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Allah's Annihilation?!

A Reply to the Christian Polemic

The Annihilation of Allah:

A Question and Challenge to Salafi Anthropomorphists

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The praise is for Allah, and it is sufficed. May peace be upon His slaves who He has chosen. As for what follows ...

Before addressing the actual challenge, I would like to mention that I found the title of this Christian polemicist's tract quite amusing. Here we have a *Christian* who believes that Prophet Jesus ﷺ was Allah *incarnate* labelling Salafis as anthropomorphists. The irony in that should be quite resonant to anyone of sound mind. One would think that Christian would be more deserving of that designation than Salafis.

Anthropomorphism is defined as “an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics.”¹ This is something that is not necessitated by merely affirming certain attributes to non-human things.²

The creed of the People of the Sunnah and Congregation (i.e., Salafis) affirms Allah's characteristics (including His face, eyes, hands, feet, fingers, and shin). We also *firmly* believe that, as Allah ﷻ mentions in His mightily book, (*nothing* is like His likes and He is the Hearing [and] the Seeing) (42:11) and that (*no one* is equal to Him) (112:4). Allah's face, hands, feet, fingers and shin have *absolutely no likeness* to those of *any* of His creation's, let alone mankind's; similar goes for the rest of His characteristics (such as mercy, knowledge, wisdom, etc.). Thus, it cannot be said that Salafis give Allah human characteristics; we are not anthropomorphists.

As for our polemicist's challenge, after mentioning a number of texts from the Qur'an and Sunnah affirming these so-called “anthropomorphists” characteristics of Allah's, he boldly states,

¹ anthropomorphism. Merriam-Webster Editorial Staff. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*. G. & C. Merriam Co., 1971. vol. 1, pg. 93.

² See pgs. 67-68 of Shaikh Muhammad Nâsir ad-Dîn al-Albânî's introduction to Imam adh-Dhahabî's *Mukhtaşar al-'Ulû lil-'Alî al-Ghaffâr* (al-Maktab al-Islamî) for a reply to this accusation of anthropomorphism (translated on my [blog](#) with the title *Doubts & Their Replies: Part 1*).

Our current challenge is directed to the Salafis, not to those who deny that Allah literally has eyes, hands, shin etc.

According to the Quran, Allah will wipe out everything that exists with the exception of his face:

And call not upon another god with God; there is no god but He. All things perish, except His Face. His is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned. S. 28:88 Arberry

All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid. S. 55:26-27 Arberry

On a literal level of reading, these references plainly say that everything will perish except Allah's face. The question that comes to mind is, what about the rest of his body? After all, the passages do not say that Allah's hands and shin will remain, but only his face. Does this mean that Allah will eradicate his hands, toes, torso, feet, shins etc.?

Thus, our challenge to the Salafī anthropomorphists is to produce a Quranic text which says that Allah will not wipe out the rest of his body, with the exception of his face, or that his entire body endures forever.

We will be waiting to see if any Salafi anthropomorphist can meet our challenge and answer these questions from the Quran.³

Aside from the fact that no where in *any* Salafī book will one find that we (i.e., Salafīs) believe that Allah has “toes”, a “torso”, or even a “body”,⁴ as anyone with a proper understanding of *true* monotheism will immediately see, this challenge is pretty absurd and ridiculous. A Qur'anic text that explicitly states Allah will not wipe out the rest of His characteristics and attributes will not be found, because the destruction of all of Allah's characteristics, save His face, is impossible. It seems as if the only one who could have conjured up such a foolish notion (i.e., that these verses are to be understood in the manner suggested) would be someone like this Christian polemicist, who *being* Christian, already believes that Allah can be distinguished (i.e., separated) into three parts or persons (or whatever he wants to call them), yet still be considered “one” God.

One glance at any of the major books of Qur'anic exegesis and one will see that none mention anything in the way of this ridiculous understanding from reading these two passages from the Qur'an. For example, in his exegesis, Imam Ibn Kathīr ? states,

³ Shamoun, Sam. [*The Annihilation of Allah: A Question and Challenge to Salafi Anthropomorphists*](#). Answering-Islam.org (accessed April 5, 2008).

⁴ These attributes are not mentioned in any text, whether Qur'anic or prophetic, thus we do not affirm them for Allah. See the quote from Imam Ibn Khuzaimah to come concerning the People of the Sunnah's position regarding Allah's characteristics. Also see the statements quoted from Shaikh of Islam Ibn Taimiyyah found in *Doubts & Their Replies: Part 1* and *Doubts & Their Replies: Part 2* found on my [blog](#).

His statement, (Everything is perishable except His face) (28:88) is notification that He is the Permanent, the Everlasting, the Living, the Self-Existent, who causes the creatures to die and does not die [Himself], just as He, exalted is He, said, (All of those upon it is evanescent, ! while the sublime and noble face of your Lord remains) (55:27). Thus, He designated the essence with the face. Like that is His statement here ,(Everything is perishable except His face,) i.e., except Him.⁵

Likewise, Imam Ibn Jarîr at-Ṭabarî ? states,

He says there is no worshipped [object] for who worship is proper except Allah, who everything is perishable except His face. [They] differed regarding the meaning of His statement, (except His face), for some of them said its meaning was everything is perishable except Him, while others said the meaning of that is: except what His face is intended by, and they sought witness for that explanation of theirs similarly with the poet's statement, "I seek forgiveness from Allah for a sin I did not count. The Lord of the servants, to Him is the face and the deed."⁶

Again, similar is mentioned by Shaikh 'Abdur-Raḥman bin Nâşir as-Sa'dî ? in his exegesis. He explains,

(And do not call upon another god along with Allah,) rather, dedicate your worship to Allah, because (there is no god [worthy of worship] except Him.) No one deserves to be deified, loved, and worshipped except Allah, the Perfect, the Everlasting, who (everything is perishable except His face.) And if everything other than Him is perishable [and] vanishing, then worship of the perishable [and] the false is invalid by the invalidity of its objective and the corruption of its end.⁷

The use of the word "face" in these verses is quite literal and not figurative or metaphorical. We take Allah's descriptions and characteristics upon their literal meanings, as is the creed and belief of the People of the Sunnah. In his *Kitâb at-Tawḥîd*, Imam Ibn Khuzaimah (d. 311H) ? states,

⁵ ad-Dimashqî, Ibn Kathîr. *Tafsîr al-Qur'ân al-'Aḍḥîm* (new ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasah al-Kutub ath-Thaqâfiyyah, 2004. vol. 3, pg. 1410.

⁶ at-Ṭabarî, Ibn Jarîr. *Tafsîr at-Ṭabarî* (verification: Aḥmad Muḥammad Shâkir). Mu'assasah ar-Risâlah, 2000. vol. 19, pg. 643 (accessed April 5, 2008). Imam Ibn Kathîr mentions similar regarding the second interpretation in his exegesis (referenced in footnote no. 5) narrating from Mujâhid and Sufyân ath-Thawrî V. He also mentions that Imam al-Bukhârî mentioned something confirming their interpretation in his *Şaḥîḥ*.

⁷ as-Sa'dî, 'Abdur-Raḥman bin Nâşir. *Taisîr al-Karîm ar-Raḥman*. Riyâḍ, Saudi Arabia: Dâr al-Mughnî & Beirut, Lebanon: Dâr Ibn Ḥazm, 1999. pg. 681.

Allah affirmed a face for Himself describing it as sublime and noble. He awarded His face continuance and negated destruction from it. We, and all of the scholars from the people of the Hijâz, Tihama,⁸ Yemen, Iraq, the Levant, and Egypt, our opinion is that we affirm for Allah what He affirmed for Himself. We confirm that with our tongues and attest to that with our hearts without likening the face of our Creator with the face of anyone [or anything] from the created beings. Mighty is our Lord from resembling the created beings and sublime is our Lord from the saying of the mu'aṭṭils.⁹ Mighty is He that He be nonexistent as said by the prattlers,¹⁰ because what has no characteristic is nonexistent. Exalted is Allah from what the Jahmîs say, who deny our Creator's characteristics, which He described Himself with in the preciseness of His revelation and upon the tongue of His Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.¹¹

Elsewhere he elaborates further saying,

Some of the Jahmî ignorants claimed that in this verse, Allah ﷻ certainly described Himself, to whom He linked sublimity to with His statement, (blessed is the name of your sublime and noble Lord) (55:78) and they claim that the Lord is the possessor of sublimity and nobility, not the face.

I say, and with Allah is my success, this claim is [one] made by [one] ignorant of the language of the Arabs, because Allah ﷻ said, (and the sublime and noble face of your Lord remains.) The mention of the face is [made] in this place in the nominative case, while the mention of the Lord is [in the genitive], linking it to the face. If His statement, (sublime and noble) returned to the mention of the Lord in this place, it would surely had read [in the genitive case], just as the mention of the Lord [is made in the genitive case].

... in these two verses is indication that Allah's face is a characteristic from Allah's characteristics, characteristics of the Essence, not that Allah's face is Allah, and not that His face is another's, just like the Jahmî mu'aṭṭilah.¹²

As Shaikh Muḥammad bin Şâliḥ bin 'Uthaimîn ? explained in his explanation of Shaikh of Islam Ibn Taimiyyah's *al-'Aqîdah al-Wâsiṭiyyah*,

⁸ The coastal plain along the southwestern and southern shores of the Arabian Peninsula.

⁹ Ar. mu'aṭṭil (pl. mu'aṭṭilūn) – hinderer, hamperer, obstructor, destroyer. It refers to those who deny Allah's affirmed characteristics either totally or partially, whether by distorting their meanings or by rejecting them. See Shaikh Ibn 'Uthaimîn's *Sharḥ al-'Aqîdah al-Wâsiṭiyyah*, pg. 91.

¹⁰ Ar. mubṭil (pl. mubṭilūn) – prattler, windbag; liar. It refers to those who invalidate or abolish the characteristics of Allah.

¹¹ Ibn Khuzaimah, Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin Is-ḥâq. *Kitâb at-Tawḥîd wa Ithbât Şifât ar-Rabb* (verification: 'Abdul-'Azîz ash-Shahwân) Riyâd, Saudi Arabia: Maktabah ar-Rushd, 1997. vol. 1, pgs. 25-27.

¹² *ibid.*, vol. 1, pgs. 51-52.

[The face] is from the informational personal characteristics, which are called portions and parts with reference to us, and we do not say [it is] from the abstract personal characteristics.¹³ If we said that, we would certainly agree with whoever interpreted it with distortion [of its original meaning]. We [also] do not say that they are a portion from Allah or a part from Allah, because that can be perceived as a deficiency for Allah I .¹⁴

So just as Imam Ibn Khuzaimah mentions, “Our Lord is beyond anything of Him, from what is from the characteristics of His essence, perishing.” All of His perfect characteristics are eternal, uncreated, and cannot be destroyed. Thus, just as the exegetes quoted above have explained, by telling us that His face will remain, while everything perishes, Allah is telling us that everything shall be destroyed and die, except Him.

As I mentioned above, anyone with a proper understanding of *true* monotheism will immediately see this challenge a pretty absurd and ridiculous. Unlike false claimants to monotheism, Muslims believe that Allah truly is *one God*. He is not divided into portions or parts, such that some of His essence can perish, while some remains. This is not a Muslim concept, let alone a Salafî one. It is a Christian concept. A concept that allows them to believe that Prophet Jesus ﷺ was part of a “Holy” Trinity and could die on the cross, while the other two components of this Trinity lived on, unharmed. Glorified is Allah from what they ascribe to Him.

And the last of our claim is that the praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds; and may Allah send His salutations, prayers, and blessings upon our beloved Prophet Muḥammad, upon his family, his companions, and those who follow them upon charitable conduct until the establishment of the Final Hour.

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¹³ Shaikh Ibn 'Uthaimîn explains,

The personal characteristics are those which He did not and does not cease [being] characterized by. They are of two types: abstract and informational. The abstract are the likes of life, knowledge, ability, wisdom ... and whatever resembles that. This is for the purpose of illustration and not exhaustive. The informational are the likes of the two hands, the face, the two eyes ... and whatever resembles that from what He named, similar to portions and parts for us.^{13a}

^{13a} al-'Uthaimîn, Muḥammad bin Şâlih. *Sharḥ al-'Aqîdah al-Wâsiṭiyyah*. Dammâm, Saudi Arabia: Dâr Ibn al-Jawzî, 1422H. vol. 1, pg. 78.

¹⁴ *Sharḥ al-'Aqîdah al-Wâsiṭiyyah*, vol. 1, pg. 287.