Faith
Jane I. Smith [*Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*]

Belief in God and a corresponding system of religious beliefs. No concept in the Qur'ān is more basic to the understanding of God's revelation through the prophet Muḥammad than faith. As the core of the truly good or moral life, faith is generally understood to encompass both affirmation and response.

According to the qur'ānic perspective, nothing of virtue is conceivable which does not arise directly from faith in the being and revelations of God. Such faith as it is articulated in the Qur'ān in its most basic sense means acknowledgment of the reality and oneness of God and of the fact that humans will be held accountable for their lives and deeds on the day of resurrection . These two integrally related concepts frame the message of the Qur'ān and thus the religion of Islam itself. Faith in God is both trust in God's mercy and fear of the reality day of judgment. It also means that it is incumbent on those who acknowledge these realities to respond in some concrete way. The details of that response, and thus the relationship of faith and action, have been the subject of much debate in the history of Islamic thought.

The nature of faith

The Arabic noun rendered in English as either faith or belief is *īmān.* It is from the verb *amuna,* which in its several forms means to be faithful, to be reliable, to be safe and secure from fear. The fourth form of the verb, *āmana,* carries the meaning both of rendering secure and of putting trust in someone/something, the latter understood as having faith. The one who is faithful, therefore, the *mu'min,* is he or she who understands and accepts the content of God's basic revelation and who thereby has entered a state of security and trust in God. "The faithful *(al-mu'minūn)* are the ones whose hearts, when God is mentioned, are filled with awe. And when his revelations (*āyāt)* are recited to them, their faith is strengthened and they put their trust in their lord" (Q 8:2). The term *al-īmān* itself, used with the definite article, appears only 16 times in the text of the Qur'ān. Other derivatives of the fourth form of *amuna,* however, specifically *mu'min*and *mu'minūn* (the singular and plural of the faithful) appear frequently in the Qur'ān. "O you who have faith" is a common refrain as God speaks to the members of his community through commandments , admonitions, or words of counsel. Sometimes faith is expressed specifically as the remembrance of God: "Those who have faith are those whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God" (Q 13:28).

Implicit in the qur'ānic understanding of God is an unqualified difference between divine and human. The very recognition of God is often expressed by the term *tawḥīd,* meaning both God's oneness and human acknowledgment of it through the act of faith. It presupposes that there is no other being in any way similar to God, that God is utterly unique and that humans must not only testify to that uniqueness but embody their acknowledgment of it

through their own lives and actions. As God alone is lord and creator of the universe, so the Muslim acknowledges that oneness by living a life of integrity and ethical and moral responsibility, in other words a life in which faith is reflected in all its dimensions. The greatest sin a human being can commit from the Islamic point of view is impugning the oneness of God (*shirk)*, i.e. to suggest by word or deed that anything else can in any way share in that divine unity.

The Qur'ān leaves no doubt that faith as a general category of human response did not begin with Muḥammad or those who heard the first messages he preached. Throughout the ages there were people who understood that there is only one God, and who responded with faith and submission. In the Qur'ān they are usually described not as *mu'minūn* but as *ḥanīf* (q.v.; pl. *ḥunafā'*), monotheists who lived a kind of pristine purity in the knowledge and recognition of God. The first of these to be acknowledged by name, and thus understood as an archetypal person of faith or submission *(islām)*, was Abraham. "Abraham was not a Jew, nor a Christian, but he was an upright man *(ḥanīfan)*, one who submits *(musliman)*, and he was not of those who practice *shirk (wa-mā kāna mina l- mushrikīna)*. The nearest of humankind to Abraham are those who follow him and this Prophet and those who have faith. God is the protector of the faithful" (Q 3:67-8). The Qur'ān contains numerous references to Abraham and his offspring as those who were the original *muslims,* those who acknowledged and surrendered to God. The faith of the *ḥanīf* served as a precursor of the *īmān* which was to emerge as the essential characteristic of those who became part of the religion of Islam. It is the faith of Abraham that was signaled in the Qur'ān as that which gave justification to Judaism and Christianity as religions of the book, not the manifestations of those religions in forms which did not acknowledge that they were precursors of the coming of Muḥammad. "They say: Become Jews or Christians, then you will be rightly guided. Say: No, [rather] the religion of Abraham, the upright *(ḥanīfan)*, and he was not one of those who practiced *shirk (wa-mā kāna mina l- mushrikīna)*" (Q 2:135).

Faith as gratitude, fear and responsibility

Many verses in the text of the Qur'ān attest that one of the primary ways in which faith is to be understood and expressed is by recognition that the world is the manifest gift of God and that its constituent elements are the signs (q.v.; *āyāt*) by which God makes evident his beneficent favors to humankind. The person who has faith is the one who sees these signs and understands with his intelligence or intellect (q.v.; *'aql*) their nature as a gift from God. Those who are lacking in faith are the ones who fail to recognize and be grateful for these signs. Faith in its qur'ānic understanding, then, contains as an important ingredient the element of thankfulness to God for the bounties he has bestowed on humanity and praise of God as the only fitting response: "Only those have faith in our revelations *(āyātinā)* who, when they are reminded of them, fall down in prostration and give praise to their lord, and do not become arrogant" (Q 32:15). Appreciation is expressed not only in the heart and by individual praise and prostration, but by active participation in helping support the faithful of the community:

"Only those are faithful *(mu'minūn)* who have faith in God and his messenger, then never doubt again, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of God. Such are the sincere" (Q 49:15). In listing some of the names of God, Q 59:23 identifies him as both *salām* (from *s-l-m,* the root letters of *muslim* and *islām*) and *mu'min.* Rather than suggesting that God is a "believer," or one who possesses faith, as is said of a human person, the term *mu'min* signifies that God witnesses to his own truthfulness or trustworthiness, that in effect he testifies to his own unicity, and that he is responsible for the signs that make humans *mu'minūn.*

It is important to underscore the importance of fear as a component of faith. The word generally rendered as piety, godliness or devoutness is *taqwā,* derived from the root letters *w-q-y,* which, in their fifth and eighth verbal forms, mean to fear, especially God: "O you who believe," says Q 59:18, "fear God." Some have argued that to fear God *(ittaqa llāh)* is virtually synonymous with *āmana,* to have faith. Fear, however, is not a state in which the person of faith is terrorized or left in a pitiable condition bereft of consolation. It is rather an attitude of trembling before the power and the majesty of God and the reality of the events to come at the end of time, including those signaling the coming of the "hour," the resurrection, the judgment and the final consignment. Fear as an element of faith is balanced in the Qur'ān by the very trust implied in the original definition of *īmān,* often rendered as *tawakkul,* with the implication of a kind of unshakable reliance on the fundamental goodness, justice and mercy of God: "In God let those who are faithful put their trust" (Q 14:11). Such trust is not always easy to achieve, however, and so the Qur'ān assures the faithful that they must also have patience, especially when up against difficult circumstances. "O you who have faith! Seek help with steadfastness *(ṣabr,* lit. patience) and prayer. God is with those who are steadfast *(al-ṣābirīn)*" (Q 2:153). Faith which is grounded in absolute trust expresses the certainty of conviction, and it is therefore the highest form of knowledge *('ilm).* It is contrasted with other kinds of belief such as *ẓann* (supposition, opinion, assumption) and *khars,* which is close to guessing. The highest kind of faith is that generated by revelation. Many of the qualities which the Qur'ān affirms as an integral element of faith were part of the moral code that structured the lives of persons of conscience and honor in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The faithful are therefore described as those who are "protecting friends, one of another," as specified in Q 9:71. This verse continues by placing on male and female believers *(mu'minūn* and *mu'mināt)* the responsibility for carrying out what was to become one of the signal responsibilities for Muslims as developed in the schools of law and theology, namely to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Thus doing good and avoiding evil, in the general qur'ānic understanding, is essential to an understanding and expression of faith. And the next verse again spells out clearly the reward for this discernment, namely the promise of God that the faithful men and women will abide in the blessed dwellings of the gardens of paradise. In a number of references the Qur'ān affirms that those who have faith are regular and humble in their prayer, help and give asylum to the needy, pay the poor-tax, guard their modesty, love truth and honor their pledges, are not weary or fainthearted, fight in the way of God, and always trust in the guidance of God regardless of the circumstances. Qur'ān

commentators agree that while a person is still alive in this world there is always the possibility of his or her coming to a position of faith. But when the final hour arrives, and time as we know it comes to an end, then the opportunity to attain faith is gone forever and one must pay the consequences. Some interpreters insist that to fare well in that final judgment one must not have abdicated his or her faith at any time, that faith must continue unabated from the time at which one acknowledges oneself to be a *mu'min* to the last hour. Others allow that God in his mercy will accept the one who comes to the final judgment in a state of faith, regardless of earlier inconsistencies.

Faith and its qur'ānic opposites

The Qur'ān is replete with the kind of absolute dichotomy represented both by the choices of right and wrong, and by the ultimate consequences of those choices in the consignment to thegarden or the fire . Faith becomes the ultimate criterion by which one is aligned either with the positive or the negative, and thus in many verses one sees the sharp contrast drawn between the person of faith and the one who lacks faith, who actively disbelieves, who thereby rejects the message and the promise of God. The quality that is set in opposition to faith is most often rendered as *kufr,* with its agent the *kāfir* contrasted with the *mu'min.*

Kufr has two basic meanings in the Qur'ān, either the absence of faith, often rendered as disbelief, or ingratitude for God's signs *(āyāt).* In one way these meanings connote somewhat different aspects of negative response to God, of lack of faith, and in another they are integrally related. Sometimes *kufr* is said to be the response of those whose intellectual reasoning does not enable them to believe and adopt a position of faith. One of the most obvious examples of this kind of *kufr* is that offered by those who cannot accept the reality of the resurrection and time of judgment: "…they rejected *(kafarū)* our signs, saying: "When we are bones and fragments, shall we be raised up as a new creation?… the wrongdoers reject all save disbelief *(kufr)*" (Q 17:98-9). The contrast of *kufr* with *īmān* is vivid, and serves to illustrate not only that there is a sharp difference between faith and rejection, but that acceptance of the resurrection and judgment is an essential element of faith.

The other dimension of *kufr* as it is contrasted with *īmān* relates to ingratitude. It was noted above that gratitude and corresponding attitudes of praise are fundamental to faith: "He gives you all that you ask for. If you count the favors of God you will not be able to number them. Man is truly a wrong-doer, an ingrate *(kāfir)*" (Q 14:34). As the person of faith allows the promises of God to assume reality, however difficult that may be for reason to accept, and to engender in him or her a grateful response, so the *kāfir* both rejects truth (Q 43:78) and is actively unaccepting of and ungrateful for the bounty of God's gifts to humankind: "Then remember me," says God, "[and] I will remember you. Give thanks to me, and do not reject [me] *(lā takfurna)*" (Q 2:152). In this striking negative parallelism, found throughout the Qur'ān between the concepts of faith and rejection/ingratitude, appears the definition of the qualities of the one in the negation of the qualities of the other. The original and in some senses

prototypical *kāfir,* according to the Qur'ān, was the angel Iblīs who refused to obey God's command. "And when we said unto the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they bowed down, all except Iblīs. He refused and was haughty, and so became a disbeliever *(wa-kāna mina l-kāfirīn)*" (Q 2:34).

Another qur'ānic term which stands in contrast to *īmān* is *nifāq,* generally rendered as hypocrisy or dissimulation . Unlike *kufr,* however, which is the mirror opposite of faith, *nifāq* is understood to be the act or condition of making a profession of faith verbally while inwardly not being a believer at all: "Have you not seen those who declare that they have faith in what is revealed to you and to those before you... When it is said to them, 'Come to what God has revealed and to the messenger,' you see the hypocrites *(al- munāfiqūn)* turn away from you with disgust" (Q 4:60-1). Some exegetes of the Qur'ān have posited that hypocrisy is sufficiently different from either faith or rejection that it should be categorized separately. The majority, however, have understood that *nifāq* is a kind of subset of *kufr,* both standing in essential opposition to *īmān.* Q 57:13-5 draws a dramatic picture of the great divide between the hypocrites and the faithful on the day of resurrection: Hypocrites (male and female, contrasting with the male and female believers of Q 57:12) will beg the believers to borrow from their light. But to the horror of the hypocrites, there will arise between them and the believers a gated wall, with mercy to be found on one side and doom on the other. The *munāfiqūn* will ask of the faithful, "Were we not with you?" But the answer is that while in one way they were, in another and more important way they led lives marked by temptation, hesitation and doubt, consumed with vain desires until it was too late. Now no ransom is possible, and the lot of the hypocrites is the fire.

Faith and works; islām *and* īmān

In the Qur'ān, as we have seen, there is a close connection between having faith and doing good deeds . The expression "those who believe and do good works" is repeated in many verses, and such people "are the inhabitants of the garden; they will abide there eternally" (Q 2:82). The Qur'ān closely links the term for good works *(ṣāliḥāt)* to *īmān.* The verb *ṣalaḥa* in Arabic means to be good, right, proper, pious and godly, and the *ṣāliḥāt* are the good deeds in which the faithful engage. The joining of faith and works is so integral to the Qur'ān that many have argued that the performance of works is implicit in the understanding of what it means to have faith. Faith is not so much believing in something or adhering to some kind of acceptance of the unseen or what is not immediately evident to the senses or reason, as it is active testimony to what one holds unquestionably to be true. God acts on behalf of humankind, and men and women respond in the act of faith. But what is the content of that faith? What is the mix of mental discernment, verbal confession and the performance of good deeds that is really at the heart of *īmān?*

Despite their apparent qur'ānic association, the question arose early in the history of the Muslim community as to whether faith and works were to be understood as one and

inseparable, or as two different though perhaps necessarily related concepts. The issue was directly related to the definition of who was a true Muslim, i.e. acceptable as a faithful member of the community, and who was not. Opinions differed widely, and in many cases depended on the understanding of two related matters pertaining to the question of faith: (1) What is the relationship of faith and works? (2) What is the relationship of *islām* (submission to God) to *īmān* (faith in God)? Several schools of interpretation, each with its own version of belief in the message of the Qurʾān, refused to separate faith and the accomplishment of good works *(aʿmāl).* Others who were attempting to understand the meaning of *īmān,* however, found it important to distinguish between faith and works, including some who were willing to see the performance of good deeds as an overt means of achieving or actualizing faith. The question of the possibility of an increase or decrease of faith will be dealt with below.

The matter of faith and works for some was seen to be integrally related to the question of faith and submission. Islam is the only major religion whose very name suggests a bi-dimensional focus of faith. On the vertical axis it refers to the individual and personal human response to God's oneness, often described as the "faith" dimension, while on the horizontal axis it means the collectivity of all of those persons who together acknowledge and respond to God to form a community of religious faith. Muslims agree that the religious response of all those persons throughout the ages who have affirmed the oneness of God in faith can rightly be understood as personal *islām.* It was only with the official beginning of the community at the time of the emigration (q.v.; *hijra*) to Medina , however, that there came to be a specific recognition that Muslims together form a group, a unity, an *umma,* although the term *islām* itself was not often used to refer to that group until considerably later. Nonetheless it was over the question of legitimate membership in the *umma* that some of the most serious controversies arose. Implicit in that discussion was the issue of whether there is a distinction between *islām* and *īmān.*

In the Qurʾān there is no clear distinction between these two terms. Among the early traditions of the community, however, is one in which the Prophet is said to have defined *islām* specifically as distinct from *īmān.* The narrative is given in a variety of renditions in a large number of compilations. The most popular version tells the story of a man who comes to the Prophet of God while he is seated with some of his companions. This man, who is unknown to the assembled group, turns out later to be the angel Gabriel . He asks the Prophet, "What is *islām?*" And the Prophet replies that it is the specific duties of witnessing that there is no God but God and Muḥammad is his messenger, submitting to God with noassociation of anything else, performing the prayer *(ṣalāt),* paying the alms tax *(zakāt),* fasting during Ramaḍān and making the pilgrimage (q.v.; *ḥajj*) if possible. He then asks the Prophet, "What is *īmān?*" The answer given is that it is faith in God, his angels (see ANGEL), his books, his messengers, the last day and the resurrection and all of the particulars to attend the final judgment, and (in some versions) the decree *(al- qadr)* in its totality (cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* i, 48; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* i, 27, 51-2; ii, 107, 426; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* i, 36-40).

In terminology developed in later Islamic theology a distinction was made between *īmān mujmal* (a brief summary of faith) and *īmān mufaṣṣal* (faith elaborated in detail). The former indicates that the essential content of faith is the affirmation that came to be known as the creed or *shahāda* (testimony) of Islam, that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is the messenger of God. The details of that testimony (*īmān mufaṣṣal),* or the elements as found in the verses of the Qurʾān that came to comprise the content of faith, are those outlined above in the Prophet's answers to the question of the angel, "What is *īmān?*" Generally these are limited to the first five, sometimes said to parallel the five pillars (*arkān*) or responsibilities incumbent on the believing Muslim (these "pillars of Islam" are outlined in the Prophet's response to the angel's question, "What is *islām?*"). Sometimes, however, acceptance of *qadar* or the measure of divine foreordainment is also included in *īmān mufaṣṣal.*

In the several renditions of this tradition there seems to be a fairly distinct line drawn between *islām* and *īmān.* The former consists almost exclusively of the performance of the (five) specific duties prescribed by God through his Prophet for the Muslim; the latter is faith in (acceptance and affirmation of) the various elements proclaimed through the word of the Prophet as real and valid. The case could thus be made, as some did, that the Prophet himself distinguished between faith and works. Some traditions support this distinction by affirming that the Prophet asserted that *islām* is overt (*ʿalāniyya)* while *īmān* is in the heart, and that pointing to his breast he said, "Piety *(taqwā)* is here" (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* iii, 134-5). Such a clear distinction was not always made, however, and in several traditions we see that while *islām* and *īmān* were generally given different emphases, they were definitely seen to be interrelated. In the Qurʾān commentaries, the traditions and the classical lexicons, three sets of relationships between faith and *islām* are proposed: different but separate; distinct but not separate; and synonymous. One frequently cited tradition reports the Prophet as having said that the most virtuous kind of *islām* is *īmān* (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* iv, 114) thus suggesting that faith is a sort of subdivision of *islām.* And in a number of narrations *islām* seems to consist of *īmān* plus works, as the Prophet, when asked to discuss *islām,* responded that the submitter should say, "I have faith," and should walk the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm,* Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* iii, 413; iv, 385; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* i, 65).

As the Qurʾān is not precise on the distinction between faith and submission, for the most part it also does not suggest that either is higher or of more value than the other. There is one verse, however, which does seem to suggest that there is, in fact, not only a distinction between *īmān* and *islām* but a quality judgment about them. Q 49:14 says, "The desert Arabs say, 'We have faith *(āmannā).*' Say [to them], 'You do not believe,' but [should] say, 'We submit (*aslamnā),*' for faith has not yet entered into your hearts...." For some commentators the verse has been taken to mean that the Arabs mentioned there came to follow the teachings of the Prophet only to obtain his bounty, and because they did not have true faith they should be classified as hypocrites, i.e. lying in their hearts (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* i, 41-2). Others, seeing that the distinction apparently drawn in this verse does not represent the way in which the terms are used elsewhere in the Qurʾān, have been unwilling to say that *īmān* is superior to *islām* (i.e. that faith takes priority over works; cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* i, 31). In general the exegetes and

theologians define *īmān* as the specific act of faith most commonly understood as assent or attestation (*taṣdīq*) and affirmation or acknowledgment (*iqrār),* and make it clear that it has at least some areas of identification with *islām.*

The various elements of faith and faith-response are often associated with the parts of the body, such that the full acceptance of the content of faith lies in the heart, the public affirmation or pro- fession comes through the lips, and the performance of the duties or responsibilities of the faith is done by the members. Some interpreters have wanted to say that only the matter of the heart is of primary significance, and that the affirmation and deeds are secondary. Only the latter constitute *islām,* they argue, and, while part of *īmān,* are not its crucial feature (see e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* vi, 564-5). Only a few Qur'ān commentators, notably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), have argued for the essential identity of faith and submission (while different in generality, he says, they are one in existence, *Tafsīr,* ii, 628). Most agree with the giant of classical Qur'ān exegetes, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), that on one level *islām* signifies the verbal submission by which one enters the community of *muslims,* and on the other it is coordinate with *īmān,* which involves the total surrender of the heart, mind and body (*Tafsīr,*ix, 518).

Early theological controversies over issues of faith

While the commentators argued with their pens over the centuries about the relationship of faith and *islām,* others in the early days of Islam were more vocal in their insistence that certain people must not be acknowledged as true members of the Muslim community and used what they saw as the distinction between the two terms to support their arguments. Who is truly a *mu'min,* a member of the community of the faithful believers? The issue became one of genuine concern to the early Muslim community when a group of puritans called the Khārajites (*khawārij)* this group considered themselves to be the only "true Muslims") tried to draw the distinction by claiming that some *muslims,* especially claimants to the leadership of the Muslim community, such as 'Uthmān and 'Alī, who had committed what they considered sinful acts and had failed to rule the community in the name of the Qur'ān, were in fact without *īmān* and thus should not be part of the *umma.* In the Qur'ān, as we have seen, the polarity is clear between those with faith, whether they are called *mu'minūn* or *muslimūn,* and those who do not have faith, the *kāfirūn,* the ungrateful rejectors of God's message. In their attempt to try to assure the absolute purity of Islam, to make sure that those who were Muslims were faithful in their hearts as well as submitters with their tongues and members, the Khārajites accused some members of the community of actually being infidels. For them the important distinction was not between Muslim believers and non-Muslim unbelievers, but rather between those within the body of Islam who had faith and those who did not, even if technically *muslimūn.* With these accusations came the first discussions of the nature of grave sin within Islam. Although the Khārajites were not themselves so much theologians as concerned Muslims who feared for the purity of the community once Islam had begun to spread rapidly beyond Arabia, they brought the issue of a definition of *īmān* and *mu'min* to the fore for essentially the first time.

The radical alternative of an essentially faithless Muslim was never adopted. Forced to resort to severe reprisals on those who disagreed with them, the Khārajites were relegated to an underground movement of political opposition.

Another group concerned with the matter of grave sin was called the Murji'ites. In distinction to the Khārajites, they held that even though a Muslim commits a grave sin, he may still remain a *mu'min,* a person of faith. So long as one continues to profess *islām,* they said, it is not the responsibility of other Muslims to determine that he or she has given up all claims to true faith. The designation *murji'a* means those who postpone, and in this case indicates their belief that judgment about the presence or absence of faith in anyone must be left to God to decide on the last day. Nonetheless they were convinced that it is faith which provides for the ultimate salvation of humans, and that the essence of faith is not necessarily affected by one's deeds.

Other factions in the early history of Islam looked at what the Qur'ān has to say about matters of faith and works from a different perspective. For one of these groups, the Mu'tazilites, faith was said to be measured most accurately by the works that constitute it. Known as the "people of justice and unity *(ahl al-'adl wa-l-tawḥīd),*" they insisted on the absolute unicity of God, denying him any substantive attributes, and held that God is necessarily just, and wills and does only that which is good (cf. Gimaret, Mu'tazila, 787-91). In their view, humans are not predestined by God toward one condition or another, but make their own destiny by their deeds. For the Mu'tazilites, the primary issue was not whether the grave sinner is still a person of faith (indeed, they developed the notion of an "intermediate state" *[al- manzila bayna l-manzilatayn],* refusing to classify a sinful Muslim as either a believer *[mu'min]* or a disbeliever *[kāfir],* but considering this individual a "malefactor" *[fāsiq];* cf. Gimaret, Mu'tazila, 786-7), but that doing good works is an essential element of *islām/ īmān.* Unlike those who wanted to identify the crucial component of *īmān* as heartfelt affirmation, with deeds a secondary result, the Mu'tazilites insisted that faith cannot exist without works. The necessity of putting faith into action is seen in one of the principles of Mu'tazilism: heeding the qur'ānic injunction (cf. e.g. Q 3:104, 110) of "ordering good and forbidding evil *(al- amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar)*"; how frequently Mu'tazilites put this principle into practice, however, is a matter of debate (cf. Gimaret, Mu'tazila, 787; for a recent discussion of this principle in Islamic thought, see Cook, *Commanding the right*). The Mu'tazilites' stress on human reason as the way of understanding God's commands led them to the position that faith is actually the knowledge by which the revelation is manifested. *Īmān,* then, is both what the faithful one knows and the necessary deeds undertaken on the basis of that knowledge.

The testimony of faith

The position taken by various groups in the early history of Islam on the matter of faith as it is expressed in the verses of the Qur'ān, then, is obviously related to the larger issues they wished

to press. While some chose to stress the importance of heartfelt acceptance, and others emphasized the importance of good deeds, still others looked to the matter of testimony by verbal pronouncement as the essential ingredient in faith. The Qurʾān affirms the importance of testimony in many places, none clearer than the passage which describes all humanity affirming God since the beginning of human creation: "When your lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, [saying], 'Am I not your lord?' they said, 'Yes! We testify (*shahidnā*)'" (Q 7:172).

Thus the testimony or *shahāda* is the content of *īmān mujmal,* faith summarized. One school that has clearly insisted on the importance of this kind of verbal testimony as essential to *īmān* is that of the Ḥanafites. For them, confession by the tongue is not merely a consequence of faith, but is the actual obligation of the person in whose heart*īmān* is to be found. Thus the very fact of God's having professed himself to be *muʾmin* (Q 59:23) means that *muʾmin*s in turn are obligated to profess God as the essential act of faith. Many theologians who believe that the locus of faith is only to be found deep within the human heart consider the Ḥanafite position to place an overemphasis on the verbal nature of faith.

Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) raised an important issue in relation to faith, namely whether, once adopted, it is capable of increase or decrease. This (Murjiʾite) position was that *īmān* cannot be divided, and thereby cannot become more or less. It seems clear from the Qurʾān that it is possible for faith to grow or diminish, or even to disappear completely: "Whoever rejects God after his faith *(man kafara bi-llāhi min baʿdi īmānihi)*…" says Q 16:106. Most of the early doctors ofIslam disagreed with the Ḥanafites on this matter, holding that faith can increase when one performs obedient acts, and likewise can diminish if one does unfaithful or disobedient deeds. Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), once a Muʿtazilite but later devoting himself to a refutation of many of their views, is often said to have been the founder of what emerged as the orthodox or dominant school of theological reasoning in matters of divine justice and human responsibility. Al-Ashʿarī disputed Abū Ḥanīfa's doctrine that *īmān* cannot increase or decrease on the grounds that one's deeds and words have an indisputable effect on the quality and nature of one's faith (*Maqālāt,* 140-1).

Not all of those who affiliated themselves with the Ashʿarite school followed al-Ashʿarī in this affirmation, but in general it has become part of the understanding of most Muslims that what one says and does can have a significant effect on what is understood to be one's *īmān* or the content of faith. Whether or not faith actually increases or decreases remains a matter of conjecture. A popular twelfth-century credal formulation (see CREEDS) by the jurist and theologian Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) summarizes a number of the issues raised above and offers its own conclusions. It affirms that faith is assent by the heart to what God has revealed and verbal confession of it, that while works can increase or decrease the essence of faith cannot, and that while they may emphasize different aspects of the human response to God,*īmān* and *islām* are one.

Bibliography

Primary:

al-Ashʿarī, Abū l-Ḥasan, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1963[2]

Baghdādī, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Khālid, *Belief and Islam. The annotated translation of Iʿtiqādnama by Mawlānā Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Khālid Baghdādī (1778-1826),* Istanbul 1993

Bayḍāwi, *Anwār*

Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* Cairo 1966

E.E. Elder, *A commentary on the creed of Islam. Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī on the creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī,* New York 1950

N. Faris (trans.), *The foundations of the articles of faith. Being a translation with notes of the Kitāb Qawāʿid al-aqāʾid of al-Ghazzālī's Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn,* Lahore 1974

Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* 6 vols., Cairo 1895

Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*

Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Īmān,* Cairo 1972

Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*

Quṭb, *Ẓilāl*

Rashīd Riḍā, *Manār*

Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* 8 vols., Istanbul 1891

Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* Damascus 1959/60

Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*

Secondary:

M.R.Ḥ. ʿAbd al-Mutajallī, *al-Īmān fī l-Qurʾān al-karīm,* Cairo 1976

S. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *al-ʿAql wa-l-īmān fī l-islām,* Beirut 1979

M. Cook, *Commanding right and forbidding wrong in Islamic thought,* Cambridge, UK 2000

L. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme,* Paris 1967

id. and Anawati, *Introduction*

D. Gimaret, Muʿtazila, in *EI²*, vii, 783-93

M.ʿA.Q. Ḥanadī, *Arkān al-īmān fī ḍawʿ al-kitāb wa-l-sunna,* Jidda 1990

T. Izutsu, *The concept of belief in Islamic theology,* Tokyo 1965

id., *Concepts*

id., *The structure of the ethical terms in the Koran,* Tokyo 1957

ʿA.Ḥ. Maḥmūd, *al-Īmān,* Cairo 1967

M. Maḥmūd, *Riḥla min al-shakk ilā l-īmān,* Beirut 1971

G. Makdisi, Ashʿarī and the Ashaʿrites in Islamic religious history, in *SI* 17 (1962), 37-80; 18 (1963), 19-39

S. Makino, *Creation and termination,* Tokyo 1970

Nöldeke, *GQ*

F. Rahman, *Major themes of the Qurʾān,* Minneapolis 1980

H. Ringgren, The conception of faith in the Koran, in *Oriens* 4 (1951), 1-20

id., *Islam, aslama, and Muslim,* Upsalla 1949

J.I. Smith, *An historical and semantic study of the term Islam as seen in a sequence of Quran commentaries,* Missoula 1975

A. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed,* Cambridge 1932

M. Yazdī, *Uṣūl al-dīn wa-usus al-īmān fī l-Qurʾān,* Qum 1997