
Faith, Freedom and E Pluribus Unum

From the Beginning: Muslims Playing an Integral Role in American Society

Diversity in Action: The MWL and the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York

Speech and Interview Excerpts: the Washington Times and the New York Post

A California Success Story: Shereen Sabet of Splashgear

NOVEMBER 2019

VOL 50 | NO 11 | DUL QADAH



FAITH & FREEDOM

The MWL in the US



*A true Muslim is an
ambassador for Islam,
reflecting its values
and principles.*

— Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim
Al-Issa, Secretary General of
the Muslim World League

About the MWL

The Muslim World League is a non-governmental international organization based in Makkah. Its goal is to clarify the true message of Islam.

Crown Prince Faisal, the third son of King Abdulaziz Al Saud, founded the Muslim World League during the meeting of the general Islamic Conference on May 18, 1962, in order to fulfill his dream for an Islamic Ummah. The establishment of the MWL continued the vision of the Crown Prince to enlighten and educate the international Muslim community, which began with the founding of the Islamic University of Madinah in 1961. The Muslim World League has grown into a worldwide charity to which the Saudi Royal Family remain active donors.

Ascending to the throne as King Faisal in November 1964, the Saudi leader remained steadfast in his faith, proclaiming: "I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. 'Majesty' is reserved to God alone and 'the throne' is the throne of the Heavens and Earth."

Contents

NOVEMBER 2019 | VOLUME 51 | ISSUE 11

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. The Month in Review | 4 |
| 2. Letter from the Editor Faith, Freedom and E Pluribus Unum | 8 |
| 3. Editorial Leaders From the Beginning: Muslims Playing an Integral Role in American Society | 10 |
| Muslims and the US Military: An Unexplored History of Service and Dedication | 14 |
| 4. Editorial Features Diversity in Action: The MWL and the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York | 16 |
| Distant Civilizations with Communal Commonalities: The MWL, the Mormon Church and Humanitarian Values | 20 |
| The Future of Public Discourse: Dr. Al-Issa Visits Washington | 24 |
| 5. Special Feature Speech and Interview Excerpts: the Washington Times and the New York Post | 28 |
| 6. Cultural Essay Brigham Young University's Arabic Translation Series: A Promotion of Classic Islamic Literature | 29 |
| The Metropolitan: The MWL Visits the Islamic Treasures in New York City | 31 |
| 7. Women and Society A California Success Story: Shereen Sabet of Splashgear | 33 |
| 8. Historical Essay The Story of Thomas Jefferson and His Qu'ran | 34 |



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MWL in November

Highlights of the Month in Review

“Whether we realize the reasonableness of God’s demands, whether we can fully penetrate into it, we all agree that his demands are reasonable.”

—H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, speaking at the Brigham Young University Kennedy Center for International Studies, November 2019

OCTOBER 20

The Muslim World League signed an agreement with the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. The new partnership will bring together rabbis and imams and their respective synagogues and mosques to engage in critical interfaith dialogue. The agreement “recognizes the importance of unity in the face of hate.”

OCTOBER 20-21

In New York City, Dr. Al-Issa explored the New York Public Library’s collection of religious texts. As the Secretary-General commented on the visit: “Education is key to fostering greater understanding among people and faiths.” He also visited the newly expanded Islamic art and antiquities galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on a private tour of the collection with Dr. Navina Haidar. The MWL noted that the art at the Met is “an example of the cultural communication between Muslim and non-Muslim communities around the world.”



Dr. Al-Issa with Jason Greenblatt, Senior Advisor to President Trump.

OCTOBER 22

Dr. Al-Issa also had the honor to meet the chaplain of the United States Senate, Dr. Barry Black. The two faith leaders shared their visions of greater harmony and understanding among religious communities in the US and around the world.

OCTOBER 29

In a wide-ranging interview for the Washington Times, Dr. Al-Issa discussed how diversity is an essential part of life and natural to all societies, and should never be so manipulated as to become the source of hatred and dissent.

OCTOBER 29-31

In the US capital, MWL Secretary General Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa met with Mr. Jason Greenblatt, an advisor to President Trump. Dr. Al-Issa also met with Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Michigan), a long-time supporter of Arab-American causes and who represents one of the oldest and most vibrant Muslim communities in the US. The two discussed the role of the MWL in uniting all faiths as a cultural and spiritual force to effect peace in the world.

OCTOBER 30

In Washington, Dr. Al-Issa met with the National Council on US-Arab Relations (NCUSAR); the two organizations share values of collaboration and aimed to find solutions to the challenges of misinformation and prejudice thinking that is overwhelming and undermining modern society and civilized values.

NOVEMBER 4

In Utah, Dr. Al-Issa wrote an opinion piece that was published in Deseret News that explored how Muslims and Latter-Day Saints can work as leaders in building tolerance and overcome extremist thinking, noting the excellent record of traditional

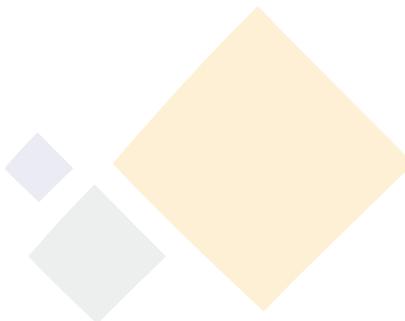
open-spiritedness and generosity of understanding on the part of the Mormon community towards Muslims and the Islamic faith.

NOVEMBER 6

The Salt Lake Tribune highlighted Dr. Al-Issa’s week-long meetings in Utah’s capital with state religious leaders, including the governing First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

NOVEMBER 6

While in Utah, Dr. Al-Issa spoke at the Brigham Young University Kennedy Center for International Studies on “the Essential Mission to Build Bonds.” He also met with Utah’s governor, Gary Herbert, to discuss the MWL’s work to forge bonds between the two religious communities.



Dr. Al-Issa with Dr. John Duke Anthony of NCUSAR.

Dr. Al-Issa meeting with Senate Chaplain Barry Black in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Dr. Al-Issa meeting with the Washington Times Reporter Guy Taylor.

Photo of the Islamic Exhibit at the New York Metropolitan Museum.



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with 17th and current President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Russell Nelson.



Dr. Al-Issa in New York with Rabbi Marc Schneier, Founder and President of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding.

NOVEMBER 15:

In Copenhagen at the symposium titled “National Identity and Ideological Security,” Dr. Al-Issa heard views expressed by scholars of diverse backgrounds. Terrorism historian and scholar, Mr. Ahmad Durani shared his views on the importance of tolerance and cohesion within the framework of national identity, while Mr. Aami Brobygger, President of the Dialogue for Peace Foundation, and Dr. Enver Gicic, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Novi Pazar, Serbia, emphasized the importance of education in building understanding between religious communities.



Campus sign at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

NOVEMBER 15

Dr. Al-Issa attended the second panel at the Symposium on National Identity and Ideological Security, in which the focus was

“ While the centers of Islam and the Church of Jesus Christ sit on opposite sides of the world, the values that bring our communities together could not be closer. Tolerance, faith, diversity and hope are central to the MWL’s mission.

—Dr. Al-Issa speaking at Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, Utah.

on examples of spreading the culture of dialogue and coexistence among communities across Europe. During a panel discussion on the role of religious leaders in strengthening national security, Mr. Dal Babu, former chief superintendent of the Metropolitan Police in London, offered practical opportunities to build greater social cohesion. At the third panel, author Gisli Joekul Gislason of Iceland and the Danish imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen discussed the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and being part of a greater community within a national identity.

NOVEMBER 16

In celebration of the International Day of Tolerance, Dr. Al-Issa read from his op-ed in the US weekly Newsweek, published in July of this year, titled “As Head of the Muslim World League I See Islamic Leaders Calling for Tolerance More Than Ever.” In this essay he describes how Islamic leaders call for tolerance in implementing the principles of the Charter of Makkah, which encapsulates the values of more than 1,200 Islamic scholars assembled in May of this year by the MWL following the Arab League Summit.

NOVEMBER 17

Dr. Al-Issa visited the Roskilde Cathedral in Copenhagen, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and burial church for the Danish Royal Family. In speaking with the church leadership, Dr. Al-Issa expressed the common values shared between Muslim countries and those of a predominantly Christian faith.



Dr. Al-Issa delivering keynote address at the “Unifying Human Brotherhood” Conference in Oslo.

NOVEMBER 20-21

In Oslo, the MWL joined the Scandinavian Council for Relations during the symposium titled “The Unifying Human Brotherhood.” In his keynote speech, Dr. Al-Issa outlined the pillars of human brotherhood as defined in Islam, emphasizing the role of dialogue in spreading peace and harmony.



Dr. Al-Issa joined the Scandinavian Council for Relations for the Symposium on National Identity and Ideological Security.

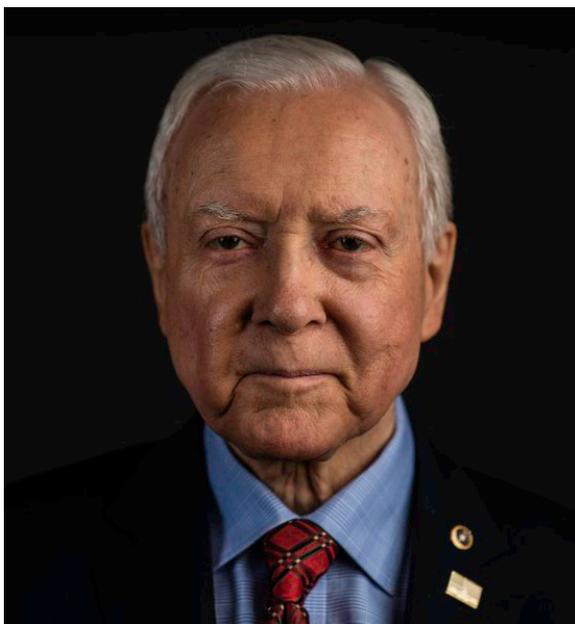
Dr. Al-Issa delivering a speech at the Symposium on National Identity and Ideological Security, where he discussed the importance of Charter of Makkah.

Dr. Al-Issa receiving a tour of the Roskilde Cathedral in Copenhagen.



FAITH, FREEDOM AND E PLURIBUS UNUM

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), the longest serving Republican U.S. Senator in history.

“I’d be the first to stand up for [Muslim] rights. Islam is a great religion

— Retired-Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah in 2010 amid the controversy surrounding the construction of an Islamic community center close to ground zero in New York City.

Most Americans take pride in the phrase “E Pluribus Unum.” That compact expression of political wisdom defines the United States as the product of national unity through the strength of diversity. It was first used as a motto when it was adopted as part of the Great Seal of the young country on July 4, 1776. A resolution was adopted by the Continental Congress that began: “Resolved, That Dr. Franklin, Mr. J. Adams and Mr. Jefferson be a committee to prepare a device for a Seal of the United States of America...” Those men were, of course, the three leading members of the committee of five that had

drawn up the Declaration of Independence, and the committee made its report a month and a half later. Its very first recommendation concerning the US national seal was “Motto: E Pluribus Unum” (“From the many, one”).

From that concise statement grew one of the most successful experiments in history: a country founded upon a “great idea,” a self-invented country where people from anywhere in the world could come to settle and reinvent themselves as Americans. “From the Many, One” remains the driving spirit of American culture, in which all are invited to participate in the expansion of the American dream. It is an idea that knows no color, no creed, no race and no religion. To be sure, this journey as a nation has not been perfect, but the principle remains unchanged: Diversity, when aligned with common values, is



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D-MI) in Washington.

an expression of great cultural strength, and to show tolerance for the other is, in turn, to up-hold the nation's fundamental values.

As the following pages will reveal, the multifaceted activities of MWL Secretary General Dr. Al-Issa in several regions of the United States in late October and into November serve as the embodiment of this spirit. He met with people and church and civic leaders in the western state of Utah. He held conversations with members of the United States Congress. He traveled to New York City and toured two of the nation's great cultural institutions. Though hailing from a world away, Dr. Al-Issa demonstrated one of the underlying messages of E Pluribus Unum: that cultural differences should distinguish but not divide us. At the core, humans all desire the same thing: stable societies, civilized values, strong belief systems and world peace that may be nurtured into world prosperity. Dr. Al-Issa's visit also brought attention to the "hidden" history of Muslims in America, one in which patriotism and a sense of belonging prevails against often considerable odds. The feature articles in this issue describe that distinctly about American heritage.

Also in this issue are historical articles giving insight into the military service of Muslims in America since the country's founding, architectural details in notable US buildings influenced by Islamic styles, and the



Diversity, when aligned with and allied to common values is an expression of the utmost cultural strength, and to show tolerance for the other is, in turn, to demonstrate respect for oneself.

entrepreneurial spirit of US-born Muslims. Throughout the issue, non-Muslim voices tell of the contributions of Muslims to American society.

The Editors. ❖



FROM THE BEGINNING:

Muslims Playing an Integral Role in American Society

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



The first President of the United States of America, George Washington.

The first nation to recognize the newly established United States of America was a Muslim country, the Sultanate of Morocco—on December 20, 1777, only a year after the US Declaration of Independence was issued and while the War of Independence was still raging. A few years later, in 1786, the Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship was signed in Europe by future presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and Sultan Mohammad III. Renegotiated in 1836, the treaty is still in force, constituting the longest unbroken treaty relationship in US history, and endured even during the Barbary Wars (the first from 1801-1805 and the second in 1815) in which the United States fought pirates and privateers who raided shipping from Tripoli, Tunis and Algeria.

Sympathetic views toward Islam may be found throughout US history by statesmen and ordinary citizens alike.

In 1916, an eminent American scholar of Near Eastern languages, Dr. Martin Sprengling of the University of Chicago, wrote in the journal *The Biblical World* that “the Islamic form of civilization is connected with our own by ties infinitely closer and more numerous than, e. g., Brahminism and Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Its roots draw nourishment from the same soil that nurtured our modern European life and thought, the magnificent ruins of the Greco-Roman world.”

Dr. Sprengling went on to add: “Islam is not a mere offspring from these forebears of our own. It is planted besides, in larger measure and more



True freedom embraces the Mohammadean [Muslim] and the Hindu, as well as the Christian religion.

—Virginia Statesman and Founding Father, Richard Henry Lee, friend and ally of Thomas Jefferson, to the Second Continental Congress, June 7, 1776

“ The Founders of this nation explicitly included Islam in their vision of the future of the republic. Freedom of religion, as they conceived it, encompassed it. Adherents of the faith were, with some exceptions, regarded as men and women who would make law-abiding, productive citizens. Far from fearing Islam, the Founders would have incorporated it in to the fabric of American life.

— Dr. James Hutson, Chief of the Manuscript Division, the Library of Congress.

immediately than our own modern Germanic and Latin worlds, in the ground prepared by our Indo-European relatives” of the Middle East and Northern India. Out of these elements he further commented, Islam “was constructed—or, perhaps better, out of them grew—the unique civilization of Islam, a new, true unity, with a character and life of its own. Manifestly it is a not distant blood-relative of ours.”

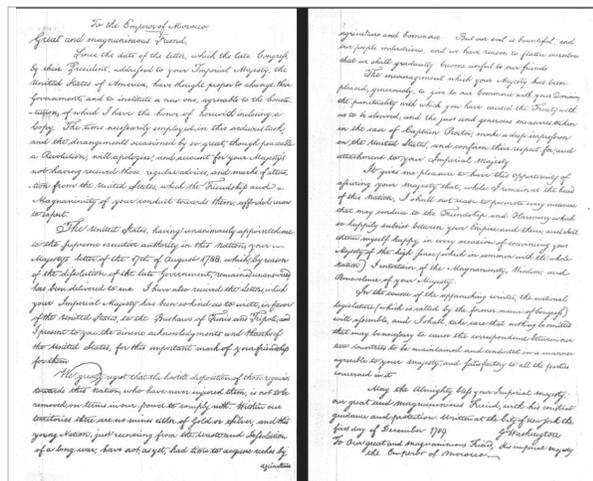
In the aftermath of 9-11, many Muslims began to feel unwelcome in the United States, according to newspaper reports and anecdotal evidence suggesting that many Americans viewed their Muslim neighbors as something of an alien presence.

According to the Library of Congress, Muslims were present in the United States by 1776, mainly imported as slaves from areas of Africa where Islam flourished. Dr. James H. Hutson,

Chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, writes in his essay “The Founding Fathers and Islam” (2002), “Although there is no evidence that the Founders were aware of the religious convictions of their bondsmen, it is clear that the Founding Fathers thought about the relationship of Islam to the new nation and were prepared to make a place for it in the republic.”

From the beginning of the Republic, Muslims found freedom to worship within the American guarantee of freedom of religion. In his seminal letter on Toleration (1689), John Locke insisted that Muslims and all others who believed in God be tolerated in England. Campaigning for religious freedom in Virginia, Jefferson followed

Locke, “his idol,” in demanding recognition of the religious rights of the “Mohammadean” as well as that of “the Jew.” In support of Jefferson was his friend and ally, Richard Henry Lee, who had made a motion in Congress on June 7, 1776, that the American colonies declare independence. “True freedom,” Lee asserted, “embraces



Letter of appreciation from George Washington for the Treaty of Friendship he signed with Mohammad ben Abdallah, Sultan of Morocco, the first country to recognize the US.



Dr. James H. Hutson, Chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Photo Credit: Library of Congress.

the Mohammadean [Muslim] and the Hindu, as well as the Christian religion.”

George Washington suggested a way for Muslims to “obtain proper relief” from a Virginia bill that proposed levying taxes to support Christian worship. The first president said on another occasion that he would welcome “Mohometans” to Mount Vernon if they were “good workmen.” Dr. Hutson further cites officials in Massachusetts who were just as adamant that their influential Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 afford “the most ample liberty of conscience... to Deists, Mahometans, Jews and Christians.” It is a point, Hutson notes, “that Chief Justice Theophilus Parsons resoundingly affirmed in 1810.

Other influential observers had positive views of Muslims. In 1783, the president of Yale College, Ezra Stiles, cited a study showing that “Muslim morals” were “far superior to the Christian.” Mr. Hutson’s essay features a quote from a contemporary Boston newspaper columnist stating “A Mahometan is excited to the practice of good morals.” Benjamin Rush, the Pennsylvania signer of the Declaration of Independence and friend of Adams and Jefferson, praised the moral disci-

pline of Islam, maintaining that he had “rather see the opinions of Confucious [sic] or Moham-mad inculcated upon our youth than see them grow up wholly devoid of religious principles.”

Ordinary citizens were supportive on principle as well. A group of citizens of Chesterfield County, Virginia, wrote to the state assembly on November 14, 1785: “Let Jews, Mehometans [Muslims] and Christians of every denomination enjoy religious liberty... Thrust them not out now by establishing the Christian religion lest thereby we become our own enemy and weaken this infant state. It is men’s labor in Manufactories, their services by sea and land that aggrandize our Country and not their creeds. Chain your citizens to the state by their Interest. Let Jews, Mehometans [Muslims] and Christians of every denomination find their advantage living under your laws.”

Religious freedom is the first right guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, and the Founding Fathers saw it as fundamental to their vision of America. Of course, true religious tolerance, like any ideal, requires persistence, courage and patience in even the dedicated societies. John F. Kennedy’s responded to attacks on his fitness for office as a Roman Catholic by saying, “For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been...a Jew— or a Quaker- or a Unitarian- or a Baptist.... Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you...”

Ultimately President Kennedy defended Catholicism as an American experience, making the argument that the principles of religious freedom and democracy are not in conflict with a faith that was considered to be controlled by the Vatican and authoritarian. During Mitt Romney’s 2008 and 2012 campaigns for the presidency, the fear of foreign and authoritarian religion again emerged. Although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was founded in America, the patriotism and loyalty of its members have been questioned throughout its history of because religious authority is vested in a single

prophet. Harkening back to Kennedy, Romney refuted the accusations that the LDS Church would hold sway over a Romney administration. "Let me assure you that no authorities of my church, or of any other church for that matter, will ever exert influence on presidential decision," he said at the time. "Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin."

In recognizing both the tolerant views held by Americans since the time of the country's founding and the struggles that the highest-ranking political figures have endured to defend their own faith, it should come as no surprise that so many Muslim-Americans feel themselves perfectly at home in the context of the American dream. Muslims have fought in all major US wars since the inception of the country. They are home-grown billionaires, NASA astronauts, members of Congress and activists, entertainers, artists, writers and sports stars. They are thousands of small-business owners and they are Harvard professors.

It is therefore fitting that Dr. Al-Issa and the Muslim World League should feel themselves in familiar territory, whether in Salt Lake City, visiting the home of the "first family" of nation's oldest Muslim community in Dearborn, Michigan, or in the political capital of Washington or the cultural capital of New York.



Dr. Al-Issa greeting the First Presidency of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.



Fact Sheet: A Brief History of Muslims in America

- Between 1878 and 1924 Muslim immigrants from the Middle East, particularly from Syria and Lebanon, arrived in large numbers, with many settling in Ohio, Michigan, Iowa and even the Dakotas. Like most other migrants, they were seeking greater economic opportunity than in their homeland. One of the first big employers of Muslims was the Ford Company.
- During the 1930s and '40s Arab immigrants began to establish communities and build mosques. African American Muslims had already built their own mosques, and by 1952 there was more than 1,000 in North America.
- The estimated number of Muslims in the United States varies depending on the source. The American Muslim Council claims 5 million, while the non-partisan Center for Immigration Studies believes the figure is closer to between 3 and 4 million. "Today there are more than 1,500 Islamic centers and mosques around the country. "Figures vary, but the estimated population is between 4 and 7 million" according to the 2014 PBS series *Islam in America*.



MUSLIMS AND THE US MILITARY:

A History of Service and Dedication

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019

One story in American history has rested in the shadows too long: the contributions of Muslim servicemen to the United States military. This service dates back to the American Revolutionary War, where records indicate that at least a few Muslims fought on the rebel side. Beyond that, Muslims have fought in all major US wars, from the to the Gulf War, the Iraq War and the War in Afghan-



Distinguished writer on Arab Muslim-American issues, Ms. Robin Wright.

istan. According to the Encyclopedia of the United States Army Insignia and Uniforms, a uniform insignia with a crescent design was authorized for Muslim chaplains in early 1994. According to the *Muslim US Military Experience*, in 2011, approximately 3,500



While many minority groups have had their contributions and accomplishments during the Civil War recognized, one group of Americans has received little attention. Muslim Americans are rarely the focus of Civil War scholars and are typically viewed as a demographic relevant only to more modern history. This should not be the case. In fact, Muslim Americans have served in virtually every armed conflict in United States history and left their mark on every era, including the Civil War.

—Jeffrey Laueck, "Profiles in Patriotism: Muslims and the Civil War," March 1, 2017

American Muslims served in the United States military. More recently, ABC News estimated the number to be closer to 6,000.

As Robin Wright, the distinguished writer on Arab and Muslim-American issues (and recipient of the Goldziher prize), noted in an August 2016 article for the *New Yorker*, among the more than 5,000 Muslims who fought for America in the First World War, “the name Muhammad was so common that it was spelled

forty-one different ways in military records, according to Amir Muhammad, the author of *Muslim Veterans of American Wars*, and the co-founder of the Islamic Heritage Museum in Washington. Muslims also fought and died in the Second World War. “There are so many Muslim vets,” Ms. Wright notes, “that the Muslim American Veterans’ Association is opening its twelfth regional post this month.”

“” *Medina is, by far, the handsomest city I ever saw in the East, with ample, smooth streets, neat, stone, houses, generally two stories high; containing a great mosque called the Prophet’s, two smaller ones Béshir and Omar, a large college building and public baths.*

— African slave turned dignitary to American war veteran in his *Autobiography of Nicholas Said, A Native of Bornou, Southern Sudan*. Shotwell & Co. 1873



The US Secretary of War & His Ottoman Camel Corps

Hajji Ali, an Ottoman camel driver, landed one day in Indianola, Texas, aboard the USS Supply in 1856. Recruited by the US government, he was to take part in one of the strangest military experiments in the pre-Civil War Era. A year earlier, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis convinced Congress to create the Camel Military Corps to patrol the newly acquired lands in the desert Southwest. When the camels arrived from the Ottoman Empire, they were met with awe from locals. The US soldiers assigned to the new Camel Corps were

equally bewildered and were unable to manage the exotic beasts. That was up to Hajji Ali, nicknamed “Hi Jolly” by his American comrades. The first mission for the camels was to transport troops on an expedition searching for a possible southern route for the transcontinental railroad. The approaching Civil War dashed any hopes for the future of the Camel Corps. “Hi Jolly” lived on and became a local legend, along with the dozens of camels that roamed the Southwest for years.



DIVERSITY IN ACTION:

The MWL and the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with Rabbi Marc Schneier, President of the Foundation for Ethnic Understand.

In late October, Dr. Al-Issa met with one of the most influential New York-based interfaith organizations. The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) has waged a quiet war against intolerance while constructing new bridges of peace between the Muslim and Jewish communities, particularly in the United States. The FFEU was founded by Rabbi Marc Schneier in 1989, when tensions were increasing between the Jewish and African-American communities; soon thereafter and for two decades the organization was instrumental in repairing this historically warm relationship.

Since 2007, the focus has shifted to the Foun-

ation's stated aim of pioneering and becoming the global address for improving Muslim-Jewish relations. Its programs span more than 30 countries through a global network of grassroots organizations and partners that include heads of state and leaders from Muslim and Jewish communities. The organization's ground-breaking efforts include the Summit of Imams and Rabbis of North America, the Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the US, the Mission of Latin American Muslim and Jewish leaders to the US, the Mission of Southern Hemisphere Muslim and Jewish leaders to the US, and campaigns against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

“ To defeat hate, we must speak and listen to one another, learn from one another and unite with one another.”

—Dr. Al-Issa

When Dr. Al-Issa met with Rabbi Schneier, the two announced a historic partnership to sponsor another “Season of Twinning” program, a joint undertaking by the MWL and the FFEU held between November this year and January 2020. It coincides with the anniversary of the October 27th, 2018, Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, about which Dr. Al-Issa commented that all attacks against Jews, as well as those against Muslims and Christians, showed “our houses of worship targeted, the sanctity of our communities violated, and the basis of peaceful and collaborative coexistence threatened.”

The program includes fifty events in thirty-five countries and features pulpit exchanges among Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams, as well as events that involve Muslim and Jewish student groups, families and children. The “Season of Twinning” advances both bodies’ aims of cooperation in the fight against Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The Secretary General affirmed the necessity of dialogue among people of different religions, saying that the nature of dialogue spearheaded by the FFEU is the way to “defeat hate.” For his part, FFEU President Rabbi Marc Schneier commented that both Jews and Muslims share a “common faith and a common fate,” urging people of the two religions to collaborate against the growing waves of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, especially in the US.

“We must take this tragedy and create something positive out of it and so, together with Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa and the Muslim World League, we’re partnering with 50 organizations around the world to create programs to further fortify this close bond between Muslims and Jews,” noted Rabbi Schneier at the New York meeting.

“Whether it was the attacks on Jews in Pittsburgh or in Germany, Muslims in New Zealand, or on Christians in Sri Lanka,” said Dr. Al-Issa in response, “we have seen our houses of worship targeted, the sanctity of our communities violated, and the basis of peaceful and collaborative coexistence threatened. To defeat hate, we must speak and listen to one another, learn from one another and unite with one another.”



Dr. Al-Issa and Rabbi Schneier signing the “Seasons of Twinning” Declaration.

During the meeting, Rabbi Schneier pointed out that Evangelical Christian-Muslim relations constitute today’s largest interreligious challenge, and one recent poll done by the organization shows that “there are causes for concern and elements of hope and optimism on both sides to narrow the divide between the two faith communities.” The FFEU president noted of that polling: “As a next step towards bridging this divide, I recently led a mission of the leading Evangelical Christian leaders from the United States to Azerbaijan, a Muslim-majority country, which is a leading advocate for interreligious dialogue and coexistence, so that we can start bridging the gap.”



The FFEU Studies on American-Evangelical and American-Muslim views of each other, as well as American-Muslim and American-Jewish comparative views.



Excerpts from the press release for these 2019 studies:

On Muslim-Evangelical Relations

“While more than half of Muslims regularly interact with Christians and believe that interaction has led to better understanding between the groups, only 22-percent of Evangelicals share similar experiences.

“Both Muslims and Evangelicals see room for improvement in their relationship with the other group. The two groups share similar religious values such as daily prayer, family and improving the world and see these three commonalities as a way to bond and improve relations. Despite this, Evangelicals are more likely to see differences between the two religions. Frequent interactions lead to more perceived similarities between the groups. Evangelicals show low familiarity of Muslim terms/holidays, but many of those familiar with Muslims and Islam are able to correctly define these terms such as Ramadan, hijab and sharia.”

“Evangelicals and Muslims alike acknowledge that Muslims have been discriminated against because of their faith and agree that there is anti-Muslim sentiment in the Evangelical Christian community. Sixty-two percent of Evangelicals report there is anti-Muslim sentiment in their own community. With this in mind, when asked if Muslim holidays should be observed in the United States with a day off from work/school like Christmas is, fifty-seven percent of Evangelicals say that they shouldn’t be observed.”

Excerpts from the press release for these 2019 studies:

On Muslim-Jewish Relations:

The FFEU also released a first-of-a-kind study “that provides a national benchmark measuring opinions and behaviors of Jewish and Muslim Americans.” According to the organization’s website, the study showed that the gaps between the two groups were “smaller than previously thought,” and that “the more devout the person was, the closer they aligned with the other religion.”

As the report stated:

“American Jews and Muslims who interact often with the other faith are more likely to see the similarities between the religions and communities. The majorities of both faiths recognize the similarities between them – and the study found that this increases with exposure to the other. Nearly three-quarters of Muslims who interact with Jews frequently say that Judaism and Islam share more similarities than differences. More than two-thirds of Jews (69-percent) who interact with Muslims frequently agree. The study found that those with more exposure to the other faith are more likely to see it as inclusive and progressive.”

“Both faiths see the importance of working together to combat discrimination and are optimistic that America can be more tolerant....Three-quarters of Muslims who interact with Jews frequently say that it is “very important” for the two faiths to work together on strengthening the laws to prevent discrimination. Nearly three-quarters Jews who interact with Muslims frequently agree that it is very important.

“‘Muslim-Jewish relations are thought to be in conflict, but this study shows that they are in a state of cooperation,’ said FFEU President Rabbi Marc Schneier. ‘This is the first definitive study of its kind to quantify that with cooperation and dialogue between the two groups, we are stronger together. This is the mission of the FFEU and the study shows our success in this area.’”



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

DISTANT CIVILIZATIONS WITH COMMUNAL COMMONALITIES:

The MWL, the Mormon Church and Humanitarian Values

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Dr. Al-Issa after meeting with First Presidency.

When Dr. Al-Issa embarked upon his week-long engagements in Salt Lake City in early November meeting with government, religious and cultural leaders—ranging from Governor Gary Herbert to the Elders of the Church of Latter-Day Saints to the world-famous Arabic translation department at Brigham Young University—he was already aware of the strong ties and close bonds Muslims and Mormons have shared with

one another since the LDS Church's founding in the late 19th century. It is humanitarian work and a sense of charity that perhaps best underscore this spiritual brotherhood between Mecca and the Mormons.



When you get into the Islamic world, they have some strengths that others of us don't."

—Garry Flake, the director of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' humanitarian emergency response



Dr. Al-Issa receives a tour of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints of food storage facilities.

In recent years, both groups have actively pooled resources to aid casualties of Middle Eastern conflict. Mormons have a long history of disaster preparedness; while Muslims, who embrace charity as one of the five pillars of Islam, have the network of contacts on the ground. "We kind of complement each other," commented Mokhtar Shawky, acting CEO of Islamic Relief, in California, quoted in the Religious Diversity News of Harvard University's Pluralism Project. "We try to help with the transportation costs. They put the material together. We have our people overseas that distribute it to the needy." Despite doctrinal differences, both Muslims and Mormons believe that charitable duty is a central

tenet of their respective faiths. In one example of recent cooperation, in August of this year, an MD-11 airplane filled with 85 tons of medical supplies left Salt Lake City for a Lebanese port to help Muslims and other Arabs caught in the crossfire of Lebanese unrest, in Gaza and the West Bank.

As Gary Flake told the Los Angeles Times on the occasion of the Lebanese aid delivery, "When you get into the Islamic world, they have some strengths that others of us don't. It's just simply driven by the idea that there's people in need and we reach out where an organization has a strength that we can match up to." These Muslim-Mormon collaboration projects began just after the Iraq and Afghan wars commenced in 2003, when the church sent an aid shipment to Iraqis. Since that time, joint shipments have gone to many Muslim-majority countries, such as Bangladesh and Sudan.

Another commonality between Mormons and Muslims is that of minority within American society. In addition to retired Utah Senator Orrin Hatch's expressed strong support for Muslims. In explaining why many in Utah opposed the ban, Utah's governor, Gary Herbert, observed, "We had Rutherford B. Hayes in 1879 issue an envoy to Europe saying in essence, 'Don't send those Mormon immigrants to America anymore.'" (President Hayes' secretary of state, William Evarts, instructed US diplomats to ask European governments to help us keep Mormon converts from traveling to the US. And in 1883 President Grover Cleveland asked Congress to prevent the importation of Mormons into the country, according to Immigration and the 'Mormon Question, by William Mulder.)

Pointing to this history of Mormon persecution, in 2017, a group of scholars with expertise in Mormon history filed an amicus curiae brief in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit opposing the "Muslim ban." This group drew a comparison between that perceived posture towards Muslims on the part of Washington and the government's 19th century treatment of Mormons. "This court should ensure that history does not repeat itself," they wrote.



Dr. Al-Hssa speaking to students and faculty at Brigham Young University's Kennedy Center for International Studies.

Arnold H. Green, a professor of history at BYU, has traced how early Mormons in the 19th century were accused of following “the American Mohammad,” founder Joseph Smith. At first this was denied, but the community eventually began to accept some comparisons. “As the church grew into a global faith,” Professor Green wrote in 2001, “its posture toward Islam became...more positive,” and today “the two faiths have become associated in several ways, including Mormonism being called ‘the Islam of America.’” He points out how both religions strongly emphasize family, traditional roles and the sense of modesty of male and female youth.

Haitham Bundakji, former chairman of the Islamic Society of Orange County, California, told the Los Angeles Times, “When I go to a Mormon church I feel at ease. When I heard the president [of LDS] speak a few years ago, if I’d closed my eyes I’d have thought he was an imam.”

On September 11, 2001, this sense of support remained consistent. “We were treated as dignitaries,” Shabbir Mansuri, founding director of the

Muslim-based Institute on Religion and Civic Values in Fountain Valley, Utah, told The Salt Lake Tribune. “I met with the president of LDS and the governor of Utah. We were sitting in the front row of the Tabernacle. Mormons would give their right arms to be there.” He recalls that the first call he received that day was from church Elder Dallin H. Oaks. “He was concerned and wanted to send us a very clear message that we were in their prayers,” Mansuri recalled to the newspaper. “It was like having someone who loves and cares for you; not so much a Mormon reaching out to me as a fellow believer reaching out.”

Perhaps such common cause is best summarized by lawyer and religious liberty scholar Asma Uddin, who wrote in a May 2018 op-ed for The New York Times: “Mormon politicians seem to understand better than many of their fellow Republicans that if another’s freedom of faith is under attack, so, too, is their own. Perhaps this has to do with the church’s 11th Article of Faith, which states, “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may.”



“When I go to a Mormon church I feel at ease. When I heard the president [of the Church of Latter Day Saints] speak a few years ago, if I’d closed my eyes I’d have thought he was an imam.”

—Haitham Bundakji, former chairman of the Islamic Society of Orange County, California

Ms. Uddin, a Muslim mother living in Salt Lake City who is also the founder of altmuslimah.com, further underscored this sense of kindred values between the two religious groups when she wrote in the online publication, FaithCounts.com in February 2018: “I realize that so much of what I envy about Mormonism is its ability to extract itself from its surroundings and focus inwardly. ... In my own experience of faith, par-

ticularly as I transmit it to my kids, the Mormon model of centeredness is something I seek to replicate.” For Dr. Al-Issa and the Muslim World League, such an outlook not only expressed the very purpose of their extraordinary visit to the Utah capital, but of his and the MWL’s entire world outlook and “essential mission to build bonds among the nations.”



Dr. Al-Issa meets with Governor of Utah Gary Hebert, where they discussed the importance of interreligious cooperation and understanding.



THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE:

Dr. Al-Issa Visits Washington.

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with Representative John Curtis (R-UT) to discuss the combatting terrorism and its ideology at all levels.

MWL Secretary-General Al-Issa visits Washington often and meets with other officials, scholars and non-government leaders who share his dedication to the cause of disarming extremism through education, dialogue and tolerance. During his latest trip, he met with congressional representatives and think-tank leaders who for decades have been active in domestic Ar-

ab-Muslim issues related to the US. In return, Dr. Al-Issa emphasized the key point of his universal message, that the approach adopted by the MWL was to call on Muslims and all minorities “to abide by the Constitutions and laws of their countries, and not to receive religious fatwas from outside parties that had nothing to do with where they were living.

🗨️ *In Michigan and across the country, Muslim-Americans are doctors, lawyers, teachers, community leaders and some of the most patriotic Americans I know. They are literally my next-door neighbors in Dearborn, the city which has been our home for decades. Racism and bigotry have no place in our politics, and especially not in the White House. We must not allow fear and hatred to divide us, and irresponsible statements like this make us less safe. Freedom of religion is a fundamental pillar of our democracy and we must stand together as Americans to protect the values and ideals that make this nation great.”*

— Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, D-MICHIGAN, who met with Dr. Al-Issa October 29, 2019

To start, Dr. Al-Issa met with Rep. Deborah “Debbie” Dingell (D-MICHIGAN), whose hometown of Dearborn, Michigan, is the longest-standing Arab-Muslim community in the United States, and, proportionately, one of the largest. She and her late husband, former Rep. John Dingell, have worked for decades on behalf of domestic Muslim causes.

Rep, Debbie Dingell lauded the secretary-general’s work in encouraging religious minorities to adapt in their communities. During their discussion, she emphasized that this process of integration that at the same time respects religious and ethnic identity had proven highly successful in Michigan and in successful Muslim communities throughout the US.



Dr. Al-Issa with Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI).

In addition, Dr. Al-Issa met with the National Council on US-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) and was awarded a medal for his “highly valued” international work to promote harmony among nations. The organization, founded in 1983, has been at the forefront in using education as a means of enhancing American “awareness, knowledge and understanding” of Arab countries, the Mideast in general and specifically the Islamic world. It carries out its objectives through leadership development, lectures, the placing of American scholars in Arab universities, and a respected annual Arab-US policymaker conference. Where Washington intelligentsia are concerned, the Council has long served as an information clearinghouse and activist-participant in grassroots outreach to media, think tanks and select professional associations.



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with the National Council on US-Arab Relations in Washington.

As part of this visit, the NCUSAR hosted Dr. Al-Issa for an open dialogue in the presence of a number of politicians, intellectuals, media professionals and religious leaders. At that forum, Dr. Al-Issa “noted the importance of communication and dialogue between religions and cultures in developing understanding and cooperation,” the MWL wrote. He also answered questions from the audience, highlighting activities carried out by the League aimed at promoting peace and global harmony. In February 2019, the NCUSAR awarded Dr. Al-Issa the “World Religions Peace Award” in recognition of his international efforts “to promote peace among worshippers.”

Dr. Al-Issa also met with Rep. John R. Curtis (R-Utah) to discuss the issues relating to religious extremism and the cause of peace, during which time Rep. Curtis praised Dr. Al-Issa’s significant role on behalf of the MWL in strengthening ties between countries and people of all faiths, and also lauded the League’s efforts in combating radical religious ideology. Rep. Curtis has been actively engaged with Arab causes as a member of the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and North Africa of the House

Foreign Relations Committee, focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian issues as well. Dr. Al-Issa and Rep. Curtis also talked about the importance of strong social bonds, a priority emphasized by the Utah congressman’s concern for strong community values.



Dr. Al-Issa meeting with the National Council on US-Arab Relations in Washington.

Capping off these meeting, Dr. Al-Issa met with the Chaplain of the US Senate, Dr. Barry Black. The two dignitaries discussed the means of establishing religious and national harmony in societies of ethnic diversity and, as the MWL tweeted in its summary of the meeting, “the need for coordination among world faith institutions in promoting the message of tolerance.”

Dr. Black was the first African-American and the first Seventh-Day Adventist to hold this office (the Senate elected its first chaplain in 1789). He is the author of an autobiography, *From the Hood to the Hill* (2006), in which he described his faith as having allowed him to overcome the obstacles of poverty and domestic instability growing up in Baltimore, Maryland.



Rep. John Dingell. “The Friend of of Muslim and Arab-Americans”

At the time of his retirement in 2015, the late John Dingell was the longest-serving member of Congress in history. He had lived in Dearborn, a city whose population is nearly half Arab-American Muslim and has long been known nationally as a center for people with roots in the Middle East. In the last twenty years of his service to Congress, Rep. Dingell often spoke up for the civil rights of Arab-Americans and expressed sympathy for Palestinians and Lebanese embroiled in the larger geopolitical conflicts of the region. “While the community found itself under attack from bigots, Dingell was quick to protect them,” noted his February 2, 2019, obituary in the *Detroit Free Press*.

After the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, Rep. Dingell defended the rights of Muslims, and was one of only 66 members of the House Representatives who voted against the Patriot Act and spoke out against hate crimes directed at Muslims. He voted against the Iraq war in 2003 and over the years gave voice to the Palestinians. As reported by the *Detroit Free Press* in 2011, he praised metro Detroit’s Muslim-American population during Congressional hearings on Islamic extremism, telling Republicans not to “blot the good name...of Arabs or Muslims or other Americans en masse.”

The *Free Press* further quotes Osama Siblani, publisher of *The Arab-American News* in Dearborn and a leader with the Dearborn-based Arab American Political Action Committee: “He was always open to us, he listened to us. He gave us a lot of time to express our views on issues. It was a powerful friendship that we had. He consulted us on most of the issues related to the Middle East and Arab-Americans, immigration, foreign policy.”

The Detroit area was home to thousands of Muslims in the early 1900s, primarily from Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire and British India. Henry Ford imported Muslim workers from India with a view toward building plants there, and wanted to teach them to manage a factory. By and large, the Muslim community followed Ford: a new Arab community, one that now included a significant Muslim population, sprang up around his first factory in Highland Park, and one of the first mosques in the US was located in Highland Park. Many Arab Americans worked outside the auto industry, though. As Detroit’s population boomed, so did the need for grocery stores, and in the 1920s, Arab Americans “ran hundreds of them,” according to a National Public Radio (NPR) feature on the Arab communities of Michigan, aired July 9, 2014.



SPEECH AND INTERVIEW

EXCERPTS:

The Washington Times and the New York Post

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Dr. Al-Issa being interviewed by Guy Taylor of the Washington Times.

a. *Washington Times* interview by journalist Guy Taylor with Dr. Al-Issa. October 30, 2019, on the theme that the fight with ISIS is “only just beginning”

[...] “If we believe the killing of Baghdadi is the end of ISIS, we are wrong,” said Sheikh Al-Issa, who has sought to position the Mecca-based World Muslim League as the leading opponent of extremist Islamic teachings since taking the helm of the organization in 2016.

“Baghdadi’s death is a huge loss for ISIS and a historical event for the United States and its endeavors in counterterrorism,” the sheik told *The Washington Times*. “But we now must be careful in our future steps in countering terrorism, because the risk now is that ISIS will intensify

its ideological efforts to target the youth and recruit them — specifically youths who are deprived of any true religious teachings.”

b. “A Voice for Muslim World Moderation”: *The New York Post*, October 22, 2019 Interview with journalist Sohrab Ahmari

[...] “The War on Terror started 18 years ago,’ says Sheikh Mohammed al-Issa, the secretary-general of the Muslim World League, as we sit down for an interview in a Ritz Carlton penthouse suite overlooking Central Park. ‘What do we see now? Has terrorism shrunk or has it expanded? There is something wrong with the equation.’

The sheik isn’t opposed to counterterrorism operations. His point is that military action alone will never be enough to win a war of ideas.

“Since assuming leadership of the Mecca-based league in 2016, the former Saudi justice minister has emerged as a force for Islamic moderation. His main project is to change how Muslims understand their own faith — in relation to other religions, to non-Muslim-majority states in the case of the Muslim diaspora and, especially, reason itself.

“God’s reasonableness is a complex question, the subject of a vast theological library. In some strands of Islam, God is believed to be so utterly beyond human understanding that he can demand unreasonable violence.

“Yet Issa is committed to an eminently reasonable vision of God. All three monotheistic faiths, he tells me, ‘agree on the existence of God, that he is the Lord of heaven and earth. And all three agree that God’s demands are reasonable. Whether we realize the reasonableness of God’s demands, whether we can fully penetrate into it, we all agree that his demands are reasonable.”

“Whether Issa’s vision succeeds theologically is for Muslim scholars to judge. But its practical fruits are undeniable. He has vowed to visit Auschwitz next year to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the camp’s liberation. And in a letter to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, he decried the Shoah as ‘an event whose horrors could not be denied or underrated by any fair-minded or peace-loving person’ — no small step for a leader in a region where Holocaust-denial is part of the ideological air people breathe.”



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY'S ARABIC TRANSLATION SERIES:

A Promotion of Classic Islamic Literature

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019



Photo of Vintage Brigham Young Campus. Photo Credit: Revolvly

When Dr. Al-Issa arrived in the Salt Lake City for his week-long meetings there and his crowd-drawing speech at Brigham Young University, he probably did not expect that a nondescript rock just outside the main campus would be the very symbol of the purpose

of his trip to the beautiful state. It is easy enough to overlook at first glance: Located just north of LaVell Edwards Stadium at BYU, the large stone reads “translation house,” and there inside two editors work for the university’s Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI). But



Student at Brigham Young University listening attentively to Dr. Al-Issa speak at the Kennedy Center for International Studies. Photo Credit: BYU.

there is something else on the stone: Next to the name of the university is the inscription bayt-al hikma, Arabic for “house of wisdom,” a deliberate historical allusion to the translation movement of early ninth-century Baghdad, in which Christians, Muslims, and Jews collaborated to bring Greek medicine, science, and philosophy into Arabic.

“More than a millennium later,” it states on the METI website, the university is engaged in a like-minded exercise, cultivating a like-minded collaboration of Christian, Jewish and Muslim thought.” As European and American historians have agreed, Islamic civilization was, for several centuries, arguably the most advanced culture on the planet. Its philosophers, scientists, historians and poets produced many of history’s greatest works, yet few classical Arabic or Persian works are accessible in the major Western languages, “a fact that is especially ironic, and perhaps even dangerous, since understanding the Islamic world is an urgent priority for us today,”

METI notes. In the early 1990s many at the university than began to make plans for a major effort to translate Islamic texts. As it happened, generous donors stepped forward to help launch it, and personal contacts throughout led to the acquisition “of the finest Arabic word-processing software in the world at the time.”

The university’s “Islamic Translation Series” (ITS) went on to publish its first book, al-Ghazali’s 12th century *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, in 1997. Since then it has published five other books, including a meditation (titled *The Niche of Lights*), also by al-Ghazali, and a discussion by the esteemed Aristotle commentator Averroës (Ibn Rushd) on the relationship between faith and reason (*The Decisive Treatise*). This was followed by the *Metaphysics of Avicenna* (Ibn Sina), often considered the greatest of all Muslim philosophers, which will perhaps be METI’s most important book yet.

As Daniel C. Peterson, a professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic at BYU, commented: “We are trying, in our small way, to do what was done in Baghdad in the ninth century: to bring the West and the Islamic world into fruitful conversation. And we are doing it, once again, by involving people of widely different faiths and backgrounds. I am proud of that. I hope that it illustrates that what once was can be again, that the strife, hostility and mutual distrust that currently exist between Muslims and the West need not always dominate. I am humbled and moved that Latter Day Saints can play such a role. Building bridges is exactly the kind of thing a Church university should do.”



The “Niche of Lights” A Highlight of the Middle Eastern Text Initiative, Brigham Young University.

Of its many translations of classical Arabic texts, BYU’s Middle Eastern Text Initiative (METI) considers *Niche of Lights* by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (A.D. 1058-1111) to be among its finest. Al-Ghazali is a pivotal figure in the history of Islamic thought, famous in his time as a master of Islamic jurisprudence and. But, according to the university’s description of the work, his own spiritual quest “convinced him that salvation was not to be obtained merely by slavish adherence to a code of conduct or intellectual assent to a creed but rather in the firsthand experience of the divine,”

toward which the beliefs and practices of Islam were oriented but often went unrealized in most of the faithful. Al-Ghazali’s “quest for a fully actualized spiritual life” led him to the disciplines of meditation upon the meaning of the Islamic revelation as contained in both the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). The *Niche of Lights*, written in the latter part of his career, “is a luminous example” of al-Ghazali’s personal effort to understand Islamic revelation in its richest sense.



Photo of Vintage Brigham Young Campus. Photo Credit: Revolvly

THE METROPOLITAN:

The MWL Visits the Islamic Treasures in New York City

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019

A typical visit by Dr. Al-Issa to New York normally involves meetings with the leaders of that city's great think-tanks and religious institutions. In late October, however, Dr. Al-Issa had the occasion to visit two of the city's iconic cultural institutions, The New York Public Library and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. At both institutions, he was introduced to vast holdings of Islamic treasures both in literature and the visual arts. As Dr. Al-Issa commented on the spiritual riches before him: "It is through art that civilizations and religions may best communicate with one another."

The New York Public Library holds some 200 sacred texts that formed the basis of an exhibition, "Three Faiths: Judaism Christianity and Islam." The three religions have their roots in Abraham's covenant with a single, unforeseeable God and now include half the world's population. Dr. Al-Issa was able to examine many of these classic texts on his tour of the library. The exhibition underscored the close literary and intellectual relationship among the three Abrahamic faiths, which live side by side around the world and in New York, "and the texts continue to be part of the local dialogue, fuel-



Dr. Al-Issa at the Metropolitan Museum of Art examining the Koran that greets visitors at the entrance to the galleries that were expanded in 2011 to accommodate the museum's rich collection of Islamic Art.

ing discourse and debate,” according to NYPL director Brian Bannon.

The library says that it educates visitors about the founding figures of the faiths and the ways in which those texts “have been used for centuries or millennia and in the daily lives of ordinary people.” Dr. Al-Issa examined texts in which these broad themes are illustrated through focused examples ranging from artifacts of Jewish theology to vernacular translations of the Christian Bible to depictions of the Hajj.

Dr. Al-Issa then continued on to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, specifically the fifteen new galleries at the museum dedicated to Islamic art and antiquities. The Met’s collection of Islamic art ranges from the seventh to the twenty-first century and comprises more than 15,000 objects reflecting the diversity and range of the cultural traditions of Islam. Works come from Spain and Morocco and extend as far eastward as Central Asia and India. With both sacred and secular objects, “the collection reveals the mutual influence of artistic practices such as calligraphy, and the exchange of motifs such as vegetal ornament (the arabesque) and geometric patterning in both realms,” as noted in an accompanying essay on the galleries on the museum’s website.

The history of this magnificent collection—expanded in 2011 to the current fifteen galleries—is a fascinating narrative of treasure hunting itself. Although the museum acquired some seals and jewelry from Islamic countries as early as 1874, and a number of Turkish textiles in 1879, it received its first major group of Islamic objects in 1891. By 1963, the number of objects had increased “to a point that necessitated an official departmental division between the ancient Near Eastern and the Islamic portions of the collection” and the Department of Islamic Art was founded.

In 2011, after an extensive renovation, the Museum opened the fifteen new Galleries, officially, for the “Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia.” The enlarged rooms “highlight both the diversity and the interconnectedness of the numerous cultures represented,” with a matrix of entryways “that allow visitors to approach the galleries—and the art displayed within—from different perspectives.” It is a style of approach to culture and civilization that symbolizes the spirit of the MWLs and Dr. Al-Issa’s permanent, international campaign for education, dialogue and tolerance.



A CALIFORNIA SUCCESS STORY:

Shereen Sabet of Splashgear

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019

One day in 2006, a brilliant young Egyptian-American student of marine biology and certified scuba diver from Huntington Beach, California, was faced with an “unexpected quandary” after deciding to wear the hijab upon getting married. As a self-described accidental entrepreneur, Shereen Sabet told the Arab fashion news website My Salaam: “I didn’t realise there was this need until I had that very same need/problem. I then did what every other Muslim woman has done; I searched for swim shirts and pants already in the marketplace to put together a homemade modest swimsuit.” Thanks to social media and e-commerce, “modest fashion,” as this niche market for Muslim-targeted women has come to be known, is gaining momentum.



Muslim-American entrepreneur Shereen Sabet in her creations.
Photo Credit: Tucson.com

Her ongoing success has been the result of her taking matters into her own hands from the start. Initially, she sought “to persuade two major women’s athletic apparel brands to consider making a modest swimwear

line for Muslim women.” This idea was rejected, but she was not deterred. Being inspired by both the surf and scuba-diving scenes, she attended a scuba-diving trade show where she met a representative from NeoSport, a popular surfwear company, who agreed to make a private label for the new company. Persistence further led her to finding the right range of designer-contractors to produce the swim pants, which she describes as “a long version of the popular men’s board shorts.” It wasn’t always calm waters and cloudless skies for the company she named Splashgear, and she encountered numerous obstacles ranging from the complexities of e-commerce to underestimating marketing budgets to being a pioneer in a niche demographic only to watch “copycat” companies emerge en masse following the first wave of success.

It is true that modest fashion has come a long way in recent years. As Sabet first started building her brand in 2006, the modest swimwear market was starved for options. “When Splashgear first opened, there were literally only three other companies worldwide offering modest swimwear,” the then-35-year-old recalls. “After Splashgear garnered much media attention, I witnessed a rise of copycat companies around the world, in Brazil, Europe, Far East Asia, and the USA. But the pioneering of the trend is due to her own American entrepreneurial spirit—with a ‘splash’ of Islam to inspire it all.

“I understand most people are accustomed to not seeing a lot of clothing on the beach or in the water,” Sabet has said in interviews. “We don’t want to look like freaks or stick out like sore thumbs for being so covered up on the beach, but I wanted to help make water activity accessible to Muslim women.” Today, Sabet has customers all over the world, including Canada, Asia and Australia, and she will introduce a line for both Muslim and Mormon men as well.



HISTORICAL ESSAY

THE STORY OF THOMAS JEFFERSON AND HIS QU'RAN

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | November 2019

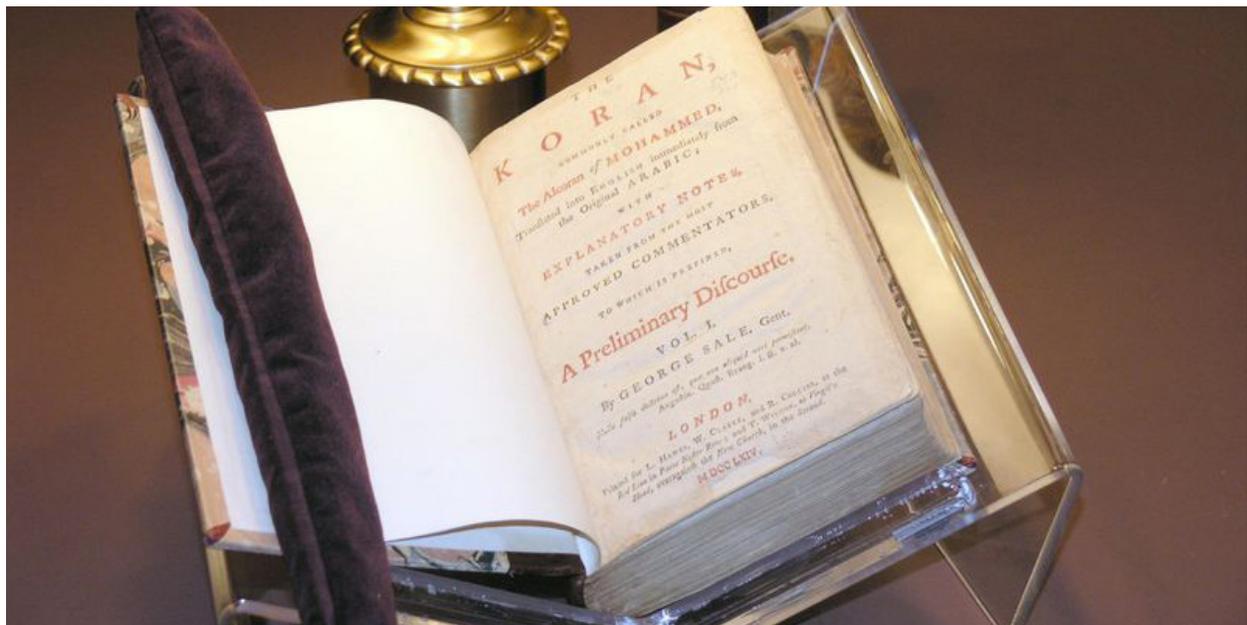


Photo of Thomas Jefferson's Qu'ran. Photo Credit: Smithsonian Magazine.

When Rep. Keith Ellison was sworn into Congress in 2007, photographs of the ceremony revealed that the Minnesota congressman (Attorney General of that state as of early 2019) did not take the oath swearing upon the traditional Bible, but upon a distinguished looking two-volume, Moroccan leather-bound work. Upon closer observation, that work was revealed to be a Qu'ran and that Qu'ran, in turn, came from the library of no less a figure than Thomas Jefferson. Ellison, an African –American, was then the first Muslim to be elected to Congress, from a district that at the time was composed of only 1% Muslims and 11% African-Americans. “I

keep the ummah [Muslim community] in my prayer constantly,” said Ellison in a 2016 speech. This would have been good news to Jefferson, who wrote in 1777, “All men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion.”

Politics are known to make strange bedfellows, and religions at times as well. The story of Jefferson's Qu'ran gives insight into the sense of spiritual liberality and cultural-intellectual curiosity of the high-minded of the Enlightenment. Historic scholarship shows that the Qu'ran had gained a great

”” *Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.*

— Thomas Jefferson, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, enacted into law January 16, 1786

deal popular readership among Protestants both in England and in North America, “largely out of curiosity,” according to Denise A. Spellberg, a history professor at the University of Texas at Austin and author of *Thomas Jefferson’s Qu’ran: Islam and the Founders*. The author was profiled in a Smithsonian article, “Why Thomas Jefferson Owned a Qu’ran” (January 2018). Dr. Spellberg also points out: “[It was also] because people thought of the book as a book of law and a way to understand Muslims with whom they were interacting already pretty consistently, in the Ottoman Empire and in North Africa.”

That interaction is one of the more unusual aspects of early American history, and when Jefferson bought his Quran as a law student in 1765, it was most likely because of his interest in understanding Ottoman law. Some scholars maintain that it may have also had an influence on his original intention for the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom to protect the right to worship for “the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan [Muslim], the Hindoo [Hindu], and infidel of every denomination,” as he wrote in his autobiography.

Jefferson’s Qu’ran was a 1734 translation by a British lawyer named George Sale and the first direct translation of the Qu’ran from Arabic to English (the only other English version was a translation of a French translation published in 1649). It would remain the definitive English translation of the Qu’ran into the late 1800s. In his 200-page introduction, Sale wrote that the purpose of the book was to help

Protestants understand the Qu’ran so that they could better define their own religion in contrast to it. Ironically, the translation was sponsored by an Anglican missionary society, “but its appeal went beyond its value as a missionary tool,” says Dr. Spellberg. She notes that Christians in the 18th century understood the value of learning about Islam. “The version that Thomas Jefferson bought was really a best-seller”—even with Sale’s voluminous introduction.

Dr. Spellberg certainly does not hesitate to point out that, even today, this philosophical legacy of tolerance has not been without significant setbacks, challenges and outright obstruction. Writing of Rep. Ellison’s ceremony, she commented: “At the time, I thought that the outrage expressed by some toward Congressman Ellison’s election and private swearing-in on the Qur’an might have been averted if only more Americans had known their own founding history better, a past that had prepared an eventual place for Congressman Ellison, not in spite of his religion, but because of it.”

Nonetheless, for as long as one may be reminded that the United States was founded in part upon the words of men like Jefferson remarking that “Neither pagan, nor Muslim nor Jew ought to be excluded from civil rights,” America is and will remain heart and soul the country of enlightened tolerance she was always meant to be.

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