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Rupen Das

The Poor and Poverty in Islam

Compassion and Social Justice

Scholars' Press

Imprint

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Section I

The Poor and Poverty in Islam: Charity and Social Justice¹

ABSTRACT: Most strategies for addressing poverty are based on western paradigms to analyze and respond to poverty. There is very little awareness of a rich tradition of charity and social justice in non-western religions and ethnic groups. This monograph will first look at the poor and poverty in Islam and how it has addressed the issues of responding to the needs of the poor and vulnerable in society. It also explores some of the most prevalent thinking on social change and social justice within Islam.

Socioeconomic transformation of poor and marginalized communities has emerged as a key objective of national policy makers and international development experts. While there are emerging models and examples of how communities have emerged from poverty in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, there are very few examples of this in the Middle East. If poverty was addressed and eradicated, it was because of oil wealth. However, the Shi'as of Lebanon provide a case study of a community emerging from marginalization and poverty because of socioeconomic and political dynamics. This monograph in Section II explores what some of these dynamics were, and if are there lessons for other communities in the region to emulate.

The issues of addressing poverty and socioeconomic development are on the forefront of policy considerations of most governments, and non-governmental and civil society organizations. However, the understandings of the dynamics of poverty and strategies to respond are based on western philosophical, religious, and socioeconomic paradigms used to analyze why poverty exists. In an age of identity politics, there is a great need to listen, understand and appreciate the different perspectives and worldviews represented in the mosaics of our pluralistic societies. Of late, there has been a growing awareness that non-western religious traditions and values of ethnic groups have long histories of responding to the needs of the vulnerable and the poor in their communities. This wealth of knowledge and practice has rarely been considered in community development and poverty alleviation programs.

The availability of critical studies and analysis on Islamic understandings of the dynamics of poverty is a challenge as there is limited material in this area in English. The available material either explains in great detail Islam's response to poverty or is from a historical perspective in analyzing the institutional or revolutionary responses to poverty during various periods of Islamic history. However, there are various social theories that have been proposed from within Islam by scholars such as Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Tammiya, Sayyid Qutub, Sayyid Mawdudi, Hasan Al-Banna and Tariq Ramadan. While they used the framework of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, they drew heavily from contemporary ideologies, theories and philosophies.² Colin Chapman, who was

¹ This research is based on a series of interviews in Beirut, Lebanon between 2012-14, when the author worked in the region.

² In reference to Sayyid Qutub the 20th century Egyptian Islamic thinker, "Qutub, as is often the case with other twentieth-century Islamic thinkers, does not hesitate to invoke concepts rooted in the Western tradition. He does not

formerly Professor of Islamic studies at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut cautions, "They didn't base all their thinking on the Qur'an; they imbibe it from others."³ In specifically addressing the issues of poverty, Monir Hossain Moni at Asia Pacific Institute for Global Studies, Dhaka, Bangladesh, writes, "The Islamic way of life is a constitutional requirement of any Muslim; yet they look for secular solutions to the socioeconomic dilemma of poverty like every other problem."⁴

The first section of this monograph will seek to explore how the Islamic community responds to poverty (focusing on the teachings of the Qur'an and the *hadith*), explore the understanding of human rights within Islam, and finally discuss (very briefly) the social theories of selected Islamic scholars focusing on poverty. The discussion of social theories is not meant to be extensive, but to try and identify some larger concepts of social justice and social change from an Islamic perspective. Many of the insights are from in-depth interviews that were part of this research.

1. Islamic Conception of Poverty

Addressing the needs of the poor is a central tenet of Islam, as charitable giving (*zakat*) is the third of the five pillars of Islam. The Qur'an in 98:4-5 states, "The only Command they were given was to worship Allah, making their religion sincerely His, turning all their attention towards Him, and to establish the Salat and to pay the *Zakat*: for this alone is the most true and right religion."⁵ According to Islam, it then is impossible to attain righteousness without being charitable. "You shall not attain righteousness until you spend out of what you love (in the way of Allah). Allah knows whatever you spend." (Qur'an 3:92)

The basic understanding is that Islam is all encompassing and addresses all aspects of life that include the social, the political, the physical and the spiritual. This is foundational to the social theory of Islam. William Montgomery Watt (1909-2006), former Professor at University of Edinburgh, writes that for Mohammad religion was not just an issue of private and individual faith but rather "the total response of his personality to the total situation in which he found himself. He was responding [not only] ... to the religious and intellectual aspects of the situation but also the economic, social, and political pressures to which contemporary Mecca was subject."⁶ It is from within this framework that poverty is addressed.

1.1. The Causes of Poverty explained by the Qur'an and *hadith*

In order to understand poverty from within Islam, the starting point is to understand that wealth is

acknowledge the Western provenance of such ideas, reaching into the early Islamic period to argue that they in fact are endemic to Islam, but in fact, many of these concepts derive either from the ancient Greek tradition or otherwise emanate from the period of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and its aftermath." John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 403.

³ Colin Chapman. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 5 December 2012.

⁴ Monir Hossain Moni, "Islam and Poverty," *Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, Sage Publications, (2006), accessed 21 August 2013, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/sagewpov/islam_and_poverty.

⁵ All quotes from the Qur'an in this thesis are from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Quran*, (Medina: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1987).

⁶ Quoted in P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 30.

a blessing from God. The Qur'an in 67:15 states that wealth is part of the gift of creation that God gives. "It is He who made the earth manageable (and amenable) for you, so you may travel through its open lands and enjoy the gifts that He furnishes." These blessings of God's gifts come with social responsibilities of stewardship and charity towards the poor. The Qur'an in 57:7 says, "And (for those) who believe and spend (in charity), there is great reward." The concepts of wealth as a blessing and charity are integrally linked within Islamic thought and teaching.

Most of the recent Islamic literature that analyzes the causes of poverty draws heavily from economics and sociology rather than from the Qur'an and the *hadith*. However, there is teaching in both these religious sources on some of the causes of poverty.

Foundational to understanding why poverty exists is the concept of *al fitra*. God created the earth and all of life. The Qur'an in 55:10 says "And the earth, He has set it for living creatures." It was created perfect. The concept of *al fitra* is of perfection and beauty as created by God. The *hadith* (Sahih al Bukhari, volume 2, book 23, number 441) states, "No child is born except on the *fitra* and then his parents make him Jewish, Christian or Magian (Zoroastrian)"; the idea being that an individual is created by God perfect (*al fitra*) but is then influenced by its parents, environment, culture, and social influences, which then corrupt him. According to Islam, poverty was never part of God intentions, but originates from human beings and their social environment.⁷

The Qur'an in 3:117 states that God does not cause poverty, but that it is the result of the behavior of individuals. "What they spend in the life of this (material) world may be likened to a wind which brings a nipping frost: It strikes and destroys the harvest of men who have wronged their own souls: it is not Allah that hath wronged them, but they wrong themselves."

The influences from the social environment result in four kinds of behavior that cause poverty. The first, according to the Qur'an, is laziness. The term in Arabic is *kasal* and is used only twice in the Qur'an.⁸ Highlighting personal responsibility, the Qur'an in 13:11 says, "Surely Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change it themselves." Laziness is connected with the lack of spiritual discipline. The *hadith*, in Sahih al Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 21, and Number 243 illustrates this. "Satan puts three knots at the back of the head of any of you if he is asleep. On every knot he reads and exhales the following words, 'The night is long, so stay asleep.' When one wakes up and remembers Allah, one knot is undone; and when one performs ablution, the second knot is undone, and when one prays the third knot is undone and one gets up energetic with a good heart in the morning; otherwise one gets up lazy and with a mischievous heart."

The second behavior causing poverty is that of squandering whatever wealth one may have. The Qur'an in 17:26-27 states, "And give to the near of kin their right, and to the destitute and the traveler; and squander not wastefully. Surely the squanderers are Satan's brothers..." The squandering may be through extravagant behavior, some of which is forbidden by Islam,⁹ and may lead to poverty and destitution.

⁷ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayad. Interview with the author. Saida, Lebanon. 18 July 2012.

⁸ In the Qur'an 4:142 and 9:54, the laziness described is associated with prayer and the required rituals.

⁹ This includes use of alcohol, dancing, singing, among others.

The third behavior is economic exploitation and greed. The Qur'an in 16:92 warns against exploiting and taking advantage of others. "You resort to oaths as instruments of mutual deceit so that one people might take greater advantage than another although Allah puts you to the test through this. Surely on the Day of Resurrection He will make clear the truth concerning the matters over which you differed." Against greed, the Qur'an states, in 47:38, "Look, you are being called upon to expend in Allah's Way, yet some of you are being niggardly, whereas the one who is niggardly is, in fact, being niggardly only to himself. Allah is Self-Sufficient: it is you who are the needy. If you turn away, Allah will replace you by another people, and they will not be like you." The Qur'an states in 2:30, "Allah created Man to be the vicegerent of Allah on earth." If this is the case, then God has given humans more than they need. If inequality exists it is because of greed and the love for *dunya* (worldly matter), the rich become richer and the poor become poorer.¹⁰

The final behavior is the lack of initiative. The Qur'an states that a person has no excuse for not taking the initiative to deal with obstacles and problems that prevent him from prospering. When a soul is judged and asked why they were in the condition they were in, making an excuse for not taking the initiative to move out of oppression and poverty is not acceptable. 4:97 states, "they (angels) say: 'What (condition) were you in?' They reply: 'We were weak and oppressed in the earth.' They say: 'Was the earth of Allah not spacious enough for you to move yourself away (from evil)?"¹¹ As will be seen later, this understanding was key in encouraging the Shi'ites of Lebanon to migrate from the impoverished rural areas to southern Beirut, while others emigrated overseas.

The Qur'an does not overly analyze the causes of poverty. Instead, the focus is on addressing the needs of the poor and destitute. Wealth is not only given as a blessing to the individual and his family but to ensure that those in need are taken care of. The Qur'an in 24:30 states the social responsibility that comes with the blessing of wealth and states "give them from the wealth of Allah which He has given you." Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (702-765 A.D.), an early descendant of Muhammad and a prominent Islamic jurist, explains this further. "Allah, the Most Powerful and High, certainly made in the wealth of the rich an adequate share for the poor if it was not so He would certainly make their share greater. If they are needy, it is because some of the rich refuse to give them their share."¹²

¹⁰ Ibrahim Shamseddine. Interview with the author. 8 August 2012.

¹¹ This insight is from Ibrahim Shamseddine. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 8 August 2012. However, the traditional interpretation of this passage concerns those who stay behind among the unbelievers, despite no genuine disability that would have prevented from leaving. "They are satisfied with a life made up of a blend of Islamic and un-Islamic elements, even though they have had the chance to migrate to the Dar al-Islam (where there is Islamic rule) and thus enjoy a full Islamic life. This is the wrong that they committed against themselves. What kept them satisfied with the mixture of Islamic and un-Islamic elements in their life was not any genuine disability but their love of ease and comfort, their excessive attachment to their kith and kin and to their properties and worldly interests. These concerns had exceeded reasonable limits and had even taken precedence over their concern for their religion. Those people who had willingly acquiesced to living under an un-Islamic order would be called to account by God and would be asked: If a certain territory was under the dominance of rebels against God, so that it had become impossible to follow His Law, why did you continue to live there? Why did you not migrate to a land where it was possible to follow the law of God?" Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Koran*, translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari (London: Islamic Foundation UK, 2010), accessed 23 November 2013, <http://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem2.php?sura=4&verse=97&to=100>.

¹² Quoted in al Kulaini, *al-Kafi*, Vol.3, 3rd Edition, ed. Muhammad Baqir Kamara'i (Tehran, 1968), 497. *Al-Kafi* is a collection of the traditions taught by the Prophet and the Imams and handed down to the Muslim (Shia) Community by the disciples of the Imams. It is not a *hadith*. The name *al-Kafi* means, "that which is sufficient". The book was intended to be a comprehensive collection of Imami-Shi'i traditions.

Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayad, the chief judge of the Islamic court in Saida, Lebanon, counters the commonly held belief that wealth is an indication of God's blessings and that poverty is an indicator of God's displeasure. He states that this attitude was prevalent during the time of Mohammad, who addresses it in the Qur'an in 89:15-16, "Now, as for man, when his Mighty Lord tries him (by) giving him honor and gifts then he (proudly) says, "My Mighty Lord has honored me." But when He tries him (by) restricting his livelihood for him, then he says (in despair), "My Lord has put me to shame!" The verses following (17-20) counter this by stating that such an attitude wrongly focuses on wealth; rather the focus should be on charity. Sheikh Mohammad concludes that neither poverty nor wealth is a curse or a blessing. Instead, wealth and poverty are tests in life to see how one will react. He says that it tests the heart of the wealthy that say, "Why should I feed someone God does not feed?" It challenges the attitudes of the poor who blame God for their poverty.¹³ Ibrahim Shamseddine, a leader in the Shia community in Lebanon and a human rights activist, states that the command to be charitable tests the heart and attitudes of people. "Heaven is not just a place to worship God. People are tested in this life to make them fit for heaven – and zakat is one of the tests."¹⁴

Charitable giving, and specifically *zakat*, serves both spiritual and practical functions. Those who give and those who receive *zakat* are bound together by the sharing of wealth. Fulfilling this duty challenges affluent Muslims to confront and reject the human tendency to be selfish, greedy, and excessively interested in material possessions. Because Islam discourages begging, *zakat* enables the poor to receive economic support without humiliation. *Zakat* also reduces the resentment the poor might harbor toward the rich.¹⁵

Because stewardship of wealth and charity are moral issues, the Qur'an is explicit about God's judgment on those who do not abide by this fundamental Islamic value.

Allah does not love the arrogant and the boastful, who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly and conceal the bounty which Allah has bestowed upon them. We have kept in readiness a humiliating chastisement for such deniers (of Allah's bounty). (4:36(b)-37)

And let not those who covetously withhold of the gifts which Allah has given them of His Grace, think that it is good for them: nay, it will be the worse for them: soon shall the things which they covetously withheld be tied to their necks like a twisted collar, on the Day of Judgment. (3:180)

And there are those who bury gold and silver and do not spend it in the Way of Allah: announce to them a most grievous penalty – On the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs. – "This is the (treasure) which you buried for yourselves: you then taste the (treasures) you buried!" (9:34-35)

While charity is foundational in Islamic morality and social thought, the Qur'an is also clear that

¹³ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayad. Interview with the author. Saida, Lebanon. 18 July 2012.

¹⁴ Ibrahim Shamseddine. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 8 August 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

justice is a value that God honors and requires of his followers. The Qur'an in 16:90 connects acting justly with doing good. "Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) ..." However, the Qur'an does not explicitly state that social injustice is a cause of poverty.

1.2. Prescribed Responses to Poverty

In Islam, piety is expressed not only through correct belief but also through prescribed behavior, which is obligatory of all sincere believers. Belief and behavior are integrally linked.

And be regular in prayer and regular in charity: And whatever good you send forth for your souls before you (from this life), you shall find it with Allah. (2:110)

Piety lies in believing in God, the Last Day and the angels, the Scriptures and the prophets, and disbursing your wealth out of love for God among your kin and the orphans, the wayfarers and mendicants, freeing the slaves, observing your devotional obligations, and in paying the *zakat* and fulfilling a pledge you have given... (2:177)

Surely the men and women who spend in charity and give a goodly loan to God, will have it doubled for them and will receive a generous reward. (57:18)

Your wealth and children are surely meant as trial for you: But God is the great reward. So fear God as much as you can, and listen and obey, and spend in charity for your own good. He who is saved from his own avarice will be successful. If you lend a goodly loan to God, He will double it for you, and forgive you. (64:15-17)

Have you seen him who belies the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter? He it is who drives away the orphan and does not urge giving away the food of the poor. (107:1 - 3)

Not only are belief and behavior important, but the attitudes of kindness and humility are also critical in all acts of charity. The Qur'an in 2: 262-264 states,

Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow up their spending by stressing their benevolence and causing hurt, will find their reward secure with their Lord. They have no cause for fear and grief. To speak a kind word and to forgive people's faults is better than charity followed by hurt. Allah is All Sufficient, All Forbearing. Believers! Do not nullify your acts of charity by stressing your benevolence and causing hurt as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen by men and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. The example of his spending is that of a rock with a thin coating of earth upon it: when a heavy rain smites it, the earth is washed away, leaving the rock bare; such people derive no gain from their acts of charity.

In the teachings of Islam, there are a variety of ways of how an individual believer should respond to poverty and the poor. Charity to the poor is either voluntary or prescribed (required or obligatory). While there are special occasions when charity is obligatory, Sheikh Mohammad states, "If I am a good man I don't wait for feast times to do good. I am always doing good – it is

a part of my daily life.”¹⁶ The special occasions are:

- During the month of Ramadan people, including the poor, are invited for the *iftar* meal.¹⁷ There is a traditional saying, “The worst feast is to invite people who are not interested (because they don’t need the food) and not to invite those who are interested (need the food).”¹⁸ On occasions like this, the rich and poor sit and eat together, signifying that there is no social distinction between them.¹⁹
- During the month of Ramadan, special payments are made. The first is the *zakat*, which is 2.5% of income.²⁰ The second is if a person cannot fast, they make a special payment called *fidya*. This is not a penalty but is a way of empathizing with the poor and helping them. This is known as *sadaqa al-fitr*.
- On the first day after the month of Ramadan, a special gift is given to the poor and is based on the number of people in the giver’s family. In Lebanon, this is \$5 per person. So a family of five would give a gift of \$25. The objective is that a poor man can also prepare a feast for his family and children.
- During the feast of al Adha a sheep is slaughtered and the poor are given a portion of the meat.
- There are also financial penalties for specific wrong behavior. The Qur’an for example says that for some offences a person has to provide food or clothing for 10 people. The principle is to do something good to overcome the evil that they have done.²¹
- For the Shia Muslims, there is an additional payment. This is the *al khums*, which means the fifth. It’s an annual tax on yearly profits – the residual amount after operations. It involves everything that one owns but does not use. For products – it 1/5th of market price. This is paid only once a year.²²

Piety is also expressed through voluntary charity that is not restricted to specific times nor is it obligatory but is encouraged at all times. This is known as *sadaqa*. The broader meaning of the term involves the sharing of happiness through kindness, encouragement or even caring for the environment and animals. *Sadaqa* also means honest.²³ According to Sheikh Mohammad one cannot be an honest believer without helping people.²⁴

¹⁶ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayd. Interview with the author. Saida, Lebanon. 18 July 2012.

¹⁷ This is when they break their day long fast in the evening.

¹⁸ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayd. Interview with the author. Saida, Lebanon. 18 July 2012.

¹⁹ This is affirmed by Frenkel and Lev. “Personal involvement, at least for the duration of the charitable act, served as a social leveler between the high-ranking and the needy poor.” Mariam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev, *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions* (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 3.

²⁰ There is much debate as to how this amount is calculated.

²¹ Ibid. Items i-v.

²² Ibrahim Shamseddine. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 8 August 2012.

²³ The root of the word is *sidaq*, meaning truth.

²⁴ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayd. Interview with the author. Saida, Lebanon. 18 July 2012.

Zakat is the third pillar of Islam and is obligatory. It is not collected into a centrally administered communal fund but is an individual decision to give to those in need either directly or through institutions.

While some see the payment of *zakat* as a tax, the Qur'an explain it as a means of purifying one's wealth in order for God to increase it. The Qur'an states 9:103, "Of their goods take alms, that so you might purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf. Verily, your prayers are a source of security for them: and Allah is One Who hears and knows." In 30:39 it states, "That which you lay out for increase through the property of (other) people, will have no increase with Allah: but that which you lay out for charity, seeking the Countenance of Allah, (will increase): it is these who will get a recompense multiplied." In Sahih al Bukhari, volume 2, book 24, number 491, it states, "If one gives in charity what equals one date-fruit from the honestly earned money and Allah accepts only the honestly earned money -- Allah takes it in His right (hand) and then enlarges its reward for that person (who has given it)..." Monir Hossain Moni explains what is meant by 'purification'. "The predominant principles of Qur'anic economics include "purification," giving up a portion of wealth as alms, and the "return" of property. Just as Allah (God) distributed his "surplus" as a gift that can never be reciprocated, so were Muslims expected to give freely and unstintingly."²⁵ However Druze Arab scholar, Suliman Bashear states that the payment of *zakat* and *sadaqa* to the poor was perceived as purification for sins.²⁶

There are three understandings of *zakat*. According to Akbar Muhammad, at the State University of New York, Binghamton, the first is a linguistic understanding and means cleansing or purification of something from dirt or filth. The meaning of the root z.k.y is "to be pure".²⁷ It also means growth and increase. The second is a theological understanding and means spiritual purification as a result of giving *zakat*. Finally, legally it means the transfer of ownership of specific property to specific individuals or to individuals under specific conditions.²⁸

Sadaqa is different from *zakat*. *Zakat* is given in public, while *sadaqa* is given in private.²⁹ Yaacov Lev, professor of Islamic medieval history at Bar-Ilan University in Israel writes, "Although the [Qur'an] does not object to public giving of wealth (*mal*) and charity (*sadaqa*), secret giving to the poor (*fuqara*) is perceived as a higher moral deed (Quran 2:262, 263, 271, 274)."³⁰ However, the Qur'an does not always clearly distinguish between the two.³¹ According to some Islamic scholars the meaning and intention of both are the same, even if the names differ.³² Two verses from the Qur'an highlight this.

²⁵ Moni, *Islam and Poverty*.

²⁶ Lev, *Charity*, 235.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 235.

²⁸ Akbar Muhammad, "A Note on the Concept of Zakah and Taxation," in *Some Aspects of the Economics of Zakah*, ed. M. Raquibuz Zaman (Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications, 1980), 70.

²⁹ Ibrahim. Shamseddine. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 8 August 2012.

³⁰ Yaacov Lev, "Charity and Gift Giving in Medieval Islam," in *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, eds. Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev (London: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 237.

³¹ The word *zakah* occurs in the Qur'an thirty times, and in twenty-seven places it is linked with prayer, while the words *sadaqah* (5 times) and *sadaqat* (8 times) occur thirteen times.

³² Muhammad Subhi bin Hasan Hallaq, *According to the Qur'an & Sunnah* v.1, trans. Sameh Strauch (New York, NY: Darussalam, 2007), 590.

Of their goods take alms (*sadaqa*), that so you might purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf. Verily, your prayers are a source of security for them: and Allah is One Who hears and knows. (9:103)

Alms (translated *sadaqa* but meaning *zakat*) are for the poor and needy, and those employed to administer the (funds)... (9:60)

In the early period after the establishment of Islam, the two terms were used interchangeably. It was only in the writings of Abu 'Ubayd (d. 839) that the term *sadaqa* is used to mean only voluntary charity.³³

Middle East and Islamic scholar, Jorgen Back Simonsen, has a non-religious understanding of *zakat* and *sadaqah*. According to him, both developed during the lifetime of Mohammad as two separate financial institutions with very different purposes. *Zakat* was the alms tax paid by the faithful, while *sadaqah* was the tribute paid by the Bedouins who were allied with Mohammad and the emerging Muslim community.³⁴

While not mentioned in the Qur'an, *waqf* developed as a financial tool that would have a far-reaching impact in addressing poverty. A *waqf* is a trust or an endowment that is set up to address a specific need. Johannes Pahlitzsch writes that Islamic literary sources written after the 9th century often portray the transition from the Christian world of late antiquity to the Islamic medieval world as being simply a change of actors, with the Byzantines leaving with their classical culture and the Arabs entering with theirs. He states that the archeological evidence shows that Syria (with some exceptions) remained intact and that that one of the institutions that transitioned from Byzantium of late antiquity to the Islamic medieval world was the pious foundation.³⁵

Public *waqfs* were set up to run mosques, hospitals, khans (rest houses for travelers), mail systems, water channel and taking care of abandoned animals, among many other needs that were identified. Family *waqfs* benefit the poorer members of the family. The funds can be set up as a business, whose income is then used to provide for the purposes of the *waqf*. A sponsor or a designated person usually manages the money or trust fund. On occasion, the person who sets up the *waqf* can even manage the funds. There are laws that govern how it is set up and managed. A *waqf* can be "unwafkd" (unregistered), except in the case of a *waqf* set up for a mosque.³⁶

The *waqf* has since been seen as one the key tools for the social and economic development of communities.

1.3. The Recipients of Charity

The Qur'an in 17:26-27 identifies who are to be the beneficiaries of charity. "And give to the near of kin their right, and to the destitute and the traveller." In 9:60 it also states, "Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have

³³ Lev, *Charity*, 239-240.

³⁴ Ibid, 235.

³⁵ Pahlitzsch defines a pious foundation as "the designation of property or the revenue of endowed property to support a definite purpose determined by the founder." Johannes Pahlitzsch, "Christian Pious Foundations as an Element of Continuity between Late Antiquity and Islam," in *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, eds. Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev (New York, NY: Walter D. Gruyter, 2009), 125-126.

³⁶ Ibrahim Shamseddine. 2012. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. August 8.

been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.”

There are two basic categories to which the poor belong. The first is the *fakir*, the poorest of the poor. The second category is the *miskin*, whose legitimate needs for the basics of life far exceed their ability to earn their living.³⁷

Charity however, starts with one’s own family. This is known as *kifalah*.³⁸ The *hadith* forbids the giving of charity to others while someone within one’s own family is in need. Muhammad al Bukhari, one of the major compilers of the *hadith* states, “The Prophet said, ‘the upper hand is better than the lower hand; and start giving charity first to your dependents.’”³⁹

Abu Dawud Sulayman, the 9th century Persian compiler of one of the third (out of six) major canonical Sunni *hadith* collections, identifies eight categories of recipients of charity. The *hadith* (Sunan Abu Dawud book 9, number 1626) states, “He has divided those entitled to them into eight categories, so if you come within those categories, I shall give you what you desire.” The eight categories he identifies based on verse 9:60 in the Qur’an, are the following:

- The poor, *fuqara'* (singular *fakir*), are those in extreme poverty and lack the basic necessities with regards to food, drink, clothing, housing, and other essentials. These people are entitled to zakat.
- The poor, *masakin* (singular *miskin*) are people who have something, but not enough to meet their basic need and have anything beyond. Using modern development terminology, these would be people who are around the poverty line but not in extreme poverty. The difference between the *masakin* and the *fuqara'* is that one may not recognize the *masakin* as being poor. They usually do not beg and it would seem that they have more than enough; yet that may be deceptive. The Qur’an refers to them in 2:273. “It is for the poor, those who are restrained in the way of God, and unable to travel in the land. The unaware would think them rich, due to their dignity. You will recognize them by their features. They do not ask from people insistently. Whatever charity you give, God is aware of it.” The *hadith*, (Sahih al Bukhari, volume 2, book 24, number 557) states, “The poor person is not the one who goes round the people and ask them for a mouthful or two (of meals) or a date or two but the poor is that who has not enough (money) to satisfy his needs and whose condition is not known to others, that others may give him something in charity, and who does not beg of people.”
- The Qur’an in 9:60 identifies those employed to administer the zakat funds by collecting and distributing them, as being eligible to receive payment for the work they do.

³⁷ Moni, “Islam and Poverty”.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, comp. *Bulugh Al-Maram: Attainment of the Objective according to Evidence of the Ordinances* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, 2002), 202. Canadian Imam Zia Ullah Khan, who is also the director of Just Media Watch, explains that *zakat* is usually not given to family members but to those outside the family. Sadaqah, or voluntary charity is for the needs of family members. According to scholars, this prevents a person giving all his zakat to family members, thus ensuring that the wealth stayed within the family.

- The Qur'an in 9:60 also identifies the beneficiaries of charity as "those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth)." So zakat can be used to attract unbelievers to Islam and build up those who are weak in their faith.
- Those in bondage that the Qur'an in 9:60 refers to are the slaves and captives of war. Charity may be used to enable slaves to buy their freedom and for captives of war to be redeemed.⁴⁰
- Persons who are in debt, according to the Qur'an in 9:60 should also be the beneficiaries of charity. The Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq, the author of the book *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, identifies the various reasons why people may be in debt. "...Those who took upon themselves responsibility to discharge a debt; those who guaranteed debts of others and therefore, upon default, the debts have become their obligation; those who mismanaged their finances, those who borrowed money because they had to; or those who were involved in sinful acts and then repented, and who had to pay a fine for repentance."⁴¹

A person in debt is allowed to beg, and therefore is entitled to charity. Saudi Islamic scholar, Shaykh Abdul Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Baz, who was the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (1993-1999), in Fatwa 14/320 quotes from the *hadith* narrated by Ahmad.

He said: "Qabeesah, begging is not permissible but for one of three (classes) of persons: one who has incurred debt, for him begging is permissible till he pays that off, after which he must stop it; a man whose property has been destroyed by a calamity which has smitten him, for him begging is permissible till he gets what will support life, or will provide him with reasonable subsistence; and a person who has been smitten by poverty the genuineness of which is confirmed by three intelligent members from among his people. For him begging is permissible, till he gets what will support him, or will provide him subsistence. Qabeesah, besides these three, (every other reason for) begging is forbidden, and one who engages in it consumes that which is forbidden."⁴²

- "In the cause of Allah" referred to in verse 9:60 of the Qur'an has a wide range of meanings. It includes any work that is for the common good. Qur'anic commentator Yusuf Ali writes about the beneficiaries referred to in this phrase; "those who are struggling and striving in Allah's Cause by teaching or fighting or in duties assigned to them by the righteous Imam, who are thus unable to earn their ordinary living."⁴³
- The last group entitled to charity according to the Qur'an 9:60 is the wayfarer or stranger.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Yusuf Ali, ed. "The Meaning of the Noble Qur'an." (p. 120) 2006, accessed 25 August 2013, <http://www.pdf-koran.com/Koran.pdf>.

⁴¹ As-Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh Al-Sunnah, Vol. 3* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1985), 68.

⁴² Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz, *English Translation of Majmoo' al-Fatawa of Sh. Ibn Baz, 2nd edition*, (Riyadh: The General Presidency for the Departments of Scientific Research and Ifta, 2012), 255.

⁴³ Ali, *The Meaning*, 120.

⁴⁴ Different English translations of the Qur'an use the following term besides 'wayfarer' – those who become needy on a journey (Muhammad Sarwar), the stranded traveller (Sahih International), a traveller who is cut off from everything (Mohsin Khan), stranger (Yusuf Ali), and the traveller (Arberry).

This is not just a demonstration of hospitality, but an act of helping the traveller or stranger who is stranded for one reason or the other and has no means of support.⁴⁵

2. Human Rights and Obligation in Islam

The human rights framework, which over the past sixty years has been so fundamental in defining the value of an individual and the rights of everyone, including the poor to live with dignity, has been challenged by various Islamic scholars as being a Western religious and philosophical construct that is not congruent with the basic principles and ideals of Islam. Islam has a very different philosophical and theological basis for responding to poverty than the secular world.⁴⁶ Sheikh Mohammad states, "Islam does not believe in human rights. Instead we believe we have an obligation to the poor."⁴⁷ He used the word 'duty' (*waasib*, a necessity).⁴⁸

Sheikh Mohammad's comment reflects not only the deep divide between the concept of universal values and *ethnocentrism*, but also between the Western value of individualism and the value of the group (or family) in more traditional societies, and between secular and religious worldviews. In Western society the individual has rights to ensure his welfare. In traditional societies the group has an obligation to the care for the individual.

In more traditional societies, the community recognizes the reality of the poor and vulnerable in society and knows it has an obligation to them. This is a moral obligation that is often rooted in the tenets of one's faith or worldview. So, if poverty exists it is because the community has failed in its obligations. The Islamic perspective of obligation and duty is rooted in its origins among the Bedouin tribes of the desert. Abu Zayd 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun al-Hadhrami (known as Ibn Khaldun⁴⁹), the 14th century North African historian wrote, "Only tribes held together by group feelings can live in the desert..."⁵⁰ since the group ensured the survival and well-being of the individual. Yet this obligation was always limited in practice to the immediate group, family, or clan and very rarely beyond it.⁵¹

So how does the Qur'an address the concept of human rights and social justice? Mustansir Mir, Professor of Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, writes, "The Qur'an offers no explicit definition of either "justice" or "rights," yet these are by no means unknown concepts in

⁴⁵ According to Ibrahim Shamseddine that it was not uncommon for a business to have lost everything (for whatever reason) and thus be stranded. *Zakat* would help such a person get home rather than become a beggar. Ibrahim Shamseddine. Interview with the author. Beirut, Lebanon. 8 August 2012.

⁴⁶ Cf. William H. Brackney, *Human Rights and the World's Religion, Revised and Updated* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2013), 139-140.

⁴⁷ Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayad. Interview with the author. 12 July 2012.

⁴⁸ Sheikh Mohammad refers to Egyptian Islamic scholar Mohammad Amara who responded to the 1948 Universal Declaration in a publication *Human Rights and Islam: Necessity not Rights*. Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zayad. 2013. Interview with the author. 15 June 2013.

⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldun is acknowledged as the father of the social sciences.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), x.

⁵¹ Bruce Malina writing about collectivistic societies states, "Should a group member fall ill, the goal of an individual's healing is group well-being. Focus is on the ingroup, cooperation with ingroup members, maintenance of ascribed status, and group-centered values." Bruce J. Malina, "Collectivism in Mediterranean Culture," *Understanding the Social World Of The New Testament*, edited by Richard E. DeMaris Dietmar Neufeld (London: Routledge, 2010), 23.