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Religious Rooting of Sacralisation Phenomena in Human Thought: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines how sacralisation arises within human thought and practice, focusing on the Islamic tradition. It explores how core Islamic beliefs and principles (such as *tawḥīd* and intentionality in worship) imbue places, times, actions, and social norms with sacred significance. Drawing on Islamic scripture, prophetic traditions, and historical accounts, the study analyses the manifestations of the sacred in Muslim communities through space, time, ritual practice, and moral action. In Islam, external practices are inextricably linked to internal intentions (*niyyah*) and ethical values, forming a holistic system whereby spiritual ideals are expressed through daily conduct. While this sacralisation of life offers communal identity and moral guidance, the article critically examines how misinterpretations of "sacred" mandates have fuelled extremism. The article concludes that an Islamic perspective on sacralisation provides rich insights into the human quest for meaning, illustrating the dynamic interplay between faith, practice, and sacred experience within increasingly pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Sacralisation, Islam, Sacred Space, Sacred Time, Intention (*Niyyah*), Phenomenology of Religion

Introduction: The Quest for the Sacred in Human Experience

Human beings across cultures have persistently sought meaning by distinguishing certain places, times, objects, and actions as sacred or holy, set apart from the ordinary. The concept of sacralisation has been central to religious studies and the phenomenology of religion.[1] Emile Durkheim famously defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices "relative to sacred things... set apart and forbidden" that unite its adherents into a moral community.[2] Emile Durkheim's analysis demonstrates that the distinction between sacred and profane is foundational to how societies construct collective identity and cohesion; by setting apart certain things as sacred, communities reinforce shared values and boundaries, and violations of the sacred are seen as threats to the social order.[3] In Islamic contexts, Durkheim's framework illuminates how collective ritual practices such as congregational prayer and communal fasting foster social solidarity while reinforcing the boundaries of acceptable religious behaviour.[4]

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[1] Campbell, Ian. "Introduction: Sacralisation in Early Modern Europe." *History of European Ideas* 50, no. 1 (2023): 68–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2023.2233332
[2] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (Free Press, 1995), 44.
[3] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 44–47; "Émile Durkheim, the Sacred, and the Nonreligious," NSRN Online, accessed April 19, 2025.
[4] Douglas A. Marshall, "Temptation, Tradition, and Taboo: A Theory of Sacralization," *Sociological Theory* 28, no. 1 (2010): 65-68.

In Mircea Eliade's phenomenological analysis, the religious person experiences a divided reality: sacred places and sacred times, which are qualitatively different from profane space and ordinary time.[5] Eliade elaborates that these sacred moments and spaces serve as points of orientation, offering meaning and structure to human existence; they function as "centres" where the divine breaks into the mundane, allowing individuals to experience a reality that transcends the ordinary. Eliade's concepts of hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) and axis mundi (the centre of the world) find resonance in Islamic sacred geography, particularly in how Muslims understand the Ka'ba in Mecca as a central point connecting heaven and earth.[6] Through rituals and myths, the sacred erupts into the mundane world, providing orientation and meaning.[7] Rituals and myths, therefore, are not merely commemorative but actively re-create and renew the sacred order, enabling participants to symbolically return to the origins and reestablish their connection with the transcendent.[8]

From an Islamic perspective, sacralisation is deeply rooted in certain theological and ethical principles that shape how Muslims conceptualise and interact with the world. In this study, sacralisation is defined broadly as the process of imbuing aspects of life (space, time, persons, actions) with sacred meaning and significance in relation to the divine.[9] This working definition is intentionally inclusive, reflecting the Islamic principle of *tawḥīd*[10] that potentially renders all aspects of creation open to divine significance when approached with proper intention and practice.[11]

The etymology of the term "sacralisation" reveals important cross-cultural dimensions of this concept. In English, "sacred" derives from the Latin *sacer*, which means "to set off or apart, to restrict." It refers to what is considered to be holy or deserving of respect, especially because of a connection with a deity.[12] According to Murad Wahba, the concept of the sacred refers to matters related to religion that evoke within the soul a sense of reverence and awe, and which must not be violated. It may likewise encompass all that is deemed worthy of reverence, including systems, laws, and institutions. This aligns with Émile Durkheim's approach, who in his study of religious phenomena was particularly concerned with distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, dividing all things into two fundamentally distinct and contrasting categories on that basis. [13]

In the Arabic language, the term *taqdees* (sanctification) is used with the meaning of purification, as in the expression: "*lā qaddasahu Allāh*", meaning "may God not purify him." Among its other connotations in Arabic is "blessing," and it is in this sense that the term is used in naming *al-arḍ*

[5] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Harcourt, 2009), 20-65.
[6] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 37-39.
[7] Beltramini, Enrico. 2024. "Toward a Historiography of the Sacred" Religions 15, no. 12 (2024): 1516.
[8] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Harcourt, 1959), 20–25; "Mircea Eliade and religious studies' concepts of sacred time and space," University of Regina, accessed April 19, 2025.
[9] Luqman Zakariyah, "Conceptualizing the Sacred and the Profane in Islamic Jurisprudence: A Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Islamic Legal Studies* 11, no. 1 (2023): 80.
[10], Siavash Saffari, "Tawhid paradigm and an inclusive concept of liberative struggle," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023), 14: 1088.
[11] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965), 28-30.
[12] Cambridge University Press, *Cambridge Essential English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2011), s.v. "sacred".
[13] Murad Wahba, *al-Muʿjam al-Falsafī* [The Philosophical Dictionary], 5th ed. (Dār Qibāʾ al-Ḥadītha, 2007), 614.

al-muqaddasah (the Holy Land). [14] Some scholars have stated that sanctification (*taqdees*) refers to the act of declaring something free from deficiency or imperfection (*tanzīh*), and that although this term is often attributed to God Almighty, it is also employed in reference to human beings. It is said: "So-and-so is a *muqaddas* (a sanctified man)," when the intention is to declare him distant from that which compromises integrity (*ʿadālah*) and to describe him as trustworthy and upright. The term may also be used in reference to non-rational beings, as in the expression: "*Qaddasa Allāhu rūḥa fulān*" (May God sanctify the soul of so-and-so).[15] These linguistic parallels demonstrate how sacralisation processes, while culturally varied, often involve concepts of setting apart, purification, and connection to divine perfection across traditions.[16]

From an Islamic perspective, sacralisation is deeply rooted in certain theological and ethical principles that shape how Muslims conceptualise and interact with the world. Islam is characterised by the principle of *tawḥīd*, the uncompromising oneness of God. Because God is one and the source of all creation, no sharp divide exists between "spiritual" and "material" life; all of creation can reflect divine purpose, and every human act can potentially become an act of worship if performed with the right intention. A hadith (Prophetic teaching) succinctly captures this integration: "Verily, actions are judged by intentions, and each person will have only that which they intended."[17] This emphasis on intentionality (*niyyah*) means that in Islam, the sacralisation of an act lies not in the act's outward form alone, but in the inner orientation towards God that accompanies it. Nevertheless, as Sherman Jackson explains in his discussion of the "Islamic Secular," Islamic tradition does recognise a distinction between what is directly governed by divine law (*sharʿī*) and what is not, while both categories remain encompassed within the broader framework of Islam. The "Islamic Secular" refers to those aspects of life that are not explicitly regulated by the Sharia yet are still situated within the Islamic worldview; thus, even so-called "secular" actions, if performed with proper intention, can attain religious significance. This approach allows for a differentiation between "religious" and "secular" spheres without adopting a Western-style dichotomy, maintaining that both are ultimately under God's sovereignty and can be rendered acts of worship through *niyyah*.[18]

At the same time, Islam delineates specific sacred times and places explicitly ordained as such. The Qur'ān and Hadith identify certain locales (for instance, the city of Mecca housing the Ka'ba, or al-Quds/Jerusalem) and certain times (the month of Ramadan, the Day of `Eid, the Fridays) as especially blessed or holy. Muslim scholars have noted that a place in early Islam could be rendered sacred in one of three main ways: (i) by explicit scriptural statement; (ii) by being designated as a place of worship; or (iii) by association with the memory of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), or other revered figures.[19]

This paper explores these dynamics of sacralisation in Islam through a structured multidimensional methodology that integrates:

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[14] Abū Naṣr Ismāʿīl ibn Ḥammād al-Jawharī al-Fārābī, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ: Tāj al-Lugha wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyya*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār, 4th ed. (Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1987), vol. 3, 960.

[15] Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Maʿjam al-Furūq al-Lughawiyya*, ed. Bayt Allāh Bayāt, 1st ed. (Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1412 AH), 125.

[16] Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 358-363.

[17] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Bad' al-Waḥy, ḥadīth no. 1; see also Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Imārah, ḥadīth no. 4920.

[18] Sherman A. Jackson, "The Islamic Secular," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2017): 1–31; 1–7, 9–12, 20–23.

[19] Essam Ayyad, "What Made a Place Holy in Early Islam? An Inquiry into Meaning and Doctrinal Modalities," *Journal of al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 28.

1. Textual hermeneutics: analysis of primary Islamic texts (Qur'ān and Hadith) and engaging with major exegetical works.
2. Phenomenological inquiry: examination of lived religious experience among contemporary Muslims.
3. Limited contextually Comparative analysis: situating key Islamic sacralisation concepts within broader patterns of religious phenomena for an academic perspective while maintaining primary focus on the internal dynamics of the Islamic tradition.
4. Critical evaluation: assessing both constructive and problematic manifestations of sacred concepts.

Conceptual Foundations in Islamic Thought

Tawḥīd: The Oneness of God and Cosmic Sacred Order

At the heart of Islam's worldview is *tawḥīd*, the doctrine of the oneness and unity of God. In Islamic theology, God (Allāh) is the sole, indivisible creator and sustainer of all that exists; no person or object shares in God's essence or lordship. This belief might seem at first to demote the sacredness of the world (since nothing created is divine), but in practice *tawḥīd* powerfully sacralises the world by making it entirely God's domain. All times and places belong to God, and human life in its entirety is lived under God's gaze and command. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes, Islam is "a religion of unity" that seeks to see the unity of truth behind the diversity of the world.[20] The Qur'an affirms this cosmic sacred order, declaring that to God belong the East and the West, so wherever one turns, there is the Face of God (2:115). According to al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of this verse, it establishes that God's presence and sovereignty encompass all directions and places, making the entire world potentially sacred when approached with proper intention.[21]

One practical implication of *tawḥīd* is the absence of a secular-sacred dichotomy in classical Islamic thought. Since all authority and blessing flow from the One God, the distinction is not between "the realm of God" and "the realm outside God" (as nothing is outside His realm), but rather between what God has sanctioned or blessed and what He has not. Activities are not divided into religious versus worldly in the Western sense; instead, there is a spectrum of actions, either pleasing to God, neutral, or displeasing (sinful). As historian Marshall Hodgson observed, Islam traditionally viewed the sharia (divine law and ethics) as a comprehensive system for all aspects of life, such that "no aspect of life was outside the governance of religion."[22]

An illustrative concept here is that of the entire Earth as a mosque. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) taught: "The whole earth has been made for me a mosque (place of prostration) and a purification."[23] This teaching reflects *tawḥīd* in practice: unlike some religions that consecrate specific temples where alone worship is valid, Islam allows prayer to be performed on any clean earth. This effectively sacralises the globe; wherever a Muslim may be, that spot can become a holy ground at the time of prayer.

Yet, Islam also delineates specific sacred precincts. The holy cities of Mecca and Medina are accorded special sanctity in Islamic scripture and practice. Mecca, home of the Ka'ba (the cubical structure towards which all Muslim prayer is directed), is called *Umm al-Qurā* (mother of all settlements) in the Qur'ān (6:92) and is regarded as "*al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf*" (the Noble Sanctuary).

[20] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 15
[21] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), vol. 2, 84-85.
[22] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1974), 71-74.
[23] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, ḥadith no. 335 (and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Masājid, ḥadith no. 521).

Certain rites like the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) are tied exclusively to Mecca and its environs. Medina, as the city of the Prophet's mosque and burial, is the second sanctum. Jerusalem (al-Quds), containing al-Aqsa Mosque, holds significance as well. These places have a transcendent significance that goes beyond their physical attributes, they are seen as loci of *baraka* (divine grace or blessing) and as links between the human and the divine.[24]

The key point is that *tawḥīd* provides a philosophical basis for understanding why and how these places and moments become sacred: they are believed to be specially connected to God's will or presence (by His designation or by events in sacred history), and since nothing rivals God, they are not worshiped themselves but honoured as means of approaching Him.[25] There is a balance between ubiquitous sacrality (due to God's unity) and particular sacrality (due to God's chosen signs), There is a balance between ubiquitous sacrality (due to God's unity) and particular sacrality (due to God's chosen signs), a theological tension reflecting divine accommodation to human finitude while maintaining God's ontological unity.[26] This duality mirrors Islamic understanding that while Allah is everywhere (*ubiquitous sacrality*), certain places like mosques and times like Ramadan possess heightened spiritual significance (*particular sacrality*) not because they contain divinity but because they serve as divinely appointed channels for human religious experience, embodying what Nasr calls "the theophanic nature of reality" in which created things may become transparent to divine presence without compromising God's transcendence.[27]

Intention and *Tazkiyah*: The Inner Sacred Geography

While *tawḥīd* establishes the macro-scale unity of sacred purpose in Islam, the concepts of *niyyah* (intention) and *tazkiyah* (purification of the self) shape the micro-scale experience of sacralisation– the inner world of the believer. In Islamic jurisprudence and spirituality alike, *niyyah* is a prerequisite for the validity of acts of worship. One must mentally declare or firmly hold the intention that an act (prayer, fasting, charity, etc.) is being done for the sake of God. This simple requirement has profound implications: the same outward act can either be sacred or mundane depending on one's inward state. For example, giving money to someone in need could be a mere generosity, but with the conscious intention of seeking God's pleasure, it becomes the sacred act of *zakāt* or *ṣadaqa* (charity).

Psychologically, this focus on intention cultivates a continuous awareness of the divine in the mind of the practitioner. Rather than compartmentalising "religious" actions apart from ordinary life, a devout Muslim is encouraged to carry an intention of devotion into all tasks. This resonates with what sociologists of religion call "sanctification of everyday life", imbuing daily activities with spiritual meaning.[28] In Islam, the sacred value is the pleasure of God, and *niyyah* operationalises that value at every moment.

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[24] Juan Eduardo Campo, "Mosque," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Juan E. Campo (Facts on File, 2009), 491-496.
[25] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 75-78
[26] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 147. Chittick explains how Ibn al-Arabi resolved this tension through his concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being).
[27] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965), 35-42. Izutsu specifically addresses how the principle of tawḥīd informs the Islamic understanding of sacred places and ritual objects
[28] Robert Wuthnow, "Religion as Sacred Canopy," in *Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard Fenn (Blackwell, 2001), 22-39.

Alongside intention, *tazkiyah* or purification of the self is a key Islamic concept guiding the inner transformation toward the sacred. The term *tazkiyah* (root *Z-K-W* meaning to purify, to grow) refers to purging the soul of vices (such as arrogance, greed, hatred) and adorning it with virtues (such as humility, generosity, compassion) in pursuit of closeness to God. The Qur'ān praises those who purify their souls, "Truly he succeeds who purifies it (the self)" (Qur'ān 91:9), and this spiritual purification is considered a continuous process of self-improvement. Ibn Kathīr, in his exegesis of this verse, emphasises that purification refers to cleansing the soul from base desires and adorning it with obedience to Allah and noble character traits, making the inner transformation a sacred journey.[29] One scholar describes *tazkiyah* as "transforming the carnal self through various spiritual stages towards the level of purity and submission to the will of God," a path that involves constant awareness of God's presence and "remembering one's position in front of God" in every moment.[30] This sacralises the inner life of the individual, one's thoughts, emotions, and desires become the arena of a sacred struggle (*jihad al-nafs*) to align with divine will.[31]

In practical terms, certain rituals of purification symbolise and facilitate *tazkiyah*. The most widely practised is *wuḍū'* (ablution), the washing of face, hands, and feet before the five daily prayers. Beyond its hygienic function, *wuḍū'* carries rich symbolic meaning. It is often said that the act washes away minor sins, preparing the worshiper to stand before God in prayer with a cleansed body and spirit. A hadith states that each drop falling from the believer in ablution carries away a sin.[32]

This emphasis on inner purification distinguishes Islamic sacralisation from more externalised ritual systems. While Judaism has elaborate purity codes[33] and Buddhism has rigorous meditation practices,[34] Islam's *tazkiyah* uniquely combines ritual purification with ethical self-scrutiny and spiritual consciousness. [35] The goal is not merely ritual correctness but transformation of the heart (*qalb*) into a receptive vessel for divine guidance[36], as *tazkiyah* involves cleansing the heart from spiritual maladies and nurturing virtues such as humility, generosity, and patience.[37] This process, rooted in both Qur'anic injunctions and the Prophetic tradition, centres on the development of character and spirituality, aiming for a state where the heart is attuned to God's presence and able to embody moral excellence.[38]

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[29] Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1998), vol. 4, 511-512.
[30] Mustafa al-Zarqa, *Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Principles*, trans. M. S. Ṣiddīqī (Dar al-Fikr, 1968), 43.
[31] Adil Al Wadi, "The Concept of Supplication in the Holy Qur'an: A Terminological and Contextual Study," *Al Qasimia University Journal of Shari'a Sciences and Islamic Studies* 4 (1): 1-42.
[32] Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥadith no. 244.
[33] Jacob Meyer, "Jewish Laws of Purity in a Comparative Perspective," Leiden University Student Theses (Leiden University, 2023), 3–4; Paula Fredriksen, "Jesus, Purity, and the Christian Study of Judaism," in *Purity and Identity in Ancient Religious Contexts*, ed. Sarah Johnson (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 2–3.
[34] Rajiv Mehta, "Meditation and Monasticism: Tracing the Historical Roots of Buddhist Practice," *International Research Journal of Education and Technology* 8, no. 3 (2023): 137–141; María Sánchez, "Visuddhimagga by Buddhaghosa: Core Concepts and Contemporary Relevance," *Els llenguatges de l'absolut* (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2024).
[35] Faysal Burhan, "Al-Tazkiyah (Inner-Self Purification), The Gate to Prosperity," *Islamic Study*, February 7, 2025, https://islamic-study.org/al-tazkiyah-inner-self-purification/.
[36] William C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 149-162.
[37] "Tazkiyah: Purification/Sanctification," *To Be a Muslim* (blog), accessed April 19, 2025, https://tobeamuslim.com/tazkiyah-purification/.
[38] "Back to Basics, Tazkiyah: An Introduction to Spiritually Blossoming," *Amaliah*, accessed April 19, 2025, https://www.amaliah.com/post/66929/back-basics-tazkiyah-introduction-spiritually-blossoming-islamic-new-year.

Manifestations of the Sacred in Islamic Practice

Sacred Space: Mosques and Holy Sites

Physical space becomes sacred space in Islam primarily through association with worship and divine remembrance. The preeminent sacred space is the mosque (masjid, literally "place of prostration"). More than just a gathering hall, a mosque is invested with profound symbolic significance. It is oriented towards Mecca, uniting all mosques in a single spiritual direction; its *miḥrāb* niche points the worshiper to the Ka'ba, connecting even a small local mosque to the grand axis of Islamic sacred geography. As one study notes, one of the main ways a place was sacralised in early Islam was by "its institution as a place of worship, particularly a mosque."[39]

Within mosques, certain conventions enforce the sense of sanctity: shoes are removed (to maintain the purity of the prayer area), and a state of ritual cleanliness is required to enter for prayer. The architecture often includes calligraphic inscriptions of Quranic verses and the names of God, visually marking the space with reminders of the divine.[40] Émile Durkheim pointed out that religious rituals frequently transform ordinary space into a special arena of communal solidarity.[41] In the mosque, this is vividly evident, a diverse group of individuals stand shoulder to shoulder, performing the same movements in unison, symbolising the unity of the faith community (*ummah*) under God. Durkheim's framework helps us understand how the mosque functions not merely as a physical structure but as a social institution that reinforces collective identity through shared sacred experience.

Beyond local mosques, Islam recognises sanctuaries of larger scope: the *ḥaramayn* (two sanctuaries) of Mecca and Medina. The Grand Mosque in Mecca (*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*) and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (*al-Masjid al-Nabawī*) are at the centre of a network of holy sites. During the hajj pilgrimage, millions of Muslims physically circumambulate the Ka'ba together, a powerful enactment of devotion that not only connects them to God but also to one another in a shared sacred experience. Anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner described pilgrimage as creating "communitas," a special community of equals stripped of mundane distinctions, and the Hajj is a prime example: all pilgrims don identical simple garments (the *iḥrām* cloth), removing indicators of social status, so that before God they stand equal.[42]

It is also instructive to consider domestic sacred space in Islam. Muslim households often have designated clean areas or rugs for prayer, and many homes feature calligraphy of Quranic verses on the walls. Robert Orsi, writing on lived religion, speaks of "the religious worlds people make" in their everyday environments,[43] Muslim homes and workplaces where God's name is invoked and remembered become extensions of the sacred space. For example, it is common for Muslims to begin any task or even start a meal with *bismillāh* ("in the name of God"), thus consecrating that moment or action.

Sacred Time: Ritual Cycles and Holy Periods

In tandem with sacred space, sacred time is a crucial dimension of sacralisation in Islam. The Islamic calendar, being a lunar one, marks out a rhythm of daily, weekly, and annual sacred times

[39] Ayyad, "What Made a Place Holy in Early Islam?," 29.
[40] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 37-63.
[41] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 217-241.
[42] Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Columbia University Press, 1978), 30-52.
[43] Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 8.

that structure a Muslim's life. Foremost among these is the rhythm of the five daily prayers (*ṣalāh*). Each day is punctuated at specific intervals, dawn (*fajr*), midday (*ẓuhr*), afternoon (*ʿaṣr*), sunset (*maghrib*), and evening (*ʿishā'*), by the call to prayer (adhān) and the performance of prayer. This discipline sacralises the flow of each day, regularly pulling the believer's attention back to God. Sociologically, these shared prayer times foster a sense of unity: no matter where Muslims are in the world, they are part of a global wave of worship that follows the sun's course.

Eliade's concept of sacred time as qualitatively different from profane time is exemplified in the Islamic understanding of prayer times. Each of the five daily prayers represents what Eliade would term a "hierophany," a breaking of the sacred into ordinary temporal experience. The specific times chosen for prayer are not arbitrary but cosmologically significant, marking key transitions in the day and creating a sacred rhythm that orients believers to the divine ordering of time.[44]

The Friday congregational prayer (*Jumu'ah*) stands out as a weekly sacred time. The Quran (62:9-10) instructs believers to cease trade and gather for the remembrance of God at Friday midday. This communal worship, which includes a sermon (*khuṭbah*), is a cornerstone of Islamic community life. It sacralises the midday hour of Friday as a time of heightened spirituality and collective reflection on moral and social issues. Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of these verses emphasises that the command to cease worldly activities for prayer demonstrates the precedence of sacred time over mundane concerns, creating a regular rhythm wherein the believer transitions between different modes of existence.[45]

On the yearly calendar, *Ramadan* is undoubtedly the quintessential sacred month. For 29 or 30 days, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. The entire month is conceived as a sacred time of heightened piety, spiritual purification, and self-discipline. Anthropologists have observed that in Muslim societies, daily routines, business hours, and social life all dramatically shift during Ramadan to accommodate the fast and its communal rituals.[46] The last ten nights of Ramadan, in particular, carry special holiness, with the 27th night often venerated as *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Destiny), commemorating the first revelation of the Qur'ān. In Ramadan, one sees clearly how Islamic teaching links sacred time with ethical-educational purpose: fasting is intended "so that you may attain taqwa (God-consciousness)" (Qur'ān 2:183).

For Muslims living in secular societies, these sacred time structures often create tension with dominant time patterns organised around the workweek, school schedules, and commercial hours. Research among European Muslims shows that navigating these competing temporal frameworks becomes a meaningful way of asserting religious identity and negotiating belonging.[47] Muslims in such contexts often become keenly aware of how sacred time provides an alternative rhythm to the secular "time discipline" of modern capitalism, creating spaces of resistance to complete assimilation.

Rituals and Acts: Embodying the Sacred Through Action

Islamic rituals are the embodiment of sacralisation; they take beliefs and intentions and translate them into patterned, symbolic actions. Each of the five pillars of Islam (the declaration of faith,

[44] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Harcourt, 2009), 68-69.
[45] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān* (Dār Hajr, 2001), vol. 23, 384-387.
[46] John Bowen, *A New Anthropology of Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46-68.
[47] Jesper Sørensen, "Sacred Time, Sacred Space: The Spatio-Temporal Dimensions of Muslim Identity in Denmark," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 37, no. 1 (2022): 140-144.

the prayers, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage) can be understood as a pillar of sacralised practice that shapes both the individual and the community.

Prayer (*Ṣalāt*): The formal prayer, performed five times daily, is rich in symbolism. The prerequisite of facing the Kaaba (*qibla*) links the individual to a sacred centre. The postures of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting mark a progression of humility, culminating in the *sujūd* (full prostration with forehead on the ground), which is considered the moment a servant is closest to God. In one *rak'a* (prayer cycle), a Muslim enacts physically and verbally the proper relationship between human and divine: upright while praising God, then bowing and prostrating in submission. Prayer sanctifies the body: believers wash beforehand, remove their shoes, and wear clean clothes for prayer. Over a lifetime, the discipline of regular prayer instils a habituation to viewing oneself in a servant-of-God role throughout the day.

Qur'ān Recitation (*Tilāwa*): Reciting or listening to the Qur'ān is itself a sacred act in Islam. The Qur'ān is the word of God, and as such, its sound and content sanctify the environment. The act of reciting with proper rules (*tajwīd*) is a form of devotion that purifies the soul.[48] Memorisation of the Qur'ān (becoming a *ḥāfiẓ*) is one of the most honoured accomplishments in Muslim culture. This emphasis ensures that the sacred word is constantly present in the soundscape of Muslim life, from the melodic call to prayer, to Quranic verses in daily speech and art, to formal recitations in prayers and gatherings. The material sacredness of the Qur'ān as a physical text (*muṣḥaf*) is also significant in Islamic practice. Specific protocols govern the handling of the Qur'ān: believers must be in a state of ritual purity before touching it, the Book should be placed above other texts, and worn-out copies must be respectfully disposed of through burial or other dignified methods. The Arabic script itself is considered sacred, and translations of the Qur'ān are regarded as interpretations rather than the actual divine Word. This linguistic sanctity extends to the prohibition of transliterating the Qur'ān without preserving its Arabic form, emphasising that the Divine revelation is inseparable from its original language and form.[49]

Zakāt and *Ṣadaqa*: Charitable giving is explicitly tied to sacred duty. Zakāt, the obligatory alms-tax (usually 2.5% of one's accumulated wealth annually), is one of the five pillars and is often described in the Qur'ān alongside prayer as a joint command. This pairing suggests that worship of God is incomplete without caring for others, thus making social responsibility sacred. Giving purifies one's wealth (the literal meaning of zakāt is purification) and soul from greed. By framing helping the poor as a way to draw near to God, Islam sacralises ethics; altruism is not just recommended social behaviour but part of one's devotion. Studies have found that participation in the Hajj (which includes sacrificial charity) led to measurably increased charitable activities and tolerance post-pilgrimage,[50] underscoring how ritual can shape moral outlooks.

Fasting (*Ṣawm*): Fasting is a potent ritual action that engages both body and soul in sacralisation. The hunger and thirst one feels are intended to remind one of dependence on God and the plight of the needy. Fasting is said to "sharpen the spiritual senses", reducing distractions so that the heart becomes more receptive to remembrance of God. A noteworthy aspect is that fasting is largely invisible; hence, it is often mentioned as an act done purely for God, with God as its reward. This

[48] Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (University of California Press, 2010), 38-71.
[49] Omar Saleh and Rizwan Ahmed, "The Materiality of the Sacred: Contemporary Muslim Approaches to Qur'ānic Preservation and Digitization," *Journal of Material Religion* 24, no. 3 (2023): 120-124.
[50] David Clingingsmith, Asim I. Khwaja, and Michael Kremer, "Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: Religion and Tolerance in Islam's Global Gathering," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124, no. 3 (2009): 1133-1170.

invisibility further sacralises it, it's like a secret between the believer and God, a test of one's conscience.

Pilgrimage (Ḥajj *and ʿUmrah*): The Hajj is an amalgam of many ritual acts, each with its historical and spiritual meanings. The power of Hajj in sacralisation is manifold: it activates sacred history (retracing the steps of Abraham (pbuh), Hagar, and Muhammad (pbuh)), it forges an intense temporary community of Muslims from all over the world, and it requires significant personal sacrifice and humility. Many pilgrims describe the Hajj as the pinnacle religious experience of their lives. Survey research on Hajj returnees found that they often exhibit long-term changes such as increased religious practice, more tolerant attitudes, and a greater sense of unity with the global Muslim community.[51] This indicates that the ritual experiences are not fleeting; they re-orient a person's sense of self and values in a lasting way.

Ethical and Social Dimensions of Sacralisation in Islam

One of the distinctive features of sacralisation in the Islamic context is its ethical orientation. The Qur'ān and Hadith repeatedly link devoutness toward God with responsibility toward fellow human beings. In Islam, to be "holy" (*taqī* or *ṣāliḥ*, God-fearing or righteous) is practically indistinguishable from being moral and trustworthy. The Islamic tradition holds up the character of the Prophet Muhammad as the model of a sanctified life: he is called "*al-insān al-kāmil*" (the perfected human), not only in terms of spirituality but in terms of ethics, mercy, justice, honesty, and courage. Therefore, sacralisation of life entails internalising a set of moral virtues and enacting them in the world.

The Unity of Worship and Ethics

Classical Islamic scholars often cite a verse from the Qur'ān (*Al-Maʿūn*, 107:1-7) that pointedly asks: "Have you seen the one who denies the religion? That is the person who repels the orphan and does not encourage feeding the poor. So woe to those who pray, who are heedless of their prayers, those who make a show (of piety) but withhold small acts of kindness." This passage underscores that true religion is not in empty rituals, but in ethical concern, and that prayer itself is condemned if divorced from compassion and charity. A hadith states, "Whoever does not give up false speech and bad actions while fasting, God is in no need of his leaving food and drink."[52] This emphasizes that the ethical outcome of fasting (truthfulness, good conduct) is the real purpose, not hunger for its own sake.

The institution of zakāt we discussed is a concrete link between worship and social welfare, it is simultaneously an act of piety and a redistribution of wealth to reduce inequality.[53]The Qur'ān (9:71) describes the believers as those who "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and establish prayer and give zakāt." This intertwining of moral exhortation with ritual pillars encapsulates Islam's vision of a righteous society: performing the rituals (prayer, *zakāt*) cultivates a community ethos where good is promoted and injustice prevented.

[51] Clingingsmith et al., "Estimating the Impact of the Hajj," 1152-1157.
[52] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, ḥadīth no. 1903.
[53] Nazim Khan, "Religious Charitable Giving in Islam: An Analysis of Zakat and Waqf Systems," *Journal of Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance* 16, no. 1 (2020): 38-59.

Another aspect is how certain social relationships are sacralised. Marriage, for example, is considered half of one's religion in some hadith. Likewise, caring for parents in old age is elevated to a high virtue, the Qur'ān almost always mentions gratitude to parents right after gratitude to God (e.g., Qur'ān 17:23). Even friendship for the sake of God (*al-ḥubb fi 'llāh*) is a concept where loving another person is made sacred because the bond is based on shared faith and virtue. The Prophet said, "The believers, in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy, are like one body".[54] In Islamic political thought, the historical community under Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Medina is idealised as the Ummah living under God's law, a model of society sacralised in its structure (justice, consultation, care of neighbour).

From the viewpoint of lived religion, field studies show that Muslims often integrate their devotional life with community service.[55] One could argue that Islam sacralises humanitarian work– the concept of *waqf* (endowment) allowed wealth to be dedicated in perpetuity to public welfare as a pious act. Historically, this created hospitals, schools, fountains, and other public goods in the name of God's reward.[56] The net effect is that ethical action is ritualised, generosity and social care become habitual "rituals" of the community, especially around sacred times like *Ramadan* or 'Eid, when extra charity is given.[57]

Sacralisation and Identity: Benefits and Boundaries

The sacralisation phenomenon described contributes significantly to shaping Muslim identity on both individual and collective levels. By participating in the same sacred practices and calendar, Muslims across vastly different cultures share a sense of common belonging. Anthropologist Jeanette Jouili's work on European Muslim youth, for example, notes that involvement in everyday religious practices is a way of negotiating identity in a secular context, an expression that "being Muslim" means orienting one's life by sacred values even in ordinary situations.[58]

For Muslim minorities in pluralistic societies, maintenance of sacred practices often serves as a crucial anchor for community identity and resilience. Studies of Muslim communities in Europe, North America, and Australia demonstrate how mosque attendance, Ramadan observance, and daily prayer routines create psychological spaces of belonging even when Muslims feel marginalised in the broader society. The transportability of Islamic sacred practices—prayer, for instance, can be performed anywhere, and fasting requires no special facilities—makes them particularly suitable for maintaining religious identity in diaspora contexts.[59]

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[54] Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Birr wa'l-Ṣilah, ḥadīth no. 2586.

[55] Mohammed Al-Bar and Hassan Chamsi-Pasha, "The Origins of Islamic Morality and Ethics," in *Contemporary Bioethics: Islamic Perspective* (Springer, 2015). Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharīʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[56] Mohammed Al-Bar and Hassan Chamsi-Pasha, "The Origins of Islamic Morality and Ethics." Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, "Etiquette as Spiritual Nourishment: The Adab of the Student According to al-Ghazali and al-Isfahani," 2023.

[57] Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharīʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations*. Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen, Chang Lee Wei, Abdul Halim Ibrahim, and Nor Aina Mhd Khotib, "Islamic Ethical Framework to Tackle Scientific and Technological Dilemmas," *Journal of Dharma* 38, no. 4 (2013): 373–386.

[58] Jeanette S. Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 103-118.

[59] Kylee Smith and David J. Marshall, "Practices, Beliefs, and Identities: Muslim Immigrants' Acculturation in the Southeastern United States," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 44 (2025): 10–12, 32; Zayneb Al-Bundawi, "Sacred texts and identity construction in the Cardiff Muslim community" (PhD dissertation, Cardiff University, 2018), 2, 12, 138.

The integrative function of sacralisation is largely positive, it provides meaning, ethical orientation, and solidarity. However, history and contemporary events show that when misinterpreted or absolutised, the same sacral concepts can become tools of exclusion or aggression. This is not unique to Islam; any time a community believes it has sole access to Truth or Holiness, there is a risk of devaluing "the Other."[60]

Critical Examination: The Misappropriation of Sacralisation in Extremist Ideologies

The past several decades have witnessed the emergence of extremist movements that appropriate Islamic sacred concepts to justify violence and intolerance. These groups, from Al-Qaeda to ISIS and various regional affiliates, claim to defend the sacred against perceived desecration, whether by Western military presence in Muslim lands, local governments deemed insufficiently Islamic, or minority groups considered deviant. They frame their political violence as a sacred duty (*jihad*), casting temporal conflicts in apocalyptic terms.[61]

Mark Juergensmeyer calls this the phenomenon of "sacred violence," where worldly conflicts are reframed as cosmic wars between good and evil, often resulting in unbridled brutality because opponents are dehumanised as enemies of God.[62] Such movements exhibit several distinctive patterns in their misappropriation of sacralisation:

First, they selectively absolutise certain sacred concepts (e.g., jihad, caliphate, sharia) while ignoring countervailing Islamic principles of mercy, gradualism, and tolerance. [63] Second, they remove these concepts from their historical contexts and ethical frameworks, treating them as rigid ahistorical commands. Third, they claim exclusive interpretive authority, dismissing fourteen centuries of scholarly tradition that developed nuanced applications of sacred texts.[64] Fourth, they prioritize performative violence as the ultimate expression of sacred commitment, contradicting the Prophet's emphasis on compassion.[65]

The theological problems with these extremist interpretations are numerous. They ignore the Qur'ānic prohibition against compulsion in religion (2:256), disregard the extensive Islamic legal tradition restricting violence to defensive contexts, and misread early Islamic history by treating

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[60] John L. Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?" United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, accessed April 19, 2025, 5-6, https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf; Douglas Pratt, "Exclusive Religion and the (In)Validation of Variety," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 18, no. 1 (2005): 10-11, 20; Asaad Kazem Shabib, "Misinterpreting Religion in the Name of Extremism," *Unipath*, December 22, 2021, https://unipath-magazine.com/misinterpreting-religion-in-the-name-of-extremism/; Nicola Righetti, "The Sacred in Current Social Sciences Research," *Italian Sociological Review* 4, no. 1 (2014): 148.

[61] Feyaad Allie, "Sacred Time and Religious Violence: Evidence from Hindu-Muslim Riots in India," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 68, no. 10 (2023): 1968-1993.

[62] Margo Kitts, "Cosmic War and Atavistic Longings," in *Religion, Conflict and Global Society: A Festschrift Celebrating Mark Juergensmeyer*, edited by Iselin Frydenlund, Dybdahl Ragnhild, and Ida Marie Høeg (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2021), 28. Juergensmeyer discusses this framing as "cosmic war."

[63] John L. Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?" United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, accessed April 19, 2025, 5, https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf;

[64] Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?" 5; Praja Rahman, "Islam, Globalization and Counter Terrorism," UNAFEI Resource Material Series No. 71, accessed April 19, 2025, 88, https://www.unafei.or.jp/publications/pdf/RS_No71/No71_09VE_Praja1.pdf.

[65] John Hall, "Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective," WCFIA Working Paper, Harvard University, November 2001, 3, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/wcfia/files/569_jhallreligionviolence11-01.pdf (discussing performative violence); Charles Kurzman, "Islamic Statements Against Terrorism," Kurzman.unc.edu, last updated September 27, 2001, https://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/ (quoting condemnations emphasizing Islam's mercy).

contingent historical developments as normative models. [66] Most significantly, they betray Islam's ethical core by valorising brutality in the name of God, a profound contradiction of the divine attributes of mercy and compassion that open every chapter of the Qur'ān except one.[67]

The vast majority of contemporary Islamic scholars have issued unequivocal condemnations of such extremism. [68] From the 2004 Amman Message (signed by over 500 leading scholars) to the 2010 Mardin Declaration (which corrected Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwa often cited by extremists) to the 2016 Marrakesh Declaration on minorities' rights, mainstream Islamic scholarship has actively worked to reclaim authentic interpretations of sacred concepts from extremist distortion. [69] These efforts represent not secularization but a reassertion of the ethical substance of Islamic sacralisation against its ritualistic corruption.[70]

As Karen Armstrong argues, religious extremist violence usually has roots in political grievances, identity crises, or social upheaval, rather than purely theological causes.[71] In other words, it is not devotion itself that leads to violence, but a toxic mix of factors that cloak themselves in religious absolutes for legitimacy.[72] Serious scholarly analysis must therefore examine extremist phenomena as complex sociopolitical movements using religious language, rather than as simple expressions of religious belief.[73]

In contemporary times, many Islamic scholars and intellectuals emphasize pluralism and humility as part of a mature sacred outlook. They often quote the Qur'ānic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) and stress that God's guidance cannot be forced on people. The ethical imperative is to witness the truth through one's own good conduct, not through domination. Islamic sacral values like justice (*ʿadl*), consultation (*shūra*), and human dignity (*karāmah*) can be mobilized in pluralistic contexts to support human rights and ethical governance, rather than to erect theocratic rule. [74]

Discussion and Conclusion

The foregoing analysis reveals an Islamic paradigm in which the sacred is not confined to one domain but is diffused throughout life via belief, practice, and community ethos. This holistic sacralization aligns with phenomenological theories that see religions as providing sacred canopies

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[66] Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?" 5; Rahman, "Islam, Globalization and Counter Terrorism," 88.

[67] Karen Armstrong, "The Role of Religion in Today's Conflict," United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, accessed April 19, 2025, 2, https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Armstrong_Religion_Conflict.pdf; Kurzman, "Islamic Statements Against Terrorism."

[68] "Islamic Statements Against the Terrorism of 9/11," AmmanMessage.com, accessed April 19, 2025, https://ammanmessage.com/media/911-Islamic-Condemnation.pdf; Kurzman, "Islamic Statements Against Terrorism"; "The Amman Message," The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, accessed April 19, 2025, 12, https://rissc.jo/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Amman_Message-EN.pdf.

[69] "The Amman Message"; "The Marrakech Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in the Muslim World," Fondation Mohammed VI des Ouléma Africains, January 27, 2016, https://www.fm6oa.org/en/the-marrakech-declaration-on-the-rights-of-religious-minorities-in-the-muslim-world/.

[70] "The Amman Message," 12; "The Marrakech Declaration."

[71] Karen Armstrong, "The Role of Religion in Today's Conflict," 7; Adis Duderija, Review of *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, by Karen Armstrong, *Religions: A Scholarly Journal* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 21.

[72] Armstrong, "The Role of Religion in Today's Conflict," 7; Nader Hashemi, "The ISIS Crisis and the Broken Politics of the Middle East," University of Denver Center for Middle East Studies Occasional Paper Series, No. 1, December 2016, 31, https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2016/12/hashemi-paper1.pdf (citing Armstrong).

[73] Hall, "Religion and Violence," 1; Armstrong, "The Role of Religion in Today's Conflict," 7; Kitts, "Cosmic War and Atavistic Longings," 28, 31.

[74] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211-234.

over human existence, a total worldview that makes sense of reality by linking it to transcendent meaning. In Islam's case, that canopy is woven from the threads of *tawḥīd* (theology), sunnah (practice), and *sharī'a* (moral-legal guidance).

While our analysis has focused primarily on the normative, scripturally-based forms of sacralisation in Islamic tradition, it is important to acknowledge that the lived experience of Muslims includes additional forms of sacralisation that exist in varying relationships to this core framework. For instance, the veneration of saints (*awliyā'*) and their shrines constitute a significant dimension of popular piety in many Muslim societies across North Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. These practices often exemplify what anthropologists term "social sacralisation", the investing of certain individuals with sacred qualities based on their perceived spiritual accomplishments or proximity to God. While such practices have been subject to debate within Islamic scholarly discourse regarding their relationship to *tawḥīd*, they remain deeply meaningful to many Muslims and represent an important dimension of how sacralisation operates in lived religious experience.[75]

When compared with other major religious traditions, Islam's approach to sacralisation reveals both commonalities and distinctive features. Like Judaism, Islam emphasizes orthopraxy (correct practice) as much as orthodoxy (correct belief), with detailed codes governing daily life. Like Christianity, it centres on revelation and prophetic guidance. Like Buddhism, it values inner purification and ethical self-cultivation. However, Islam uniquely integrates these elements into a comprehensive system where monotheistic theology, ritual practice, social ethics, and inner spirituality form a seamless whole. This integration helps explain both Islam's historical resilience and its capacity to provide meaning for believers in diverse cultural contexts.

First, Islamic sacralisation underscores the bridge between internal devotion and external action. Intention and ritual, faith and works, are tightly interwoven. This interplay ensures that beliefs are continually actualised in behaviours, reinforcing their salience. For Muslims in pluralistic modern societies, this visible dimension of religious practice, from prayer routines to dress codes, becomes a meaningful way of asserting religious identity amidst secular pressures.

Second, the Islamic pattern of sacred times and places provides a clear example of Eliade's notion that religious man lives in a sacred geography and history distinct from the modern homogeneous space-time.[76] It gives orientation: there is always a following prayer, a coming Ramadan, a direction to face, and a city to turn hearts to at Hajj time. This lends a rhythm and centeredness to life that many find psychologically and spiritually grounding. Recent studies confirm that maintaining prayer schedules and mosque attendance helps Muslim minorities create a sense of home and identity in disorienting environments.[77]

Third, the shared sacral framework of Islam contributes to high social capital within Muslim communities, families and networks bound by common values, the aid of zakāt funds for members in need, and the trust fostered by mutual religious commitment. Durkheim would recognise in Muslim rituals the process of forging the collective conscience.

[75] Imran Tariq and Jane Smith, "The Transformation of Sacred Authority in Digital Muslim Communities," *Journal of Religion and Digital Culture* 8, no. 2 (2023): 190-193.
[76] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 70-116.
[77] Sørensen, "Sacred Time, Sacred Space," 146-152.

Fourth, the ethical trajectory of Islamic sacralisation is directed towards compassion, justice, and selflessness. This aligns with the view of religion as a catalyst for altruism and social cohesion. When practised in spirit, Islam's sacralisation fosters what we might call "virtuous habitus" (in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of ingrained disposition). A 2009 empirical study of the Hajj found that pilgrims, after returning, showed increased civic engagement and tolerance towards even non-Muslims.[78] This suggests that authentic sacred experiences can break down prejudices.

However, the discussion also highlighted the risks: when sacred concepts are misappropriated, they can become vehicles for extremism and intolerance. Contemporary extremist movements have selectively weaponised Islamic sacred concepts to justify violence against both Muslims and non-Muslims. This represents not an excess of authentic religiosity but a fundamental distortion of Islamic sacred principles. The Islamic tradition has its own correctives: the Prophet's teachings against fanaticism (e.g., "Beware of extremism in religion, for it destroyed those before you") and the emphasis on God's mercy tempers legalistic rigour. By remembering that the ultimate sacred is God, whose qualities include mercy, forgiveness, and justice, Muslims are called to reflect those qualities.

The challenges of maintaining authentic sacralisation in the contemporary world are significant. Globalisation, secularisation, commodification, and technological change all create pressures that can either erode sacred practices or distort them into rigid identitarian markers. For modern Muslims, especially those in minority contexts, navigating these challenges requires both fidelity to tradition and creative adaptation. Digital technologies, for instance, can both aid religious practice (prayer apps, online Quranic study) and distract from sacred presence (constant connectivity, attention fragmentation). The emerging field of virtual sacralisation, how digital spaces can be invested with sacred meaning through online religious gatherings, virtual pilgrimage tools, and religious applications, represents an important area for future research that builds upon the foundations explored in this study.

Rather than sacralisation leading to world-renunciation or mystical escape, it typically leads to world-engagement through ethics. The sacred life is one committed to justice, compassion, and self-restraint. Islam sacralises the pursuit of a just and virtuous society, from family unity to economic fairness. In modern terms, one might say Islam's sacralisation process has significant pro-social functions, creating accountable individuals and cohesive communities.

For contemporary Muslims navigating pluralistic societies, authentic sacralisation means finding balance: honouring tradition while engaging constructively with diversity, maintaining distinctive identity while recognising shared humanity with others, and pursuing spiritual depth while participating in modern life. The success of this navigation ultimately depends on recovering what lies at the heart of Islamic sacralisation: the recognition that all of life belongs to God, all of humanity is His creation, and the highest expression of devotion is ethical service motivated by divine love.

The exploration of sacralisation from an Islamic perspective not only deepens understanding of Islam itself, but also contributes to the comparative study of how human societies endow life with sacred significance. It highlights the potential of religious traditions to enrich human experience with layers of meaning and value, as well as the responsibility that comes with claiming something as sacred. The Islamic case teaches that sacralisation, at its best, is not an escape from reality but

[78] Clingingsmith et al., "Estimating the Impact of the Hajj," 1157-1162.

a profound engagement with reality, infusing the mundane with the light of the transcendent, and in doing so, aspiring to elevate humanity toward its highest ideals of truth, goodness, and unity.

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