WHETHER TO SAY SALĀM: MUSLIM COURTESY TOWARD NON-MUSLIMS

*Kazunori Hamamoto**

Abstract: This article addresses the question of whether or not Muslims should say *salām* to non-Muslims. While various opinions on it have been presented since the first century of Islam, most medieval scholars did not approve of saying *salām* to non-Muslims. However, the traditional mainstream position has been reconsidered by modern reformers, and the increase of Muslim population in the West has rendered this issue more important and controversial. This article does not intend to give a definitive answer to this controversy but to explore its long history from an objective point of view, paying attention to what Qur’anic verses and hadiths are related to the issue and how they can be interpreted without contradiction. Besides, the similarity as well as the difference between Ibn al-Qayyim’s view and Rashīd Riḍā’s is one of the important points of this article.

Introduction

Salām is one of the most important words for Muslims. It is an Arabic word that means peace and has the same root (s, l, m) as *Islam* and *Muslim*. *Al-salām*, the Peace, is one of God’s 99 beautiful names¹ and also an essential component of Muslim greetings. According to the Prophet Muḥammad, God taught Adam [Ādam] how to exchange greetings; Adam said to a group of angels, “Peace be upon you [*al-salām ‘alay-kum*],” and the angels replied, “Peace be upon you and God’s mercy [*al-salām ‘alay-kum wa-rahmat Allāh*].”² These phrases are not just greetings but even supplications for each other’s peace.

Muslims often mention this special importance of *salām* in Islam as evidence that Islam is a peaceful religion. Here a question arises: can these supplications for peace be offered for everyone in the world, or are they exclusively addressed to Muslims?³ In the time of the Prophet, this question was of practical relevance to Muslims’ relationship with Jewish tribes who enjoyed equality with Muslims under the Constitution of Medina.⁴ It is only reasonable to suppose that the Prophet treated Muslims and Jews without discrimination not only in government but also in greetings. Yet some Jews’ disloyalty to the Prophet made him reconsider how to deal with Jews. Later on, non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic state were called “*dhimmī*”s, and most medieval Muslim jurists took a view that it was no longer permissible to say *salām* to them. In modern times, however, this issue was put into a new context: the rise of Western colonialism and its consequences — the secularisation of Muslim societies, the intensification of Western Christian missionary activities,⁵ the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and so forth. As a

result, Muslim scholars were divided; some stuck to the classical view, insisting on alienating non-Muslims in order to protect the dignity of Islam, while others claimed that Muslims should show Islamic virtues to non-Muslims in order to keep Islam a universal religion in a true sense. More recently, the growth of Muslim population in Western countries has given birth to a branch of Islamic jurisprudence for Muslim minorities,⁶ *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*, in which how to greet non-Muslims is an inescapable question. Today, the issue of *salām* is one of the most controversial ones among Muslims, and numerous opinions on it are expressed at various websites. This article does not intend to give a definitive answer to it but aims to survey the history of this controversy from an objective point of view.

Since greetings are exchanged between two sides, the above question consists of two sub-questions. First, should Muslims say *salām* to non-Muslims on Muslims' initiative? Second, should Muslims return *salām* if non-Muslims say it first as a salute to Muslims? Muslim scholars have been answering these questions by consulting the Qur'an and hadiths, but their answers are not one and the same. This is because some Qur'anic verses and hadiths, if taken literally, could contradict each other, which can lead scholars to different interpretations. Before going into their arguments, let us see what verses and hadiths are related to this issue.

1. Qur'anic Verses and Hadiths about Saying *Salām* to Non-Muslims

There are several hadiths directly related to the subject, which are sorted into two groups according to our two questions. In one group of hadiths, though they are transmitted by different transmitters and not completely the same in wording, the Prophet prohibits Muslims from saying *salām* first to Jews or Christians. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* has one of these hadiths,⁷ and *al-Adab al-Mufrad* by al-Bukhārī has a few of them.⁸ In *al-Kāfī* compiled by al-Kulaynī, the most authoritative Shī'ī collection of hadiths, it is reported that Imām 'Alī forbade greeting people of the Book.⁹ In connection with this group of hadiths, there is also a hadith telling that the Prophet wrote to Byzantine ruler Heraclius, "Peace be upon those who follow the guidance,"¹⁰ which could be understood as suggesting that *salām* should not be said to non-Muslims.

In the other group of hadiths, the Prophet directs that Muslims just say "(and) upon you [(*wa*) '*alay-kum al-salām*']" when they are greeted by non-Muslims. All of Muslim, al-Bukhārī and al-Kulaynī have collected several of these hadiths.¹¹ While some of them are transmitted with "and [*wa*]," others are not. Also, while some of them use *kum*, the plural of the second person, others *ka*, the singular. In addition, many of them clarify their context: a party of Jews said to the Prophet,

“Death [*al-sām*] be upon you,” as mentioned in the Qur’an 58:8, and the prophet replied to them, “(And) upon you.” In some of them, furthermore, the prophet admonished his youngest wife ‘Ā’ishah, who answered the Jews back in a similar manner to theirs, to stay well-mannered even when non-Muslims used unpleasant words to her.

Besides these two groups of hadiths, there is a hadith in which the Prophet says, “Spread peace [*afshū al-salām*].” This hadith is also recorded by all the three collectors mentioned above.¹² In some versions, these words are followed by “among you,” but it is open to question whom “you” refers to.

In the Qur’an, there are a number of verses about the greeting of *salām*. In many of those verses, *salām* is given to those who have entered Paradise,¹³ which could be interpreted as suggesting that not all people are entitled to receive *salām*. But these are not very relevant to our subject since they are only about the hereafter. On the other hand, there are a few verses implying that *salām* can be said to unbelievers or even idolaters, whom God blames most strongly. In 19:47, for instance, Abraham [Ibrāhīm] says *salām* to his father, praying that God will forgive him for his ancestral polytheism. In 43:89, God tells the Prophet to distance himself from idolaters, saying *salām* to them so that they will realise the truth some day.¹⁴

There is also a verse that requires Muslims to give back a greeting better than or equal to the one they have received (4:86). Although this verse does not specifically refer to *salām*, it is closely related to our second question. As seen below, a number of scholars have discussed it in their comments on this verse, in which the focus is on whether the whole verse is only applied to Muslims or not. In this connection, the Qur’an enjoins Muslims not to say “You are not a believer” to whoever says *salām* to them (4:94).

In addition, Qur’anic verses talking about Muslim’s general attitude toward non-Muslims have to do with our questions because they can serve as guiding principles in interpreting the aforementioned hadiths and verses. However, while some of them are hostile to non-Muslims, others are not. For example, 9:5, the so-called verse of sword, commands Muslims to fight polytheists, whereas 60:8 allows Muslims to be kind and do justice to those who have not attacked them or expelled them.

2. Classical Views

In this section, we will see how medieval scholars interpreted these verses and hadiths. They dealt with our questions in their commentaries on the Qur’an, exegeses of hadiths collections, and legal books. To begin with, we will look at three works that were written during the formative period of legal schools and

frequently quoted by scholars in later times. Then we will go into the positions of different legal schools.

2.1. The Formative Period of Legal Schools

Ibn Abī Shaybah (d.849), author of *al-Muṣannaf*, a great collection of traditions about the Prophet, his companions and others, records a fairly substantial number of traditions relevant to our interests. As regards our first question, Ibn Abī Shaybah not only records the prophetic hadith that instructs Muslims not to say *salām* first to non-Muslims but also reports that several figures of early generations, such as Ibn ‘Abbās (d.687), Abū Umāmah (d.700) and ‘Umar bn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d.720), did not oppose saying *salām* to non-Muslims. According to Ibn Abī Shaybah, Ibn ‘Abbās wrote to a man who belonged to people of the Book, “Peace be upon you”; Abū Umāmah did not pass Muslims, Jews, or Christians without saying *salām* on his own initiative; ‘Umar bn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, referring to Qur’anic verse 43:89, shared his own view that there is no problem if Muslims say *salām* first to *dhimmīs*. As for our second question, Ibn Abī Shaybah records, besides the Prophet’s words “and upon you,” a few different views on this issue: for example, Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Whoever of God’s creatures greets you, reply to him, even if he is Magian”; Tāwūs (d.724) said that if a Jew or a Christian greeted him, he answered, “Peace has gone higher than you [*‘alāka al-salām*],” although this view is not supported by other scholars.¹⁵

Al-Ṭabarī (d.923) discusses our second question in his comment on 4:86, which enjoins Muslims to give back a greeting better than or equal to the one they have received. According to him, there are two different interpretations of this verse: some Muslims regard this whole verse as talking about greetings only among Muslims, but others assign better greetings for Muslims and equal greetings for non-Muslims. Al-Ṭabarī reports that ‘Aṭā’ held the first one, whereas a few Muslims, such as Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah (d.736), went for the other interpretation. Al-Ṭabarī then compares these two positions and finally adopts the first one for two reasons: in several hadiths the Prophet instructs Muslims to return a worse greeting to non-Muslims, and God does not say that a part of this verse is for Muslims and the rest of it for non-Muslims.¹⁶ As for our first question, al-Ṭabarī, at least in his commentary of the Qur’an, does not mention the hadith that instructs Muslims not to say *salām* first to non-Muslims position. However, according to al-Qurtubī (d.1273) and Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī (d.1449), al-Ṭabarī says somewhere that this hadith should be obeyed in principle and that the hadith in which the Prophet said *salām* on his own initiative to a group made up of Muslims and non-Muslims should be understood as an exception.¹⁷ Whether al-Qurtubī and al-‘Asqalānī’s accounts are true or not, given that al-Ṭabarī does not

allow Muslims to say *salām* in reply, it is most likely that he considers it even less permissible for Muslims to say *salām* first to non-Muslims. As far as polytheists are concerned, he clearly states that 43:89 has been abrogated by the verse that orders Muslims to kill them (9:5).¹⁸

Al-Khaṭṭābī (d.998), in his exegesis of *Sunan* by Abū Dāwūd, makes a brief comment as to how Muslims should respond if Jews say to them “death be upon you.” While the Prophet answered “and upon you [*wa-‘alay-kum*]” in all the versions that Abū Dāwūd has recorded,¹⁹ al-Khaṭṭābī, referring to another version transmitted by Sufyān bn ‘Uyaynah (d.814),²⁰ maintains that the proper answer is “upon you [*‘alay-kum*]” because to say “and upon you” is to say “death be upon you as well as us.”²¹ But what al-Khaṭṭābī is writing here makes sense only if non-Muslims say rude words at Muslims; how should Muslims reply if non-Muslims tell them *salām* in a decent manner? However, al-Khaṭṭābī seems to think that it does not matter how non-Muslims greet Muslims; in another version that Abū Dāwūd has recorded, the Prophet instructs Muslims, as a general rule, to say “and upon you” when they receive a greeting from people of the Book, but al-Khaṭṭābī does not make any comment on it. In addition, while Abū Dāwūd has recorded the hadith that tells Muslims not to say *salām* first to non-Muslims, al-Khaṭṭābī makes no comment on it. This silence of al-Khaṭṭābī should be understood as a sign that he takes into granted that Muslims are not to say *salām* to non-Muslims.

From what we have seen above, it can be seen that several figures in the 7th and the early 8th centuries are reported to have considered it permissible to say *salām* to non-Muslims, whereas scholars in later centuries tend to take the opposite view, relying on the hadiths and taking them literally. Although this is basically true of legal schools after the 10th century too, as will be seen below, there is also a notable divergent view.

2.2. Ḥanafī School

Al-Zamakhsharī (d.1144), a Mu‘tazilī theologian and Ḥanafī jurist, touches on our questions in his comment on 4:86. He presents the views of al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī, d.728), al-Sha‘bī (d.721), Abū Ḥanīfa (d.767), Abū Yūsuf (d.798) and others. According to al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ḥasan held that Muslims are allowed to say *salām* to non-Muslims but not to say “God’s mercy” for the reason that asking God forgiveness [*istighfār*] for non-Muslims is forbidden; al-Sha‘bī said to a Jew, “upon you be peace and God’s mercy,” and then said to a companion of him, “He lives in God’s mercy, doesn’t he?”; there were also some scholars who held that to say *salām* to non-Muslims is permissible when it is necessary. However, according to al-Zamakhsharī, the founding fathers of the Ḥanafī school do not allow Muslims to say *salām* to non-Muslims, at least on Muslims’ initiative:

Abū Ḥanīfa told a Muslim not to say *salām* first to non-Muslims; Abū Yūsuf told a Muslim not to greet or shake hands with non-Muslims.²² Al-Zamakhsharī does not clarify what his own position is. Interestingly, in his comment on 19:47, he supports a view that Muslims are allowed to ask God forgiveness for non-Muslims on condition that they embrace Islam. This could be understood as implying that al-Zamakhsharī approves of saying *salām* to non-Muslims on this condition, but he does not clearly say so.²³

Al-Mawṣilī (d.1284) states, in his exegesis of a legal book written by himself, that greeting *dhimmīs* is disliked because it is a glorification of them [*ta'dhīm(i)-him*]. In this connection, he observes that it is no problem to say “peace be upon those who follow the guidance” when both Muslims and unbelievers are in a group. He also notes that it is permissible to say to *dhimmīs* “May God make your life long” only if it is intended to pray that they will embrace Islam or pay poll tax. As for responding to greetings from *dhimmīs*, he states that there is no problem; he even says as follows: “Refusing to do that would hurt them and replying is doing good. Hurting them is reprehensible and being courteous to them [*al-iḥsān bi-him*] is recommended.” He adds, however, that nothing should be added to “and upon you.”²⁴

While al-Mawṣilī dislikes glorifying non-Muslims, it is noteworthy that he approves of being courteous to them. In addition, concerning the permissibility of visiting non-Muslims, he states that Muslims are not prohibited from being kind to them [*barr-hum*], following the prophet’s example.²⁵ But is it convincing that greeting non-Muslims is a glorification of them, whereas visiting them is not? Should this rule be applied to every kind of non-Muslim? In any case, what he writes on this issue seems to be more or less the Ḥanafī school’s position. Ibn Nujaym (d.1562), taking a similar view to al-Mawṣilī’s, writes that it is not permissible to say *salām* to *dhimmīs* unless it cannot be helped, that nothing should be added to “and upon you” in return to greetings from them, that shaking hands with them is disliked, and that glorifying them is forbidden, whereas it is not disliked to visit non-Muslim neighbours or to be their guest.²⁶ Al-Ḥaṣkafī (d.1677) entirely follows Ibn Nujaym in these respects.²⁷

2.3. Mālikī School

Al-Bājī (d.1081) discusses our questions in his exegesis of Muwaṭṭa’ by Mālik ibn Anas. The hadith he comments on here is the one in which the Prophet said to Jews, “upon you.” Following earlier Mālikī jurists, al-Bājī states that this hadith requires Muslims to reply when greeted by people of the Book and not to greet them first. In this connection, Mālik is reported to have said, “The Jews and Christians are not to be answered. If you reply, say ‘upon you.’” But al-Bājī

understands that the true intention of this remark was not to prohibit Muslims from replying to people of the Book but to prohibit them from doing so with words other than “upon you.” He then comments on 4:86, mentioning the two opposing views of ‘Aṭā’ and Ibn ‘Abbās. In addition, al-Bājī mentions al-Sha‘bī’s view, which we have already seen, and another view that Muslims should say “upon you be stones [‘*alay-ka al-silām*].” But he himself agrees with ‘Aṭā’ for the reason that his position accords with the hadith. Finally, al-Bājī discusses the question of whether or not a Muslim should demand back [*yastaqīl*] *salām* if he says *salām* to a Jew or a Christian. Although it is reported that Ibn ‘Umar (d.693) did so, al-Bājī concludes in the negative, following Mālik’s teaching.²⁸

Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d.1149) discusses our questions in his exegesis of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. As regards our first question, he presents three views: first, a view that follows the hadith “Do not say *salām* to a Jew or a Christian on your own initiative,” which is, according to al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, upheld by the majority of scholars, including Mālik; second, a view that gives preference to another hadith “Spread peace,” which al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ attributes to Ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Umāmah and Ibn Muḥayrīz (d.718)²⁹; third, a view that greeting non-Muslims on Muslims’ initiative is allowed only when it cannot be helped, which al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ attributes to Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘ī, d.715) and ‘Alqamah (d.681). As for our second question, he presents five options: “upon you,” “and upon you,” “upon you be stones,” “peace has gone higher than you,” and “upon you be peace.” According to al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, it was Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Sha‘bī and Qatādah who said to non-Muslims “upon you be peace.” Commenting 19:47 and 43:89, on which some scholars base their views that Muslims are allowed to say *salām* to non-Muslims, al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ states that *salām* in these verses means alienation and desertion, adding that some people say 43:89 was abrogated by the verse of sword (9:5). Concerning the question of whether to put “and” before “upon you,” As to which is better, “and upon you” or “upon you,” he reports that while a Mālikī jurist Ibn Ḥabīb (d.853) had a similar view to al-Khaṭṭābī’s, there are different views within the Mālikī school. He also points out that the Arabic conjunction *wa* has more than one function.³⁰

2.4. Shāfi‘ī School

Al-Nawawī (d.1277) discusses our questions in his exegesis of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and in *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn*, one of the most important works in the Shāfi‘ī school. In *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Nawawī often quotes al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ on the one hand, and clarifies the position of the Shāfi‘ī school on the other. According to al-Nawawī, Muslims are forbidden to say *salām* first to non-Muslims and must say “and upon you” or “upon you” if non-Muslims greet Muslims. He upholds this understanding on the grounds of the two hadiths most specifically related to the

issue, and states that general rules, such as “Spread peace,” are limited in scope by those specific ones. He also mentions, based on what al-Māwardī (d.1058) has reported, that some Shāfi‘ī scholars considered it permissible to say to non-Muslims “peace be upon you [*al-salām ‘alay-ka*, but not *al-salām ‘alay-kum*],” and to say “and upon you be peace” without “and God’s mercy” in reply to them. But al-Nawawī rejects such views for the reason that they are against these two hadiths. As to whether or not there should be “and” before “upon you,” he states that it does not matter though it is better to say “and” since there are more ḥadīths in which the Prophet says “and” than hadiths in which he does not.³¹

In *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn*, al-Nawawī cites an explanation by al-Rāfi‘ī (d.1226). According to al-Rāfi‘ī, it is not permissible for Muslims to say *salām* first to *dhimmīs*, and if someone does so by mistake, he should demand back [*yastaridd*] *salām*. Al-Rāfi‘ī then continues that Muslims are allowed to greet *dhimmīs* with expressions other than *salām*, such as “may God guide you” and “may God bless your morning.” As for the way to reply when greeted by *dhimmīs*, al-Rāfi‘ī states that nothing should be added to “and upon you.” Al-Nawawī seems to basically agree with al-Rāfi‘ī but makes a comment about greeting *dhimmīs* without *salām*. In his view, 58:22 instructs Muslims not to be kind to or friendly with unbelievers, and therefore Muslims should not greet *dhimmīs* on their own initiative in any form unless there is a need to do so. He then adds that when a Muslim encounters a group made up of Muslims and non-Muslims, it is desirable for him to greet them with the intention of greeting the Muslims alone. Also, al-Nawawī states that if a Muslim writes *salām* to a polytheist, it is desirable for him to write “peace be upon those who follow the guidance,” following the Prophet’s example.³²

While al-Nawawī does not refer to 4:86, al-Suyūṭī (d.1505) tries to reconcile this verse and the Prophet’s words “and upon you” in a different way from al-Ṭabarī’s. In al-Suyūṭī’s understanding, to simply say “and upon you” is to return an equal greeting, and therefore such a reply does meet the requirements of 4:86. He understands so on the grounds of a hadith in which a man gave the Prophet a long polite greeting, so the Prophet could not give him back a better greeting and simply said, “And upon you,” intending to return a greeting equal to the one he received.³³ However, this view of al-Suyūṭī may not be commonly accepted even within the Shāfi‘ī school. In fact, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, quoting a view that to simply say “and upon you” is not enough to obey 4:86, stresses that it should not be used as a reply to Muslims.³⁴

2.5. Ḥanbalī School

Ibn Qudāmah (d.1223) presents the Ḥanbalī school's position in *al-Mughnī*, one of the most authoritative works in this school. Referring to several hadiths, he asserts that Muslims should not say *salām* first to people of the Book or say any words except “and upon you” in reply to greetings from them. He then adds that Abū ‘Abd Allāh (Aḥmad bn Ḥanbal) considered it even worse to give *dhimmīs* greetings other than *salām*, such as “how are you?” Furthermore, according to Ibn Qudāmah, Abū ‘Abd Allāh hated to shake hands with people of the Book. He also reports Ibn ‘Umar demanded back *salām* after he realised that he had said *salām* to a Jew; instead Ibn ‘Umar said to the Jew, “May God increase your wealth and your children’s,” and explained to his companions that it was for poll tax.³⁵

Nevertheless, Ibn al-Qayyim (d.1350) challenges this view at least partly. He discusses our questions in *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimmah*, a book dealing with legal issues related to *dhimmīs* in the Islamic land. After explaining that *al-salām* is one of God's names and that God has designated (*al-salām* ‘*alay-kum* as greeting of Muslims, he concludes that Muslims should refrain from exchanging greetings of *salām* with non-Muslims. As for the way of responding to greetings from non-Muslims, however, he takes account of the situation in which the Prophet answered “and upon you” or “upon you,” and asserts that if *dhimmīs* say “peace be upon you” instead of “death be upon you,” Muslims should answer “and upon you be peace” in accordance with indications and principles of God's law; he emphasises that God has enjoined Muslims to be just and courteous, and claims that Muslims should go back to the principle of 4:86 if the situation described in 58:8 has disappeared.³⁶ Here a question arises: why should Muslims not say *salām* first to non-Muslims while they should say it in reply? But Ibn al-Qayyim provides no further justification for this.

In another book, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, Ibn al-Qayyim discusses this issue slightly differently, although there is something vague in his writing. With regard to the hadith that instructs Muslims not to say *salām* first to non-Muslims, admitting that it appears to be a universal rule, he mentions a view that this instruction of the prophet only applies to a certain kind of non-Muslim, such as Banū Qurayzah, who fought against Muslims. As for replying to greetings from *dhimmīs*, he supports the view that Muslims are required to respond anyhow. He does not make it clear whether Muslims should say *salām* back to non-Muslims, but it is noteworthy that he distinguishes *dhimmīs* from innovators [*ahl al-bida’*], maintaining that Muslims are not ordered to avoid *dhimmīs*.³⁷

2.6. Ja‘farī School

Al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067) deals with our second question in his comment on 4:86. Like al-Ṭabarī, after presenting two different interpretations, he upholds the view that this whole verse is exclusively applied to greetings between Muslims on the grounds that the Prophet instructed Muslims to say just “and upon you” in reply to people of the Book.³⁸ With regard to our first question, al-Ṭūsī does not discuss it in his commentary of the Qur’an or his other works, such as *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*, both of which are among the most important legal books in this school. It is likely, however, that he considers saying *salām* first to non-Muslims more reprehensible than saying *salām* in reply to them.

Al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153) makes a very similar comment to al-Ṭūsī’s on 4:86.³⁹

Al-Māzandarānī (d. circa 1670) discusses our questions in his exegesis of al-Kāfī. Commenting on Imām ‘Alī’s words “Do not greet people of the Book on your own initiative, and if they greet you, say ‘and upon you,’” al-Māzandarānī tries to reconcile this and other hadīths. On the one hand, he allows for exceptional cases on the grounds that the seventh Imām Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā permitted a Muslim to say *salām* when he had to consult a Christian doctor, though the Imām added that supplications for non-Muslims do not work. On the other hand, al-Māzandarānī asserts that the relevance of the injunction to spread peace is limited by this instruction of ‘Alī. He then proceeds to the question of “and” before “upon you” in reply to greetings from non-Muslims. He proposes that the way of reply should vary depending on how non-Muslims greet Muslims: if they say “death be upon you,” “and” should not be said, but otherwise “and” should be said. Either way, however, he does not allow Muslims to say *salām* to non-Muslims; in this regard he differs from Ibn al-Qayyim. He then adds that this instruction of ‘Alī should not be interpreted as requiring Muslims to return a greeting to people of the book but allowing them to do so. Also, he states that 4:86 only stipulates how to respond to greetings from Muslims, understanding this verse in the same way as al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī. Commenting on the sixth Imām Abū ‘Abd Allāh (Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq)’s words “You say *salām* in reply to Jews and Christians,” which is a hadīth peculiar to Shī‘ah, al-Māzandarānī points out that it goes along with 19:47 and 43:89 unless the Imām said *silām*, which means stones. However, he maintains that *salām* in this case is not a greeting but a word for alienation and desertion.⁴⁰

As can be seen from the above, most medieval jurists agree that Muslims should not say *salām* to non-Muslims in principle, on their own initiative or in return. They only differ – even inside each legal school – in such respects as whether it is strictly prohibited to say *salām* first to non-Muslims or just disliked, under what circumstances and under what conditions it is exceptionally permissible, whether

to demand back *salām* or not after saying it to non-Muslims by mistake, whether it is permissible or not to greet them with words other than *salām*, whether it is obligatory or not for Muslims to reply to greetings from non-Muslims, whether to put “and” before “upon you” or not, and whether saying back “(and) upon you” is polite enough to meet the requirements of 4:86 or not. Except for several figures in the 7th and the 8th centuries and some Shāfi‘ī jurists who are reported to have considered it permissible to say *salām* to non-Muslims, as far as we have seen, only Ibn al-Qayyim seriously takes the possibility that the Prophet only refrained from saying *salām* to a specific kind of non-Muslim. As we will see in the following section, Ibn al-Qayyim’s logic becomes common in the modern age.

3. Modern Views

Rashīd Riḍā (d.1935) gave a fatwa on our questions in *al-Manār*. He holds that Islam is a universal religion and that one of its objectives is to propagate its morals and virtues to people and to attract each other so that all humans will be brothers and sisters. Reminding that the prophet said *salām* to Jews until some Jews changed *al-salām* to *al-sām*, Riḍā emphasises that *salām* should be spread universally except for those who fight against Muslims. He also quotes a hadith transmitted by Abū Umāmah: “Verily God made *salām* a greeting for our community and a protection for our *dhimmīs*.”⁴¹ Riḍā understands these words to be in harmony with the universality of *salām*. On the other hand, he considers that the Prophet abstained from saying *salām* to non-Muslims only temporarily; he states that things disappear if their causes disappear. At the end of the fatwa, describing Islamic society in his time, in which some Muslims are trying to glorify Islam by keeping it from non-Muslims who are promoting Europeanisation, Riḍā admonishes such Muslims, pointing out that their efforts will only result in making Islam invisible to the world.⁴²

In addition, Riḍā discusses this issue in *Tafsīr al-Manār* too. He criticises some Muslims for their view that Islamic morals are not for non-Muslims; he regrets that “they have forgotten that if Islamic morals please people who have become familiar with Muslims and come to know the virtue of their religion, it will probably make Islam more attractive to them.”⁴³ As regards several hadiths that prohibit Muslims from saying *salām* to people of the Book, he says:

In my view, the necessity of knowing the cause of hadiths to understand what they intend is stronger than the necessity of knowing the cause of revelation of the Qur’an, because the whole Qur’an is universal guidance of which people must be informed, whereas hadiths include what the Qur’an does not include, namely specific circumstances and

opinions that are neither supposed to be religious creeds or universal guidance nor supposed to be known to people.⁴⁴

It can be said that Riḍā claims the permissibility of saying *salām* to non-Muslims much more boldly and fully than Ibn al-Qayyim does. Unlike Ibn al-Qayyim, Riḍā clearly claims the permissibility of saying *salām* to non-Muslims not only in return but also on Muslims' initiative. Riḍā's thoughts on this issue have strongly influenced a number of scholars of later generations, including Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d.1996) and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī.

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, in his comment on 4:86, states that the Muslims in Medina [al-Madīnah] used to extend greetings to Muslims and non-Muslims alike until some people of the Book resorted to distorting the word *salām* to *sām*. Considering this distortion to be just a specific instance, he asserts: "the general meaning of the verse is that it becomes Muslims to undertake social interaction with others, Muslims and non-Muslims, as that would be more conducive to creating amity, peace, and trust among all."⁴⁵

Al-Qaraḍāwī, in a fatwa for Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim countries, referring to 4:86, comments:

It is not suitable for Muslims to be less in morality than the non-Muslims. Rather, they should be the epitome of politeness and gentleness as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The best of believers in faith are those best in morality" and also, he said, "I was sent to perfect the nobility in character."

He then mentions that Ibn 'Abbās said to a Magian, "upon you be peace and God's mercy," and then said to a companion of him, "He lives in God's mercy, doesn't he?"⁴⁶

Yet traditional views are still enjoying considerable popularity. For example, Muḥammad al-Gharawī, in his book devoted to discussing *salām*, asserts that Muslims are not allowed to add anything to "upon you" in reply to greetings from non-Muslims. As for initiating *salām*, he cites Riḍā's view lengthily and comments that it is nothing but *ijtihād* against the authentic text which forbids saying *salām* first to non-Muslims.⁴⁷

Moreover, 'Abd Allāh al-Fawzān even states that if Muslims say *salām* to non-Muslims, it extinguishes the fire of jealousy in their heart; he insists on keeping non-Muslims jealous on the grounds of a hadith in which the prophet said, "The Jews do not envy you for anything more than they do for peace [*al-salām*] and protection [*al-ta'mīn*]"⁴⁸ This view makes a striking contrast with Riḍā's.

There are also middle positions. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlullāh (d.2010), a Lebanese grand āyatullah, issued a fatwa on the question of whether

Muslims are allowed to greet non-Muslims on Muslims' initiative. He states that God wants Muslims to greet the others in the most courteous manner. He then quotes 17:53 and 4:86, explaining that they are applied not only among Muslims but also between Muslims and non-Muslims. Nevertheless, he recommends that Muslims should use non-Islamic greetings for the reason that non-Muslims do not believe in peace of Islam. It seems that Faḍlullāh tries to reconcile Qur'anic verses about greeting with the fact that the Prophet refrained from saying *salām* to non-Muslims. While some medieval scholars held that it is permissible for Muslims to greet non-Muslims without saying *salām*, Faḍlullāh goes further in stressing the importance of exchanging greetings between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, his view is still similar to the traditional mainstream view in insisting that non-Muslims do not believe in peace of Islam.⁴⁹ It is quite different from Riḍā's comment on 4:94; Riḍā regards *salām* as a word used commonly among Muslims and non-Muslims who want a peaceful relationship with Muslims.⁵⁰

Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn (d.2001), a prominent Saudi Arabian scholar, quotes the hadith that prohibits Muslims from saying *salām* first to people of the Book, and takes it as a universal rule. However, he continues that if non-Muslims say to Muslims "peace be upon you," Muslims should answer "upon you be peace." According to al-ʿUthaymīn, this is because 4:86 tells Muslims to do so, and because it was when some people of the Book say "death" to the prophet that he instructed Muslims to answer "and upon you".⁵¹ Al-ʿUthaymīn seems to follow what Ibn al-Qayyim writes in *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*. Therefore, the question we raised about it can be raised to al-ʿUthaymīn too.

Conclusion

Roughly speaking, there are two opposite views as to how to understand without contradiction Qur'anic verses and hadiths related to our questions. The first view strictly, or at least basically, follows the Prophet's instruction that Muslims should not say *salām* to people of the Book on their own initiative or in return. It takes this instruction as a final and universal rule in abstraction from its context, and limits the meanings of verses and hadiths which could be interpreted as suggesting that *salām* should be spread to non-Muslims or that Muslims should be kind to non-Muslims unless they are antagonistic to Muslims. To be fair, this view requires Muslims to practice a certain degree of courtesy toward non-Muslims, but it dislikes treating non-Muslims with too much respect or friendliness. This view can be supported by the jurisprudential theory of abrogation: old rules are abrogated by new ones that contradict old ones; for, if this theory is applied, the

fact that the Prophet used to say *salām* to non-Muslims until some Jews distorted this word is no longer a source of Islamic law or ethics. However, it should be noted that this theory itself can be questioned.

On the other hand, the second view is based on the understanding that Islam seeks to build friendly relationships with other religions. This understanding requires Muslims to be gentle, amiable, and trustworthy with non-Muslims in order for them to appreciate Islamic virtues. This view is in harmony with verses like 60:8 and goes well with the interpretation that 4:86 and “Spread peace” are universally applicable beyond religions. Seen from this perspective, the Prophet’s refraining from saying *salām* to people of the Book was an exceptional response to a specific kind of non-Muslim, and not to non-Muslims in general. In addition, the gist of the hadith “(and) upon you” is that Muslims should stay well-mannered even when non-Muslims insult them. This view tends to take Qur’anic verses as universal guidance and interpret hadiths with their specific contexts. However, it should not be forgotten that the Qur’an includes a number of verses that look hostile to non-Muslims, and, given this, careful attention should be paid to the contexts of Qur’anic verses too.

There are two other views halfway between these two: one of them holds that while Muslims should be friendly with non-Muslims, Muslims are only allowed to greet non-Muslims with words other than *salām*. This view tries to reconcile the above two positions in some respects, but at the same time it can be challenged from both sides in other respects. Those who adopt the first view would show their displeasure at this view, saying that it allows Muslims to be too intimate with non-Muslims. Those with the second view would criticise it for ignoring the fact that the Prophet used to say *salām* to non-Muslims until he changed his attitude.

The other view maintains that Muslims should not say *salām* first to non-Muslims but should say *salām* in return if they say *salām* first to Muslims. This view applies 4:86 to greetings not only among Muslims but also between Muslims and non-Muslims, on the one hand, and limits the purport of the Prophet’s words “(and) upon you,” taking its context into consideration, on the other hand. However, when it comes to initiating *salām*, this view insists that Muslims should not do it to any non-Muslims. This distinction between greeting on one’s initiative and replying to greetings might make some feel that this position is incoherent.

As we have seen, the first view was the most favoured one among legal schools in the Middle Ages, although two points should be added. First, scholars with this view differ in details, and some of them may be said to have taken a position fairly close to the third view. Second, there were also scholars who went against it, taking the second or fourth view. Some Shāfi‘ī jurists as well as several figures during the early centuries are reported to have approved of saying *salām*

to non-Muslims. Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim clearly pointed out the possibility that the Prophet only abstained from saying *salām* to a certain kind of non-Muslim. In the modern age, while the first view is still popular, the other views have been adopted by an increasing number of scholars. Among them, Riḍā and his followers used Ibn al-Qayyim's logic more thoroughly and thus advocated the position most cogently opposed to the medieval mainstream.

It is not an aim of this article to decide among these views. It should be said, however, that this controversy cannot be settled by just referring to a single Qur'anic verse or hadith. Whatever position may be taken, it needs to be well grounded and reconciled with every verse and hadith related to the subject. In addition, verses and hadiths need to be interpreted in consideration of the contexts in which they were born. The question we have discussed may be one of the best examples to show the importance of taking a holistic approach to Shari'ah.⁵²

- There are two main views on how Muslims should greet non-Muslims, if at all. The first view is broadly the medieval view, while the second view may be thought of as the “modern” view.
- According to the medieval view, Muslims should say *salām* to people of the Book neither on their own initiative nor in reply.
- The modern view, by contrast, holds that since Islam seeks to build friendly relationships with adherents of other religions, Muslims should maintain good relations with non-Muslims, and therefore greet them in polite ways, or at least return greetings in a polite way.

Notes

* Kazunori Hamamoto is a doctoral student at the Theology School of Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan. He obtained a B.A. in jurisprudence from Kyoto University and an M.A. in theology from Doshisha University. While writing a dissertation on *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and religious freedom, he studied at IAIS Malaysia and Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, as well as several institutes in Middle Eastern countries. This year, he is researching on interfaith marriage, along with his Christian wife, as a fellow of CIRCLE, an inter-religious project run by Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College, Massachusetts. Mr. Hamamoto is also a member of Japan Muslim Association and a cooperative researcher for the research program “Sharī'ah and Modernity” at the Oriental Library, Tokyo, Japan. He can be contacted at norihamamoto@gmail.com

1. The Qur'ān 59:23.
2. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Chapter Paradise [Kitāb al-Jannah].
3. On the other hand, it should be noted that some non-Muslims are not pleased to

- be greeted in the Islamic manner. In this connection, according to most Arabic translations of the Bible, Jesus said “salām(un) la-kum” rather than “al-salām ‘alay-kum” (John [Yūhannā], Chapter 20).
4. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawīyyah* (al-Zarqā’, 1409/1988) vol. 2, 167-72.
 5. Mahmoud Ayoub, “Religious Freedom and the Law of Apostasy in Islam,” *Islamochristiana*, vol. 20 (Roma, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, 1994) 91.
 6. Zaki Badawi, suggesting that the term minority should be used in terms of power rather than number, states that a colonial territory has a perpetual minority status. Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections* (London, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1423/2003) viii.
 7. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Chapter Greetings [Kitāb al-Salām].
 8. al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Chapter People of the Book [Kitāb Ahl al-Kitāb].
 9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Chapter Social Intercourse, Section Greetings to People of Different Religious Communities [Kitāb al-‘Ishrah, Bāb al-Taslīm ‘Alā Ahl al-Milal].
 10. This phrase is also included in the Qur’ān (20:47).
 11. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and *al-Kāfī*, these ḥadīths are gathered in one chapter. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, however, they are scattered over several chapters.
 12. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Chapter Faith [Kitāb al-Īmān]; al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Chapter Greetings [Kitāb al-salām] et al.; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Chapter Social Intercourse, Section Greetings [Kitāb al-‘Ishrah, Bāb al-Taslīm].
 13. Qur’ān 7:46, 10:10, 14:23, 16:32, 19:62, 36:58, 39:73, 56:91 et al.
 14. According to other verses, salām can be said to the ignorant [al-jāhilūn] (25:63, 28:55).
 15. Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf* (Riyadh, Maktabat al-Rushd) 1425/2004, vol. 8, 450-3.
 16. Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān* (Cairo, Dār Hajr, 1422/2001) vol. 7, 273-7.
 17. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Iḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo, Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1387/1967) vol. 11, 112; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Egypt, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1378/1959) vol. 13, 277.
 18. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 20, 665.
 19. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Chapter Morals [Kitāb al-Adab].
 20. Sufyān bn ‘Uyaynah’s version is included in al-Tirmidhī’s ḥadīth collection. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Chapter Seeking Permission [Kitāb al-Isti’dhān].
 21. Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī, *Ma‘ālim al-Sunan* (Aleppo, Muḥammad Rāghib al-Ṭabbākḥ, 1352/1934) vol. 4, 154. Al-Khaṭṭābī makes a comment on a similar ḥadīth in his exegesis of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* too, but instead of discussing how to respond, he stresses that God does not answer supplications from wrongdoers but from sufferers. al-Khaṭṭābī, *A‘mār al-Ḥadīth* (Mecca, Jāmi‘ah Umm al-Qurā, 1409/1988) vol. 3, 2178.
 22. Jār Allāh Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashāf* (Riyadh, Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 1418/1918) vol. 2, 121.
 23. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 25-6. In this connection, al-Māturīdī (d.944) suggests the possibility that Abraham said salām to his father on condition that the father embraces Islam. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub

- al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1426/2005) vol. 7, 240.
24. ‘Abd Allāh bn Maḥmūd al-Mawṣilī, *al-Ikhtiyār li-Ta’līl al-Mukhtār* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah) vol. 4, 165.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Nujaym, *al-Ashbāh wa-al-Nazā’ir* (Damascus, Dār al-Fikr, 1403/1983) 388.
27. Muḥammad bn ‘Alī al-Ḥaṣkafī, *al-Durr al-Mukhtār* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1423/2002) 342.
28. Abū al-Walīd Sulaymān bn al-Bājī, *al-Muntaqā: Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa’ Mālik* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1420/1999) vol. 9, 423-5.
29. Ibn Muḥayrīz is reported to have shaken hands with a Christian in a mosque. Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 3, 620.
30. ‘Iyād bn Mūsā al-Yaḥṣabī, *Ikmāl al-Mu’lim bi-Fawā’id Muslim* (Mansoura, Dār al-Wafā’, 1419/1998) vol. 7, 48-53.
31. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-Sharḥ al-Nawawī* (al-Maṭba‘at al-Miṣriyyah wa-Maktabat-hā, 1924) vol. 14, 144-5.
32. Abū Zakariyyā al-Nawawī, *Rawḍat al-Tālibīn* (Saudi Arabia, Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1423/2003) vol. 7, 431-2. This is an exegesis of what al-Rāfi‘ī writes in *Faṭḥ al-‘Azīz*. Abū al-Qāsim al-Rāfi‘ī, *Faṭḥ al-‘Azīz* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1417/1997) vol. 11, 374.
33. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iklīl fī Istīnbāt al-Tanzīl* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1401/1981) 96; This ḥadīth is recorded by al-Ṭabarānī (d.971). Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr* (Cairo, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah) vol. 11, 358.
34. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 13, 284.
35. Abū Muḥammad Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī* (Maktabat al-Qāhirah, 1389/1969) vol. 9, 363.
36. Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimmah* (Dammam, Ramādī, 1418/1997) vol. 1, 409-26.
37. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād fī Hady Khayr al-‘Ibād* (Egypt, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1390/1970) vol. 2, 30-31.
38. Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifah al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān* (Najaf, al-Ṭab‘at al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1383/1963) vol. 3, 278-9.
39. Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma‘ al-Bayān* (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1376/1957) vol. 5, 180-1.
40. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi* (Beirut, Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1421/2000) vol. 11, 118-22. The text reads “al-mubā‘adah wa-al-mushārakah” (121), but it should be “al-mubā‘adah wa-al-mutārakah,” which is an expression commonly used by a number of scholars.
41. This ḥadīth is recorded by al-Ṭabarānī, but al-‘Asqalānī says it is Abū Umāmah’s opinion. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 129; al-‘Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, vol.13, 277. In Shī‘ah, there is a ḥadīth of which wording is slightly different yet meaning is the same. ‘Allāmat al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Beirut, Mu’assasat al-Wafā’, 1403/1983) vol. 73, 11-2.
42. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, vol. 5, Cairo, 1902, 583-5.
43. Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm* (Egypt, al-Maṭba‘at al-Manār, 1328h) vol. 5, 313.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
45. Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an*, translated by Ashur A. Shamis (Herndon, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1421/2000) 72.
46. Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Fiqh of Muslim Minorities: Contentious Issues & Recommended Solutions*, translated by al-Falah Foundation (Cairo, al-Falah Foundation, 1424/2003) 144. He seems to mix up Ibn 'Abbās's tradition and al-Sha'bī's.
47. Muḥammad al-Gharawī, *al-Salām fī al-Qur'ān wa-al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut, Dār al-Aḍwā', 1990) 140-3.
48. 'Abd Allāh bn Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, *Minḥat al-'Allām fī Sharḥ Bulūgh al-Marām* (Riyadh, Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1428h) vol. 9, 141. This ḥadīth is recorded by al-Bukhārī. al-Bukhārī, al-Adab al-Mufrad, Chapter Greetings [Kitāb al-salām].
49. <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/Jurisprudence/minorities4.htm>, accessed on 10 March 2014.
50. Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, 347-50.
51. Muḥammad bn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ Ḥilyat Ṭālib al-'Ilm* (Alexandria, Dār al-Baṣīrah, 1429/2008) 50.
52. This article is an outcome of JSPS Strategic Young Researcher Overseas Visit Program for Accelerating Brain Circulation (2011-13): *Interrelations and Dialogue among the Communities of Monotheistic Religions in the Multicultural Age*.