UMMATICS

What is Ummatics?

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

Muslims everywhere today face existential threats and exhilarating opportunities, all of which can be summed up in the singular challenge of becoming *ummatic*: "Verily, this Umma of yours is one Umma, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" (21:92; 23:52). Our greatest nemesis is not an external agent but a lack of imagination and will within, a learned helplessness that stands in the way of our embracing both God and His world. We have much to give to humankind, to help save it from its worst enemy, self-worship and self-delusion, and orient itself toward the one true God. It is our prophetic mandate to present the world with guidance and the path to salvation, even as we bleed and suffer at its hands, rather than rage and revenge on the one hand, and hopelessness and acquiescence on the other. This compassionate strength at the heart of the Umma can be unleashed only if we follow the divine call and the prophetic model. To do that, we must *will* to become an Umma once again.

This essay explains the concept of "ummatics" and, in turn, the mission of the Ummatics Institute. This is the first in a series of essays explaining the vision and foundations of the ummatics project. It establishes the unique Islamic significance and imperative of ummatic solidarity, which for the believers is a sufficient reason to undertake any mission no matter how arduous. It then breaks down the implications of the imperative of unification into various dimensions, and situates ummatics discourse conceptually through the cardinal Islamic notions of revival (*iḥyāʾ*) and renewal (*tajdīd*) as well as facilitating the mutual counsel (*naṣīḥa*) that originates from and is rendered to the scholars, leaders, and generality of Muslims.

Having already engaged a growing number and range of scholars and experts globally in the ummatic conversation, the Ummatics Institute's research program over the next several years seeks to achieve the following interconnected goals: (i) expand its reach across a broad range of

Muslim scholars and experts globally; (ii) develop relevant areas of knowledge and technique, drawing on existing Muslim intellectual traditions, movements, and grass-roots communities as well as contemporary bodies of social, scientific and human knowledge; (iii) elaborate on and flesh out intellectual solutions and concrete programs, employing forward-looking techniques and technologies and optimally using existing Muslim resources and global connectivity. Subsequent essays will elaborate on this program and address the common objections brought against the possibility of effective Muslim unification.

Given the obvious ambition and scope of this mission, a few disclaimers are in order. We believe not only in bold thought and action, and rigorous scholarship, both traditional and contemporary, but also continuity with and humility toward the great ulama and revivers of Islam past and present. We do not seek to supplant but to enhance the many efforts by Muslim scholars and leaders in different ummatic fields. Muslim activities at all levels—parents raising faithful children, mothers singing ummatic lullabies, Imams correcting Qurʾanic recitation, preachers and educators defending and presenting Islam, Muslim scientists, entrepreneurs, and thinkers excelling in their fields, and most importantly, the ulama taking up their prophetic mandate and reviving sacred knowledge—are necessary elements of a comprehensive ummatic flourishing. We seek to fill a crucial lacuna in contemporary Islamic discourse and inspire a discursive revolution; the war we wish to wage is on the learned helplessness, self-deprecation, and defeatism that afflicts many Muslims. We are uncompromising in our commitment to the flourishing of Islam through effective ummatic unification, as explained below. Beyond this, we offer not a singular recipe or a prefabricated utopian program but seek to engage generations of Muslims globally in working toward a unified Muslim civilization. Finally, we seek feedback in the spirit of Imam al-Shāfiʿī, who prayed that the truth be placed on the tongue of his interlocutor and he is given the *tawfīq* to accept it.

2. What is "Ummatics"

The term "ummatics" refers to all that pertains to the collective affairs of the Muslim *Umma*. *Umma* is a term defined and honored in the Qurʾan to refer to the community of the followers of the Final Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ, one that is declared "the best community brought forth for humankind" (3:110), ennobled by Allah as "the most balanced community" (2:143) that has been called to "hold on to the rope of Allah all together" (3:103) and to call humankind to what is good. Rendered in the Prophet's ﷺ words, "Ummatics" (in its nominal form) translates to

siyasat al-umma (سياسة الأمة).[1] Ummatics, accordingly, is the appropriate term for *Islamic politics*. As such, it is an umbrella term for the discourses, beliefs, and practices in which the Umma and its divine mission are envisioned and expressed, its solidarity is felt, and its sociocultural, political, ethical, and religious affairs are addressed and managed.

Ummatics is to *Umma* what *politics* is to *polis*. Why coin a new term, *ummatics*? Why not just speak of *Islamic politics*?[2] Because words are crucial in both understanding and obscuring ideas, and as Muslims, taking charge of our language is a first step toward taking control of our destiny. Coined by Aristotle, the word 'politics' referred to the collective affairs of the city (*polis*) and the management of these affairs, although in the modern period *politics* is understood in reference to the modern territorial state.[3]

The term politics, therefore, does not quite capture what the Qurʿan, the Sunna, and the great ulama of Islam mean when speaking of fundamental Islamic matters such as the imamate or caliphate, governance of the Umma, and rights and duties of the rulers and the ruled. Their discourse is not delimited by territorial borders, national characteristics and this-worldly aspirations of a people, but rather, defined by the mission, moral characteristics, and salvific quest of the Umma. To fulfill its mission, this Umma must be governed by someone who

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[1] These phrases are derived from the Prophetic speech. The root of the term and concept of *siyāsa* appears in Bukhārī: "The Israelites were governed by prophets (*tasūsuhum al-anbiyāʾ*)" (3455). The relevant concept of *amr al-muslimīn* ("general affairs of the Muslims") is more frequent: "Whoever does not heed the affairs of the Muslims, is not from them" (this report, extracted by Bayhaqi and others, is graded weak but captures the concept in numerous sound reports quite well). Countless other reports affirm its meaning. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭab reports that "The Messenger of Allah would talk late into the night with Abū Bakr about the affairs of Muslims and I would be with them" (graded *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan*, Aḥmad 228; Tirmidhī 169; *kāna yasmuru maʿa abī bakr fī amr min amr al-muslimīn*). A well-known report, cited at the end of this essay, deems sincerity toward the generality of Muslims as part of the essence of religion (Muslim 55, *al-dīn al-naṣīḥa … li-ʿāmmatihim*). Another report has the Messenger of Allah ﷺ supplicating: "Whoever is given charge of any affairs of my umma and is harsh with them, be harsh with him, and whoever given charge of any affairs of my umma and is gentle with them, be gentle with him" (Muslim 1828). The Messenger sternly warned against separating from or making war against the Muslim Umma (Muslim 1848; *man kharaja min al-ṭāʿa … wa-man kharaja ʿalā ummatī*), and spoke frequently of what he loved or feared for his Umma, e.g. "I only fear (or what I fear most) for my Umma is leaders (*imams*) who will mislead it … and a part of my Umma will persist upon the truth unharmed by those who abandon them until the coming of God's command" (Tirmidhī 2229; *innamā akhāfu ʿalā ummatī … lā tazālu ṭāʾifat min ummatī*).

[2] The term *ummatic* has been in occasional use by Muslims writing in the English language to refer to roughly the same concept, although I have not come across any sustained theorization of the term like the one attempted here. See, for instance, Ataullah Siddiqui, "Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: From ʿUrubah to Ummatic Concerns," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 16, no.3 (1999): 1-26; and Masudul Alam Choudhury, *The Islamic World-System: A Study in Polity-Market Interaction* (London: Routledge, 2005); neither author develops the concept beyond its employment in adjectival form.

[3] While 'politics' can be understood broadly as the management of the affairs of any community, there is a deeper normative texture to the concept. For Aristotle, the polis was distinguished from other ancient Greek cities ruled by monarchs or oligarchs by its democratic structure, which gave rise to the higher calling of virtuous public life (beyond the private life of the *oikos*, the household) and established the higher status of political community. Modern politics, by contrast, is more often than not something of a ruthless instrumental rationality tied to the material interests of the secular nation-state.

functions in the capacity of the deputy (hence the title, *khalīfa*) of the Prophet, insofar as he manages the affairs of his Umma.

To recall the classical definition effectively agreed upon by all writers on the subject: *khilāfa* is the deputyship of the Prophet in managing the affairs of his Umma by protecting its religion and worldly affairs.[4] Etymologically, the word *umma* refers to a collectivity or community that has a purpose or intention,[5] to which it is led by an *imām*. It is worth noting that *imām* and *amīr al-muʾminīn* are common synonyms for the word *khalīfa*.[6]

Notwithstanding their frequent secularization in the age of nationalism and the nation-state, key concepts such as *umma* (or *ummat*) or *milla* (*millet*) in Islamic discourse do not refer to territorial nations, to Pakistani, Egyptian, Saudi, Nigerian, or Malay nations, nor to humanity at large, nor to the people of the east, nor to all oppressed or colonized peoples of the world or the Global South, but to the Islamic *Umma*, to the community comprised of all those who declare the Two Testimonies of faith. Reclaiming our language, therefore, is particularly important because many of today's Muslim-majority nation-states are Orwellian structures, ruled by small coteries of elites loyal only to their self-interest and the interests of their Western patrons and masters. These elites have tried over the last century to demoralize, brainwash, and de-Islamicize Muslims, at times outright massacring us, our ulama, and leaders, and at other times corrupting the Muslim masses' religious knowledge, culture, and spirit by importing foreign ideologies, subordinating our institutions, disfiguring Islamic doctrines, and more subtly, attempting to alter the very

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[4] This definition is formulated by al-Māwardī but repeated in different idioms by nearly all major classical writers on the subject. Al-Māwardī writes: "Allah Most Exalted has delegated a leader to the Umma who stands in as a successor to prophethood, and authorized him to manage the affairs of the Umma" (*al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya,* ed. Aḥmad Jād (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1427/2006), 13). A few paragraphs later he elaborates: "Imamate is prescribed to succeed prophethood as a means of protecting the dīn and managing the affairs of this world. Establishing someone who will discharge its duties for the Umma is an obligation by consensus, notwithstanding the disagreement of [the Kharijite] al-Aṣamm. There remains disagreement on whether the caliphate is an obligation by virtue of revelation or reason" (15). For more detail, see my article "Who Wants the Caliphate?", *Yaqeen Institute*, 2019, https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/who-wants-the-caliphate; and for a detailed discussion of al-Māwardī's contribution in its historical and intellectual context, see Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 117-121.

[5] An extensive discussion of the meanings of the word Umma is found in: Isḥāq b. ʿAbdallāh al-Saʿdī, *Dirāsāt fī Tamayyuz al-Umma al-Islāmiyya wa-Mawqif al-Mustashriqīn minhu* (Doha, Qatar: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-l-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyya, 1434/2013), 61-107; the conclusion is summarized at 104.

[6] For the Sunnis, the terms *khalīfa* (or caliph, the office being *khilāfa* or caliphate) and *imām* (who holds the office of *imāma* or imamate) refer to the same office, whereas for the Shīʿa, the proper term is imām, and the office has far greater theological significance.

language or script altogether by rewriting the meanings of key Islamic doctrines and concepts.[7] The greatest weapon of the enemy—that is, anyone who wishes to break the Muslim spirit and desire to live and thrive as Muslims—has been to conscript the ulama and intellectuals themselves, or break their spirits so even when living in a world where other nations have walked on the moon and now reach for the stars, they are terrified of thinking and aspiring to their most basic rights and freedoms, forced to become, as the Japanese proverb goes, frogs in a well who deny the existence of the sea. However, by Allah's leave and thanks to the most courageous of our ulama, leaders, martyrs, and a variety of movements of the believers who have put up heroic struggles to preserve and revive the deen, the enemy may have won some battles, but is sure to lose the war. The blessed ummatic struggle continues.

Note that, on the one hand, the concern of *ummatics* is not, in contrast to secular politics, merely to manage and redistribute resources, but also to uphold the divine message (*iqāmat al-dīn*) and facilitate stewardship of the earth (*ʿimārat al-arḍ*), manage intra-Muslim relations and pursuit of harmony, unity, and unification, and establish justice and prosperity for all people in a way that fulfills the divine imperative. In disciplinary terms, *ummatics* incorporates numerous aspects of *aqīda* (Islamic creed), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *akhlāq* (ethics), and additional Islamic discourses that pertain to the collective concerns of Muslims qua Muslims (*shuʾūn al-muslimīn*). This includes the contents of classical genres such as *al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya* (the divine laws concerning governance) and *al-siyāsa al-sharʿiyya* (governance according to the divine law), but also modern disciplines such as politics, social sciences, and the humanities.

On the other hand, ummatics neither negates nor precludes conventional politics, it only orders and redirects it, in the same way that the Islamic notion of marriage does not negate the customary, local, and cultural notions of marriage, but rather gives it particular form and purpose. Accordingly, although ummatic solidarity is not delimited by territorial borders, it does not deny the significance of diversity among peoples, cultures, customs, practices, and places. Ummatic universalism need not be a zero-sum game vis-a-vis local and particularist affiliations; Islam celebrates some kinds of difference, mitigates other kinds, and discourages and prohibits yet other kinds.

Once the principle of ummatic identity has been securely established as the foundation, comparison, contrast, and learning from outside experience can be done with greater

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[7] On the failure of the nation-state model in the Muslim world today, see Joseph Kaminski, "Irredeemable Failure: The Nation-State as a Nullifier of Ummatic Unity", *Ummatics*, Dec 14, 2022, https://ummatics.org/papers/irredeemable-failure-the-modern-nation-state-as-a-nullifier-of-ummatic-unity/; on the cooptation of certain clerics in the wake of the Arab Spring, see Usaama al-Azami, *Islam and the Arab Revolutions: The Ulama Between Democracy and Autocracy* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2021; and New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). Scholarly literature is replete with accounts of repression of Muslim scholars and reformers under despotic Muslim-majority states. For one accessible account, see Iyad El-Baghdadi and Ahmed Gatnash, *The Middle East Crisis Factory: Tyranny, Resilience and Resistance* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2021). For a recent anthropological account, see Pascal Menoret, *Graveyard of Clerics: Everyday Activism in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). For a slightly dated but still insightful account of the Arab states' violence against their populations driven by their weak legitimacy, see Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995).

intentionality, caution, and purpose. Muslims may, of course, contribute to the politics (i.e., good order and management) of the communities and polities that they inhabit, where their neighbors might include non-Muslims, be they in Islamic lands or as minorities. However, as members of the Umma, their first and foremost belonging is to the Umma of Islam, and hence, as an imperative of faith their politics is inspired as well as constrained by ummatics.

3. Scriptural Foundations

Just as Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is the believers' historical response to the practical divine commands, theology (*usūl al-din* or *kalām*) to the imperative of harmonizing reason and revelation in pursuit of the knowledge of God, and ethics (*akhlāq*, *adab*) and spiritual disciplines (*tazkiya, sulūk*, and *tasawwuf*) to the task of acquiring personal virtues and higher spiritual states, *ummatics* can be understood as the believers' historical response to the divine command of being a model, unified community of faith with a mission. This brings us to the key, constitutional Qurʾanic verses that govern the formation and direction of the *Umma*:

I. Our first verse declares the Muhammadan Umma a just community and a probative witness that must carry on the prophetic mission to humankind:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

"Thus We have appointed you a just nation[8], that ye may be witnesses to humankind, and that the Messenger may be a witness to you." (2:143)[9]

II. The following verse complements and adds further depth to the meaning of the first, honoring the Umma as the best community that calls others to what is good, highlighting the same pair of an honor and a mission:

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[8] *Ummat[an] wasat[an]* refers to the middle (justly balanced) or the best (choicest) community. Both these meanings are repeated in classical exegeses. ʿAllāma Tāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1393H) in his *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* (under verse 2:143) summarizes earlier exegeses and endorses both these meanings, adding, "The verse is a tribute to the Muslims for Allah reserved the honor for them of being the choicest (*wasaṭ*) by equipping them with the means to explain and understand the divine law by protecting their minds from becoming accustomed to misguidance, unlike other nations; Fakhr al-Dīn (al-Rāzī) said, 'The meaning could be that they are balanced in religion between the excessive and the neglectful, the extremist and the lax …'"

[9] A literal translation of the phrase *shuhadāʾ ʿala al-nās* may be "witnesses against humankind," but "witnesses to," as in "callers and teachers," better suits the idiomatic meaning. The most apt explanation for the phrase is given in the classical exegesis of Naṣr b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 373H) in his *tafsīr* known as *Baḥr al-ʿUlūm* as: "*shahāda* means clarifying evidence, for it clarifies the right of a plaintiff in court, so it means that you all [the Umma of Muḥammad (s)] clarify [and thereby confirm and establish the right of God] to all who come after [the Qurʾanic revelation], just as the Prophet upon him be peace clarifies the same to you all." This explanation is cited and further elaborated in Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1332/1914), *Maḥāsin al-Taʾwīl*, under verse 2:143 (https://furqan.co/mahasin-altaweel/2/143).

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كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

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"Ye are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah." (3:110)[10]

III. Not only does Allah honor us as an Umma with the challenge of being prophetic agents, He commands us to do so while holding on to God's rope together:

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وَٱعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

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"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided." (3:103)[11]

IV. Even more sternly:

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وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

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"And be ye not as those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them. For such there is an awful doom." (3:105)[12]

V. Another verse declares the believers a fraternity, one that they must actively nurture:

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[10] I have retained the archaism "ye" to stress that the address is to the plural Umma, to "you all". As for the meaning of the phrase *khayra umma*, after listing a variety of overlapping views, Abū Jaʿfar al-Tabarī (d. 310H) declares that the best view is that of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H), who said, "We are the last of the [chosen nations] and noblest before God," because, al-Tabarī notes, it accords with the the following sound Prophetic hadith, "You come after seventy nations, you being the noblest and best of them with God." (Musnad Aḥmad and elsewhere, declared ṣaḥīḥ or ḥasan by various authorities; https://furqan.co/tabari/3/110). Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671H) reports Ibn ʿAbbās as saying that the "best community" refers to those who migrated from Mecca to Medina and witnessed the battles of Badr and al-Ḥudaybiyya, accompanied by ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's statement that "Whoever does what they did will be like them [in praise and reward]" (see under 3:110, https://furqan.co/qurtubi/3/110). Ibn Kathīr (d. 773H) in his *tafsīr* states, "The correct view is that the verse refers to the entire Umma, each generation according to [its merit]." All of the above agree that the meaning of "the best" is that the Umma is the best not only in itself but for the entire humankind, that is, of greatest benefit to them, and that the praise and honor applies to those who command what is right, namely, as given in God's final revelation, and forbid what is wrong (see under verse 3:110; https://furqan.co/ibn-katheer/3/110).

[11] Abū Jaʿfar al-Tabarī (d. 310H) lists three overlapping meanings for "the rope of Allah,": first, the unified community of the believers (*jamāʿa*), second, the doctrine of pure monotheism (*tawḥīd*), and third, the Qurʾan and the Qurʾanic covenant between Allah and the believers (see under verse 3:103; https://furqan.co/tabari/3/103). Al-Qurṭubī endorses the first meaning, that of the unified community (https://furqan.co/qurtubi/3/103), whereas Ibn Kathīr and al-Nasafī (d. 710H) endorse the last view, that its primary meaning is the Qurʾan (https://furqan.co/ibn-katheer/3/103). Ibn ʿĀshūr affirms the meaning of "the entire, unified Umma" as being the rope of God in a way that brings all of the three meanings together in the fertile metaphor of the rope: "The purpose is to command adherence to the entire Umma, which necessarily includes the command to each individual to hold on to this religion" (see under 3:103; https://furqan.co/ibn-aashoor/3/103).

[12] All exegetes agree that the reference in this verse is to the People of the Book (see under 3:105, https://furqan.co/tabari/3/105).

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إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ

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"The believers are nothing but brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren." (49:10)[13]

VI. Another warns of great mischief if the believers do not band together:

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وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوهُ تَكُن فِتْنَةٌ فِى الْأَرْضِ وَفَسَادٌ كَبِيرٌ

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"The rejectors of faith are each others' allies, and if you [O believers] do not do so, there will be persecution on earth, and great mischief." (8:73)[14]

The first two monumental verses establish a number of key points. Those addressed by the Qurʾan, the Umma of Muhammad ﷺ, are the best community, one that is justly balanced, the condition for this distinction being not their race, lineage, or mere luck, but that they call to God, enjoin good, forbid evil, and as such their mission is to stand vis-a-vis humankind (*li-takūnū*) as God's witnesses just as the Messenger stood vis-a-vis them, calling them to God, warning them of God.[15] The ummatic mission, therefore, is a reflection and extension of the prophetic office.

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[13] All classical exegetes affirm the meaning that all believers in the Two Testimonies of faith are like brothers and sisters, even though in divine law biological kinship has specific rulings, "And those connected by womb [that is, biological kins] have a priority in God's Book" (8:75; 33:6); but short of these norms of inheritance, marriage, and so on, in terms of affection and support, kinship in religion may be stronger. Al-Qurṭubī reports a Muslim quip, "Brotherhood in religion is stronger than that in blood, for difference in religion severs the blood relationship [as in the rules of inheritance], but difference in lineage does not sever brotherhood in religion" (see under 49:10; https://furqan.co/qurtubi/49/10). Ibn ʿĀshūr notes that this reference to the relationship of faith as siblinghood is a persistent reference throughout the Qurʾan and in the Sunna, e.g. verse 59:10.

[14] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī summarizes the meanings of this verse, 8:73, and the one before it, succinctly: The verse 8:72 address three groups, the first are the Meccan immigrants and their Medinan hosts and supporters, who are each other's full allies; a second group comprises believers who failed to obey the command of migration to Medina (either willingly or unwillingly), these are recognized as believers but without the benefit of *walāya* (alliance); yet, if they seek aid in religion, the believers must aid them but their aid is contingent on the believers' treaties, which cannot be violated. Finally, all alliance with the unbelievers must be severed. The following verse, 8:73, declares that the unbelievers are each other's allies, and if the believers do not also do so, there will follow great corruption and persecution (https://furqan.co/alrazi/8/73). Notably, the danger here is not only political, but to the integrity and flourishing of faith altogether. As to the precise meaning of *walāya*, al-Tabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, and other traditional exegetes report two meanings of *walāya* (alliance), the obvious and, to al-Tabarī, the only correct one, is that the alliance here means *tanāṣur*, that is, mutual military and political protection and aid. The second meaning, which can be attested in other verses but only indirectly implied here, refers to separation of social relations such as inheritance and marriage between believers and non-believers (https://furqan.co/tabari/8/73). Ibn ʿĀshūr adds that "The objective is the creation of Islamic unity, which can only be perfected if its members are united like one and avoid anything that violates it" (https://furqan.co/ibn-aashoor/8/73).

[15] Classical exegetes, in fact, invoke this verse, among others, as the proof of the divine protection (*ʿisma*) of the Umma's consensus (*ijmāʿ*), for God has appointed the Umma as a whole as His witness, which guarantees the probity of the *Umma* as a whole in all that it unanimously conveys on behalf of God. See, for instance, the explanation of 2:143 by al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubi, al-Rāzī, al-Nasafī, and Ibn Kathīr, all cited earlier.

These verses further establish that the vision of Islam in the Qurʾan is community-centered or 'ummatic', as it is the community and not any person, family, race, tribe, or ethnicity, nor any particular religious institution, that inherits the prophetic mission. It is the community as a whole that is commanded to appoint and obey a leader "from among yourselves" (4:59) to pursue that mission. These verses declare the Umma an agent of God's work on earth, rather than a passive recipient of action or dictation.

Furthermore, being a community that is good in itself and calls to good inescapably imposes two types of obligation, one pertaining to the internal virtue of the community, and the other pertaining to outward, world-facing, collective action. The former function requires attaining piety, loving and obeying God, correcting and reminding each other, whereas the latter function requires collective organization under an effective leadership to carry out the prophetic task. Whenever a group of individuals with independent wills is tasked with a collective duty, it must distribute its resources and responsibilities, and this, as noted earlier, is the task of politics, or in our case, of ummatics. If the purpose of a community is not merely survival or passive existence but an active mission to the world, the political aspect is even more pronounced, as that group must seek to become an independent entity with both moral authority and disciplinary power. **Put differently, the *prophetic mission* of the Umma has two aspects: the inwardly prophetic character requires attributes such as piety, self-criticism, integrity, and morality, whereas its outwardly prophetic mission requires virtues such as action, unity, solidarity, courage, resolve, and political acumen.**

The next three verses in our list (3:103; 3:105; 49:10) stress that not only is solidarity among the believers required for the mission, but also that it is an active process. Carrying out a common mission both generates conditions for cooperation and at the same time occasions for friction, and therefore requires a constant disposition toward purposeful internal reconciliation, peace-making, and justice. In this respect, the metaphor of believers as siblings (49:9-10) is particularly instructive, for siblings are unified by their lineage, by sharing one or both parents, just as the believers are joined together by the Two Testimonies. Yet siblings possess different personalities, and their very actualization as individuals, and growth into adults is an *agonistic* process, which leads siblings to not only love and support each other and play and share resources with each other, but also at times challenge, annoy, quarrel, and compete with each other, testing their own and each other's limits, and hence learning to deal with the world at large. Even when some of the believers, like some siblings, cross limits of tolerable harm and bring serious harm or cause evil, the Qurʾan calls them believers and brothers while also enjoining an activist remedy: to join the just party among them against the unjust, yet always for the purpose of eventual peace and reconciliation: "And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them. And if one party of them does wrong to the other, fight ye that which does wrong till it return unto the ordinance of Allah; then, if it return, make peace between them justly, and act equitably. Lo! Allah loves the equitable" (49:9). Thus the Almighty reminds us of the need to constantly make peace among Muslims, and anticipate and expect tensions rather than being disheartened

by them, and urges us to treat believers' solidarity not merely as a given but also as an obligation and a process of unification and harmonization. Those who point to frequent Muslim bickering and fighting in the present or the past as the justification of hopelessness or resignation to the status quo are not only unwise, but heedless of this divine command.

The final verse (8:73) raises the stakes even further, while also clarifying the kind of unity that is required: if you do not come together, close ranks, and make a robust alliance, you and the world at large face great harm. The enemies of faith—and truth always has enemies—are going to be each other's allies against faith, and the believers are enjoined to exhibit stronger solidarity. Note that this Medinan verse revealed on the occasion of the Battle of Badr calls for comprehensive solidarity, in war and peace, in politics and otherwise, for war is the most totalizing of human acts. The wording, furthermore, is universal and timeless, thus requiring believers to establish comprehensive solidarity and warning that if Muslims fail to establish it, there will ensue great corruption and bloodshed on earth. The purpose of such solidarity is not merely to protect themselves, but other religions and communities as well: "And had it not been for Allah's repelling some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been demolished. Verily Allah helps those who help Him. Lo! Allah is Strong, Almighty" (22:40).

To these divine urgings, the words of the Prophet ﷺ gives a particularly poignant and emotive expression through the metaphor of a single body:

> The believers in their mutual love, mercy, and solidarity are like one body, when one of its limbs suffers, the entire body responds with fever and sleepless nights.[16]

This brief presentation of the Qurʾanic commands concerning the distinct mission of the Umma and unity as a condition of its fulfillment leads us to the following interrelated imperatives and functions that fall under what we have named ummatics.

Ummatics must begin by providing a **conceptual space for the Umma's collective existence and action**, which requires disciplined study of a number of areas.

1. To theorize **Islamic politics** proper, *al-siyāsa al-sharʿiyya*, in the spirit of Islamic norms, in engagement with Islamic tradition and historical and current bodies of human knowledge, and with caution against disfiguring Islamic concepts. Ummatics, therefore, requires conceptualizing and pursuing goals and policies, on both local and global levels, that would serve the general interests of Muslims and humanity at large. At the heart of the comprehensive solidarity of the believers is **political unity** of Muslim societies across regions, cultures, languages, and administrative systems, which requires complex and flexible **institutional design** and problem-solving. Modern governance, furthermore, requires enormous technical expertise and skill, which are shared among all human

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[16] Agreed upon: Bukhārī 6011, Muslim 2586.

beings, as well as constant and intricate moral and teleological decision-making, which requires deep and systematic knowledge of Islamic norms, objectives, and issues of general agreement and disagreement. We must avoid the commonly held but naive positions with respect to the relationship between politics and Islamic norms, one being that all politics is merely technocratic decisions (such as deciding speed limits or installing faucets), and the other being that all governance is moral and can be read in scripture or ancient texts. From technology, architecture, zoning, municipality, environmental protection, to wealth redistribution, fostering of public virtue, upkeep of sacred places, and management of public rituals, defense, and foreign policy, all have deep Islamic legal and moral dimensions in varying forms and degrees. The proper execution of each requires specialist level of Islamic knowledge and cultivation of virtue and piety, as well as access to global best practices and solutions, especially those from other ummatic regions (i.e., intra-ummatic as well as global knowledge), and finally, deep local knowledge of the circumstances and traditions of the specific village, town, or region where they are applied. The ummatics discourse seeks to produce, develop, encourage, and curate this knowledge.

2. To strive for the implementation of the originary **community-centered** vision of Islam by reviving the **caliphate** as an **accountable** and **forward-looking** institution. A unified Islamic governance of all Muslim-majority regions, concerned with the welfare of the community in accordance with Islamic law and norms, is a prime Islamic obligation by unanimous consensus of Muslim scholars across the centuries and schools. However, many non-ideal adjustments have been made in its practice in each of its historical embodiments, and at times power and wealth accumulated in the hands of the few without due accountability, leading often to corruption, division, and eventual disintegration. It is imperative that we return to the proper community-centered vision of the caliphate as reflected in the Qurʾan and the Sunna and practiced by the Rashidūn caliphs, without falling into the fallacy—one that contradicts the transformative hope and faithful action writ large in the Qurʿanic message—that there is nothing left for the Umma now but eternal decline and passive suffering until the appearance of a messiah. Nor must we be limited to the political forms of the past: the historical institution of the caliphate took many forms,[17] and premodern conditions posed enormous challenges to unified administration of vast and expanding lands, and often forced compromises. Key technological, social, and political developments allow us today to overcome many of these challenges and allow the community to once again become empowered to elect those in authority and hold them rigorously accountable.

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[17] Consult my article "Who Wants the Caliphate?" for an enumeration of the four (or, if we count the short-lived constitutional Ottoman Empire, five) phases through which the historical caliphate passed.

3. To seek in discourse and practice **comprehensive** unity and unification of the Umma through systematic **mitigation of inequities and inequalities**. This means **solidarity not only on political but also spiritual, social, and economic levels**, organized by the requirement of the prophetic mission in which all Muslims are equal and preference is given only on the basis of piety and competence. As Abu Bakr al-Siddīq noted in his first sermon, to protect the weak from the strong within the Umma is a defining task of Islamic governance.[18] This quest requires study and development of a multipronged approach. This includes preparing Muslim public opinion at all levels in various regions, recognizing and treating reasons for mutual disconnection and mistrust, addressing grievances through restorative mechanisms, especially those grounded in the shared commitment to Islamic faith and civilization. Divisions based in economic, communal, or sectarian considerations would similarly require addressing the root causes and a tolerant, restorative approach grounded in shared Islamic principles. Nationalism, ethnocentrism, colorism, racism, and all forms of discriminatory ideas and practices that oppose Islamic meritocracy, which reappear in new forms, must be persistently sought out and eradicated. Note that the descriptive, or social scientific, aspect of ummatics, drawing on the kind of observations Ibn Khaldun made, acknowledges that division and disagreement among humans cannot be fully eliminated, as new ones constantly arise out of natural human instincts, and therefore, normative ummatics prompts us to seek to constantly seek mitigation and healing in ways prescribed in Islam rather than utopian perfection.

4. To advance Islamic discourse on **managing diversity rather than imposing homogeneity**. This means recognizing and acknowledging inevitable diversity within the Umma, studying its sources and causes, respecting differences that are not threatening and mitigating ones that are, including sectarian, social, class, and race divisions, and minimizing discord. This does not preclude arguing for our deeply held theological, legal, or other opinions passionately within the broad limits of Islam. Sectarian conflict played a significant role in the weakening of Christianity as a social force and rise of secularism in Europe, and poses an equally grave threat to the Muslim world today. With regard to doctrinal differences, Islamic civilization has seen exceptionally successful models of tolerance in certain key domains, such as the Sunni schools' legal pluralism, and the Sharīʿa's protection of non-Muslim communities. Such intra-Muslim tolerance and coexistence do not require giving up on the pursuit and defense of the truth, but rather putting differences in their right place. This includes not only drawing distinctions between doctrinally valid and invalid difference and politically significant and insignificant difference, but also the recognition that the fundamentals that bind the Umma while smaller in number are stronger in force than the branch differences. The ummatic mandate is that we study the cases of successful intra-Muslim co-existence,

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[18] Ibn Hishām (d. 213H), *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā et al., 6 vols. (Maṭbaʿa Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1375/1955), 2: 660-1.

make them the common wisdom of Muslims, work to secure their preconditions, and thus bring about their revival.

5. To **prioritize the weak and oppressed** among Muslims globally, which is essential to actualizing the prophetic metaphor of the Umma as a body. This requires, as the first step, producing accurate and current knowledge of the plight of our weak (*mustaḍʿafīn*) (4:75), and developing proactive and disciplined study of the present and future threats to the Islamic lands and sacred places. Crucial ummatic causes such as Palestine, Kashmir, Eastern Turkistan, Rohingya, to name a few, are unsolved and appear hopeless precisely because they have been secularized, disconnected from the Umma, and parochialized, leading to general neglect or at best sporadic, unsustained attention. All such cases, their root causes and history, and discourse on solutions need to become part of Muslims' daily news and curriculum everywhere so that we can feel, plan, and respond, as the Prophet ﷺ demanded of the believers.

6. To advance discourse on **confronting key economic, social, ecological, technological challenges** that are crucial to the vision of a unified and prosperous Muslim world. Addressing challenges like climate change, responsibly harnessing opportunities such as those presented by the rise of Artificial Intelligence, and showing how Islamic paradigms, such as an interest-free economy, can lead to more equitable outcomes are crucial, not only because they affect Muslims in significant ways and the prosperity of the Muslim world demands so, but also because we cannot fulfill the ummatic mandate of being witnesses unto humankind without leading in these areas.

7. To organize **ummatic relations with the world at large**, upholding the ummatic mission of calling to Islam and securing Muslims' well-being globally while seeking coexistence of civilizations and regions and solving shared material, environmental, and other challenges facing humankind.

4. Conclusion: Starting with *Naṣīḥa*

Who, one might ask, is supposed to do all this? Do all of these functions not already presuppose a single, powerful agency, like a state?

An effective government that represents all Muslims in a responsive and accountable fashion is certainly a necessity to care for the Umma, apart from being an Islamic obligation in itself. Political authority is needed to uphold the rule of Islamic law and defend against aggression. However, while necessary, power is not a sufficient condition for most of these functions, nor is it the point of departure. It is the prophetic way to start by first correcting beliefs and attitudes before proceeding to power. For instance, imagine the caliphate falling into the hands of a tyrannical, neglectful, or self-interested person or group, or one that sells out to foreign powers.

Even righteous rulers, like the righteous ulama and spiritual leaders, are tempted to abuse power if not checked and held accountable. Clearly, an alert Umma and robust institutions are both necessary to ensure good governance. The Umma must be prepared to demand its right while also respecting the rights of its leaders, ulama, rulers, as well as of general believers at all levels, as the Prophet ﷺ declared, "Religion is sincerity … toward Allah, His Messenger, His Book, the leaders of Muslims, and their generality."[19] The primacy of truth and duty inherent in *naṣīḥa* rather than the secular liberal mantra of individual rights, is the proper framework to ground ummatic rights and duties. The Prophet prepared his fledgling Umma for this *naṣīḥa* well before the community was given power in Medina. Without falling into the opposite fallacy that we must all become perfectly virtuous before expecting better governance, our middle position calls for creating a purposive and virtuous intellectual and sociopolitical discourse and praxis that can serve simultaneously as foundations for virtuous exercise of power and for holding that power accountable.

Note that ummatics as a discourse is required regardless of the existence of a caliphate, just as fiqh and aqīda as discourses are required both before and after a party of righteous believers comes into existence. **Indeed, if a global caliphate were to come into existence tomorrow, we would not be any less in need of an ummatic discourse.**

Who, then, must develop ummatic knowledge and do ummatic work? **The duty falls not to a single person or institution, but all those who have the resources to contribute to this in the Umma. Our responsibility corresponds to our resourcefulness, and given that today nearly endless resources are available to some Muslims whereas most are kept in great misery and poverty, the few who can must meet the challenge.**

We propose ummatics as the concept that encompasses the discourse, the academic discipline(s), and the global Muslim public sphere that systematically address these challenges. The Ummatics Institute aims to be one of what we hope will be many such initiatives that empower ummatic thought and practice.

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[19] Muslim 55.

His areas of research include Islamic history, theology, political thought, and history broadly. His publications include Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Ranks of Divine Seekers: Translation of Ibn al-Qayyim's Madarij al-Salikin (Brill, 2020), first two of four volumes. His selected publications can be accessed at https://utoledo.academia.edu/OvamirAnjum

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