

“Faith Supremacism”

Evaluated

*Islam's disavowal of what hardliners
claim about condescension to
Muslims and non-Muslim
in the name of the religion*

All praise be to Allah. Salutations and peace be upon Muhammad, the Master of the Messengers, the Imam of those who are humble, and upon his family, companions and followers.

Noble Traits of Character

This religion came for the guidance of the entire creation. It calls them to noble traits of character, bonds of kinship, leaving discord and dispute, adopting humility, gentleness and other outstanding moral qualities. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) even said, "I was only sent to perfect moral character." He forbade bad character. He eliminated bigotry, casteism, arrogance and supremacism on earth. So how strange are those who establish concepts that are contrary to what the Master of the Messengers came with, claiming that those concepts are part of faith! One of these blatantly transgressive concepts is 'faith supremacism.'

When was the concept of 'faith supremacism' founded?

Among the misconceptions and ugly distortions of hard-line groups is the concept of 'faith supremacism.'

The writer, Sayyid Qutb, established its origin in his book, 'In the Shade of the Quran.' He devoted an article to it titled, 'The Faith Triumphant,' in his book, 'Milestones.' Hard-line groups and imputers of disbelief to others seized this meaning and colored themselves with it, making superiority a path to arrogance and condescension, even to their fathers, mothers, teachers and Shaykhs, failing to respect anyone's rights, until it came to some of them killing their mother while she was praying, after they had declared her a disbeliever.

We found 'faith supremacism' as conceived and founded by the dissenter neither in the Prophetic era nor thereafter in the era of the Companions nor in the era of those who followed in the first three generations, nor even in following generations; neither by name nor by meaning.

Rather, the pure Sacred Law came with the contrary.

How did extremists understand the meaning of 'faith supremacism'?

That a believer should look down with contempt at whoever is contrary to him, because others are people of ignorance and astray.

He says in 'In the Shade of the Quran' (145/1), "And [Islam] gave [the Muslim nation] the superiority by which they look on the flocks of stray mankind in the expanses of ignorance in the far-flung corners of the earth. So they feel that God has given them what He had not given to any other people."

So Ustadh Sayyid Qutb theorizes and founds a dangerous concept, which we can call 'the arrogance of faith.'

We do not know how that meaning and the feelings it puts forth in an individual's heart and conscience can stand up to God's saying:

{They say, 'Praise be to God, who guided us to this: had God not guided us, We would never have found the way'} [Surah A'raf:43], and His saying: {Remember Him: He has guided you. Before that you were astray} [Surah Baqara:198].

Misguided thoughts... and reactions

Nothing can be said about that bizarre notion that has nothing to do with Islam, except that it is stray ideology. Its owner is more deserving of being ascribed to ignorance than those he calls to be looked down on.

We find this notion loaded with meanings and values that are contrary to the Sacred Law and the Prophetic way, such as looking down on creation and despising others, and it is full of enmity, hatred and rejection of others. If anything, it indicates sick souls suffering from persecution and deprivation, which both resulted in the reactions we see of calling for supremacism, etc.

The suffering they experienced had a great impact on their souls, thoughts and hostile orientation towards governments and societies. In fact, towards anyone who contradicted them. So they began to search sacred texts and cherry-pick what suited their desires, without regard to context or principles.

What is the dissenter's evidence for this corrupt notion?

Sayyid Qutb cited a verse from Allah's Book and two incidents from the lives of the righteous predecessors.

The verse is His saying: {Do not lose heart or despair- if you are true believers you have the upper hand} (Aal Imran:139).

Among the incidents of the predecessors, he mentioned two incidents of two Companions, may Allah be pleased with them :

- 1. The first is the incident between the Companion al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba and Rustum, Commander of Persia.**
- 2. The second is the incident between the Companion Rib'i ibn Amir with Rustam as well, before the event of al-Qadisiyya.**

The two stories point to the deception of the world and its appearances, and the Prophet's two Companions (peace and blessings be upon him) countering this with pride in the religion, paying no attention to worldly appearances, and inviting to depart worship of creation to worship of the Creator of creation, Sublime is He!

He began arguing for his dissenting understanding of the aforementioned verse:

"The first thought which comes to mind on reading this verse is that it relates to the form of Jihad which is actual fighting." He then emends, saying, "But the spirit of this message and its application, with its manifold implications, is greater and wider than this particular aspect."

He generalizes this state that he theorizes. He says, "Indeed, it describes that eternal state of mind which ought to inspire the believer's consciousness, his thoughts and his estimates of things, events, values and persons. It describes a state of superiority, which should remain fixed in the believer's heart to everything, every situation, every value and every person; the superiority of the faith and its value above all values that are derived from a source other than the source of the faith."

We do not know from where the ustadh and writer got the meaning of His saying {you have the upper hand} to be: prevail over the creation through faith?!

How did the scholars of the ummah understand the verse?

Firstly: The meaning of superiority in the Quran: **- The first meaning: emergence and victory**

There is the Exalted's saying: {Whoever wins today is sure to prosper} [Surah Taha:64] i.e. whoever gains the upper hand [Taj al-Arus by az-Zabidi (7/27)]².

And His saying: {Do not lose heart or despair- if you are true believers you have the upper hand} (Aal Imran:139). And: {So [believers] do not lose heart and cry out for peace. It is you who have the upper hand: God is with you. He will not begrudge you the reward for your [good] deeds} [Surah Muhammad:35]. Meaning, you are the victors. The meaning is evident from the context of the verses.

- The second meaning: pride and exaltation

This is exclusive to God, as in your saying, "Most Exalted is He!" i.e. He is proud and exalted above all that is unbecoming of His Supreme Essence. In this sense, it is a blameworthy trait for creation that is forbidden in the sacred law. A sacred narration says, "Pride is My cloak and might My robe. Whoever vies with Me over one of them, I shall cast him into Hell and I would not care." And in a narration: "I will break him." And the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "No one with an atom's worth of arrogance will enter paradise."³

Secondly: The rebuttal of the people of exegesis and knowledge of the corrupt inference of the dissenter

The point of contention in this matter is the distortion of the meaning of the Exalted's saying: {you have the upper hand}. It is stated in two verses in the Book of Allah: in Surah Aal Imran:139 and Surah Muhammad:35.

The meaning of {you have the upper hand} as the exegetes said, is: the victors, the ones who are helped, those who come out on top.

The Shaykh of the exegetes, at-Tabari, said in his exegesis (76/6): {Do not lose heart or despair} O Companions of Muhammad. Meaning, do not become weak by your enemy's attacks on you at Uhud –deaths and wounds— from fighting your enemy. {Do not despair}. Do not grieve such that you become agitated over the misfortune that befell you that day, for {you have the upper hand}. Meaning, those who come out on top. You will have an outcome of victory over them {if you are true believers}.

2- Reported by Ahmad (7382), Abu Dawud (4090), Ibn Maja (4174) and others, from the marfu' narration of Abu Hurayra, Allah be pleased with him.

3- Reported by Muslim (91) in the Book of Faith and by others, from the marfu' narration of Abdullah ibn Masud, Allah be pleased with him.

A number of Imams agreed with Imam at-Tabari regarding this meaning. Among them are:

1. ad-Dhahhak ibn Muzahim (102) – Tafsir ibn Abi Hatim (771/3)
2. Imam Mujahid ibn Jabr (103) – Tafsir at-Tabari (228/21)
3. Muqatil ibn Sulayman (150) in his exegesis (53/4)
4. Abu Ishaq al-Tha'labi (427) – Tafsir al-Kashf wal Bayan (172/3)
5. Nasir ad-Din al-Baydhawi (685) – Anwar at-Tanzil (125/5)
6. Imam an-Nasafi (710) – Madarik at-Tanzil wa Haqaiq at-Tawil (295/1)
7. Imam Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi (745) – al-Bahr al-Muhit (353/3)
8. Imam ibn Kathir (774)

Imam ar-Razi mentioned facets in his exegesis of it. He said about the aforementioned meaning: This is extremely appropriate [Tafsir ar-Razi (12/9)].

These are the words of the exegetes. In the commentary of the verse, not the slightest allusion came to what Sayyid Qutb mentioned! We thus see the extent of the dissenter's deviation from the meaning and his erroneous inference from this verse.

Sayyid Qutb was a writer, and not a scholar of the principles and derivation of legal rulings. So his pen exceeded his bounds to this distorted meaning. And it influenced his followers and produced conceit and supremacism.

He deviated from the original meaning, which is that a Muslim or believer must not be afflicted with weakness or feebleness, and what is meant by the scholars' saying, "The truth prevails and is not prevailed over," to his notion that a Muslim or believer must exalt himself above others, because he is a believer; and that non-believers are ignorant and astray, and that a believer, whether strong or weak, must look down on them.

Between honor and arrogance

In both incidents that the dissenter inferred from, the two great Companions faced the Commander of the enemy army, surrounded by his entourage in all their pomp and pride, arrogantly trying to attack Muslim honor and pride. So they (may Allah be pleased with them) were in a situation of showing Islam's glory, servitude to Allah and seeking the hereafter versus delusion over the pomp of disbelief and seeking this lower world.

Pause here.

Confusion often occurs between the understanding of pride and honor, which are required of a Muslim, and arrogance towards others, which Allah and His Messenger forbade, even towards non-Muslims.

About that, Allah the Exalted, says: {We grant the Home in the Hereafter to those who do not seek superiority on earth or spread corruption: the happy ending is awarded to those who are mindful of God} [Surah Qasas:83].

Reflect on the Exalted's saying: {who do not seek superiority on earth}. He did not make an exception for Muslims by permitting them to seek superiority on earth.

However, what is surprising is there is no ambiguity about pride or arrogance [over the dissenter's concept]. Rather, the call is explicit towards condescension, arrogance and contempt for others, as appears evidently in the conduct of the adopters of this ideology.

It cannot be said that arrogance towards disbelievers and the corrupt is permissible, because even those who permitted it stated parameters and specific cases. The erudite al-Qarafi says in his book 'al-Furuq' (4/245), "Arrogance is fundamentally prohibited. Something may occur that moves it from being prohibited to either being mandatory, as with arrogance towards disbelievers during wars..."

God Most Exalted did not permit arrogance for anyone in His creation. It is only the devil's propaganda: 'I am better than him' [Surah A'raf:12], by which he deceives the children of Adam, to cause them to fall into his sin that led to his expulsion and execration.

The meaning of His saying, {hard on the disbelievers}

Some might cite His saying: {You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who fight in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach} [Surah Ma'ida:54].

This and other verses that contain a meaning of hardness on the disbelievers are linked to a state of fighting and war. It is not the fundamental way in the beautiful conduct Muslims should have with non-Muslims that the Prophet's and his Companions' lives established (peace and blessings be upon him).

The meaning of the verse: {humble} compassionate {towards the believers, hard} tough {on the disbelievers, and who fight in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach} provided that they are in a state of fighting. This is contrary to the state of the hypocrites. They would ally with the Jews. When they would set out in the army of the Muslim believers, they would fear their allies, the Jews, and do nothing they knew would bring them reproach from the Jews.⁴

The Companions' understanding and application of Islam's honor

There are many situations involving the noble Companions that clarify the praiseworthy and sought meaning of Muslim pride. Our master Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) clarifies practical implementation of pride, and that it is not condescension and arrogance towards Muslims and non-Muslims as we see from the hardliners and imputers of disbelief to others.

When our master Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) arrived in the Levant, an army had come to him. He was wearing a loin-cloth, khufs (leather socks) and a turban. He took hold of his camel's head and began to wade the water. The [Muslims] said to him, "O Commander of the Believers! The army –the disaster of the Levant-- is ahead of you, while you are in this state." Umar replied, "We are a people whom Allah has honoured with Islam, so we will never seek honour through anything else."

It is a situation that manifests the meaning of pride through this religion, and not being deluded by satan, his seduction and his embellishment of error and disbelief.

You cannot sense any meaning of superiority in this incident in the sense that is presented by the dissenter and promoted by the graduates and callers to this hard-line idea.

4- Tafsir al-Kashshaf (1/643) and Tafsir Jalalayn (1/147).

There is no supremacism in the life of the Seal of the Prophets (peace and blessings be upon him)

Furthermore, where is this 'faith supremacism'—according to their expression—in the Prophet's conduct (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) with the disbelievers of Quraysh throughout his noble dawah (call) in Mecca?

If some allege that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was oppressed in Mecca, we say:

First, this makes no difference to the dissenter, since he says in 'Milestones': "It means to feel superior to others when weak, few and poor, as well as when strong, many and rich."

Second, that does not reflect here, because on the Day of the Liberation of Mecca, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was in a state of war with the disbelievers who harmed him, drove him out, tortured his Companions, killed his uncle, and he had entered victorious, but despite that, he showed unequalled mercy and gentleness to the disbelievers of Quraysh.

He lowered his head until his noble beard almost touched the saddle of his dromedary. He entered in prostration, humble to his Lord Most Sublime. Reflect on his saying to the disbelievers, even in the state of war, teaching his ummah during the Liberation of Mecca: "You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you... Go, you are free."

And he says to Uthman ibn Talha after returning the key of the Kaba to him: "Uthman, take the keys for these are yours. This the day of good faith and benevolence."

And when Sa'd ibn Ubada said, "This is the day of slaughter!", the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "Sa'd lied. This is the day of mercy."

Gentle words

In fact, Allah Most Exalted commanded the Prophets (peace be upon them) to speak gently. In His command to Moses the Converser and his brother Aaron (peace be upon them both) when meeting Pharaoh, He said: '{Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds. Speak to him gently so that he may take heed or fear.' They said, 'Lord, we fear he will do us great harm or exceed all bounds.' He said, 'Do not be afraid, I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything'} [Surah Taha:64].

Is the Exalted's saying {'I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything'} not like His saying {'Do not lose heart or despair- if you are true believers you have the upper hand'}? Both verses have a sense of strengthening, support and help, and not as the dissenter claims!

The Quranic methodology of interacting with dissenters

There is no command or directive as understood by them in the pure sacred law or the pure prophetic guidance. There is no command to supremacism, be it with regard to individuals, ideas or laws.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) came with following the truth and giving victory to it, and not being deluded with falsehood. Among his guidance in his call to the creation was what his Lord revealed to him in the Noble Quran: {'Call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided'} [Surah Nahl:125].

{Do not argue with the People of the Book except in the best way [Surah Ankabut:46].

{Tell My servants to say what is best. Surely, Satan sows discord among them} [Surah Isra:53].

Among Allah's guidance to His Prophet upon the stubborn resistance of his enemies to the truth and their delusion over their falsehood was:

{So be patient, for God's promise is true: do not let those with no firm beliefs discourage you} [Surah Rum:60].

{So be steadfast as (other) Messengers were with unwavering determination, and do not hasten (to seek the torment) for these (deniers)} [Surah Rum:60].

{Therefore be patient, with a beautiful patience} [Surah Ma'arij:5].

And Allah Most Sublime taught his ummah propriety, saying to them:

{The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, 'Peace'} [Surah Furqan:63].

{We grant the Home in the Hereafter to those who do not seek superiority on earth or spread corruption: the happy ending is awarded to those who are mindful of God} [Surah Qasas:83].

{Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for God does not love arrogant or boastful people} [Surah Luqman:83]. This is the Most Exalted's command to His Prophet and his ummah in dealing with dissenters and disavowers who are hostile to the truth and call to and support falsehood.

The semantics of superiority in the verses is patience, holding on to the truth, not being deceived by deniers and prattlers, along with the heart being attached to the Lord and having certainty in His help.

So where in what preceded is the statement of the dissenter, "It means to feel superior to others when weak, few and poor, as well as when strong, many and rich"?

Wisdom is the lost property of a believer

With regard to ideas, laws, morality and customs, the Legislator (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) taught his ummah the propriety that his Lord taught him, which was that the Sacred Law consents to, accepts and nurtures whatever came before that conformed to the truth, even if it came from a person, society or entity unheeded by people. And it refuses and in no way accepts whatever does not conform to the truth. Reflect on the Prophet's saying (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) about an alliance he witnessed during the days of Jahiliyya:

"I was present in the house of Abdallah ibn Judan at so excellent a pact that I would not exchange my part in it for a herd of red camels; and if now, in Islam, I were summoned unto it, I would gladly respond."

The intent is that noble values are found in humanity, scattered amongst them. Islam came consenting to those values, calling to them and confirming them. Whenever a Muslim encounters them, he recognizes them and will not disavow them. And he is more befitting to possess them.

Conclusion

1. Faith supremacism is a contrived misperception that sows arrogance and contempt of others in the soul. Sayyid Qutb conceived and founded it in his books. Hardliners and imputers of disbelief to others applied it in their conduct with Muslims and non-Muslims as seen.
2. There is no sacred text or proof for this misconception. It is nothing but the opinions and inferences of a writer who did not have much sacred knowledge, as is well known. We did not find usage of this construct (faith supremacism) either by name or meaning in Quranic or Prophetic guidance or in the first three generations or thereafter.
3. The dissenter cited for his idea a verse from Allah's Book and two incidents about two great Companions. As for the verse, the understanding of it has gone against the exegetes and the people of knowledge. As for the two incidents, he has confused a believer's pride with the supremacism and condescension that he calls to.
4. There is a difference between the pride that a believer should have in servitude to Allah and seeking the hereafter rather than delusion over the pomp of disbelief and seeking this lower world, and the supremacism that Sayyid Qutb calls to and that the graduates of this idea practise today as arrogance and contempt.
5. There is no supremacism in the Prophet's life (peace and blessings be upon him and his family); not towards Muslims or non-Muslims. Not in a state of war or otherwise. It is but love, mercy, doing good and humility.
6. There is no command or directive in the pure sacred law or the pure prophetic guidance as understood by the dissenters of supremacism towards individuals, ideas or laws. Rather, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) came with following the truth and giving victory to it, and not being deluded with falsehood.