.

84. Cf. Ramadan’s desire for social and economic autonomy.

85. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, 538.

86. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, 538.

87. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 544.

88. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 545.

89. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 3, 545.

90. William Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 236, referencing J. P. Gunneman, “Capitalism and Commutative Justice,” in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 1985* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1986), 235.

91. Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics,” 235.

92. Shaykh Ali Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” in *War and Peace in Islam: The Uses and Abuses of Jihad*, ed. Ghazi bin Muhammad, Kaln Ibrahim, and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2013), 153.

He emphasizes that in Islam there is the belief that the Prophet is “a mercy to all the worlds [and this belief] encompasses all the concepts and/or ideologies which stem from Islam... including the concept of jihad.”<sup>94</sup> He reminds us that the Qur’an forbids murder whilst extolling the sanctity of human life.<sup>95</sup> The purpose or aim of jihad or of conducting wars for the sake of God is to be done in self-defence and fighting back against aggression, alleviating religious persecution and establishing freedom of religion.<sup>96</sup> War should not be carried out for personal gain and fighting should be only against combatants and not defenceless civilians who are not in the battle field and who are not equipped or trained to be engaged in combat.<sup>97</sup>

The killing or harming of women and children is strictly prohibited.<sup>98</sup> The lives of captives should be preserved, and they should be treated humanely. Religious freedom should be preserved for worshippers in “their homes, churches or synagogues.”<sup>99</sup> Gomaa is also clear that current acts of terrorism involving Muslims, claiming to be performing jihad, is not actually jihad.<sup>100</sup> He is clear that terrorism cannot be the outcome of any proper understanding of religion.<sup>101</sup> “The true noble knight jihadist” he says “is the one who lays the foundation of justice and freedom for all people, regardless of their personal religious convictions. Therefore, the concept of jihad being a legitimate war is a true and well-defined one even by our modern definitions of just wars according to the United Nations’ charter on wars.”<sup>102</sup>

He goes on to write that the prophet Mohammad was the role model who applied the different concepts of mercy, justice and freedom laid down in the Qur’an. He showed Muslims how to conduct and abide by these concepts practically.<sup>103</sup> Barth’s attitude to war can be paralleled to that of Gomaa and could encourage solidarity with Gomaa in respect to justice and freedom for all people. In particular, Christians ought not to assure the state that in the exercise of power “the state and its organs may do gaily and confidently whatever it thinks is right.”<sup>104</sup> Their role is to make a “detached and delaying movement” that calls “for peace right up to the very last moment,” and encourages the state “to fashion peace in such a way that life is served and war is kept at bay.”<sup>105</sup>

The Christian community, for Barth, “is not commissioned to proclaim that war is absolutely avoidable. But it is certainly commissioned to oppose the [...] doctrine that war is inevitable and therefore justified, that it is unavoidable and therefore right when it occurs, so that Christians have to participate in it.”<sup>106</sup> On the contrary, by refusing to “howl with the pack,” by seeking peaceably “to keep war at bay,” and more generally by trying in political life to construct true peace in international relations in

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93. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 154.

94. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 154.

95. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 155.

96. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 156.

97. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 156.

98. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 156.

99. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 159.

100. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 161.

101. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 159.

102. Gomaa, “A fatwa on Jihad,” 160.

103. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol.3, part 4, 456.

104. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol.3, part 4, 456–458.

105. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol.3, part 4, 460.

conformity with normative humanity, Christians act to enable discernment of when war is, tragically, morally necessary.<sup>107</sup> In this Barth shares common ground with Gomaa.

### Conclusion

In her address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2010, Muslim female scholar Mona Siddiqui asked:

In [the] development of pluralism a central question for all religious communities today is to what extent can they use scripture and the post scriptural intellectual and social traditions to work out the basis of contemporary normative ethics. With [...] the demise of institutional religion, how does one face the challenge of being innovative whilst at the same time staying engaged with legacy of tradition?<sup>108</sup>

This is a question not only for Scottish society but for Canadian society as well as other Western countries. While Barth's dogmatic theology is certainly within the legacy of the Reformed tradition, he departs from Luther and Calvin over the question of Christ's reconciling work. His understanding of election and reconciliation is far more open than those that were proposed by many of his Reformed predecessors: for Barth all humanity, and not just some, are eternally elected in Christ. This is of fundamental importance to Christian inter-religious encounter and provides a space for scholars to appropriate his work and to utilize it as a lens or as an approach to better understand how it is that this type of inter-religious discourse can take place.

But Barth's work is not a comprehensive "theology of religions." It is a theological resource for a particular type of inter-religious encounter. It is an explicitly Christian theological resource which inevitably constructs occurrences of extra-ecclesial truth on its own terms. As Thompson correctly observes:

In general terms it is impossible not to work within the terms of a particular tradition, and some violation of [the other's] self-understanding is inevitable. Moreover [...] attempts to adopt any tradition-free position are largely illusory.<sup>109</sup>

But here lies the strength of using Barth's theology as a resource for inter-religious discourse/encounter in a secular and pluralistic context. To answer Siddiqui's question: it can be used innovatively whilst at the same time staying engaged with the legacy of its Reformed tradition, because through the particularity of their faith, Christians can relate to Muslims in the confidence that the grace of God, made known in Jesus Christ, is at work by the power of the Holy Spirit, even where it is not recognized – beyond the boundaries of the Church.<sup>110</sup>

Encounters can occur which focus on making common cause between these two world faiths on certain issues and values they share in modern, secular, and pluralistic Canada. Islam can speak to Christianity about its life and purpose by emerging, in Barth's terminology, as a 'secular' word of the Kingdom of God. Through Barth's theology, Christianity can have the potential to "be open to

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106. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, 460.

107. Mona Siddiqui, "General Assembly Address" (2010 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, May 26, 2010).

108. Thompson, "...As open to the world as any theologian could be," 173.

109. For further discussion see Migliore, "The Different Power of God."

transformation by what it learns” from truth claims made by Muslims, such as Ramadan, Goma and others.<sup>111</sup> But in response, Christianity has to decide if it is willing to listen to God’s grace as it comes through the voice of Islam or indeed through the voice of any other. This is a decision that could have significant political and social repercussions as well as theological and cultural ones. Hopefully, it can be a decision that can be made for the common good of all Canadian citizens.

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110. John Cobb, “Beyond Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 93.

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