THE CONCEPT OF THE "UMMAH" IN THE QUR'AN: AN ELUCIDATION OF THE BASIC NATURE OF THE ISLAMIC HOLY COMMUNITY

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I. Introduction

The term Ummah designates the Islamic holy community, i.e., the religious community. This, the major meaning of the term, is found in the Qur'an but only in a limited number of instances. Although students of Islam have long recognized that the idea of the Ummah and its historical existence have been central to Islamic religiosity, the basic nature of the Islamic holy community has not been adequately elucidated. A proper understanding of the Ummah is critical to any explanation of the religious significance of Islamic law (Shari'ah).

Students of Islam know that the term ummah does not always mean "the religious community," but also has several other implications in the Qur'an. Whether the major meaning of the term ummah, as "the religious community," is internally and coherently related to other uses of the term within the Qur'an must be examined. A coherent reconstruction of the relationship among the major meaning and other instances of the term ummah in Qur'anic contexts would do much to elucidate the nature of the Ummah as the Islamic holy community. With this working hypothesis, and setting aside for a while the major meaning, the Qur'anic examples of the term ummah will be analyzed and examined.

II. Ummah motifs in the Qur'an

Briefly surveying the statistical correlation of the term ummah and the chronology of the Qur'an, we find 64 instances of the term ummah in both singular and plural forms. In addition, according to the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology,(1) there is no instance of the term ummah in the first Meccan period; there are 11 instances in the second Meccan period; 38 instances in the third Maccan

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period; and 15 instances in the Medinan period. As the Qur'an was revealed from time to time during the course of twenty years, the contents and subjects of Qur'anic revelation reflect the historical situations of Muhammad and his followers. These statistics indicate that instances of the term *ummas* are quite few in the earlier period and increases in the later period. As far as the number of instances is concerned, it is greater in the third Meccan period when the foundation of the community was being laid, than in the Medinan period when the *Ummah* as the Islamic community was fully founded. In looking at the meaning of the term in different uses, the instances in which *ummas* explicitly means the Islamic community are limited to the Medinan period, such as "the community submissive to God" (2:128), "the middle community" (2:143) and "the best community ever brought forth to men" (3:110).

Based on this statistical data, it is sometimes maintained that the idea of the *Ummah* and the social teachings and communal aspects of the religion began to be emphasized in the later period, whereas the Qur'anic teachings of the earlier period are existential and personal. This type of interpretation of the Qur'an stresses the chronological differences of Qur'anic teachings, and tends to separate the social and communal aspects of religiosity from the existential and the personal. In following analysis, however, we will focus on the meanings of the term *ummas*. When one examines the Qur'anic accounts with these motifs as criteria, it is possible to integrate these two aspects of Islamic religiosity. For example, some *ummas* motifs are found in Qur'anic descriptions of the first Meccan period, though the term *ummas* is not used.

Each instance of the term *ummas* has a contextual meaning. The number of contexts in which the term *ummas* is used is relatively small. Here, the contextual meanings of the term, as well as the contexts themselves, are called "motifs." Although the selection of the motifs cannot be completely exempt from some artificiality and arbitrariness, it is still useful to classify Qur'anic examples of the term *ummas* on the basis of such motifs. This type of classification of the term *ummas* has been done by Frederick Denny. The classification scheme presented here is greatly indebted to his, but the motifs have been somewhat altered by the author.

Motif classification for each example of the term *ummas* involves some arbitrariness, since a particular instance can often be classified into more than one motif category. Therefore, the following classification is tentative, and others are possible. Critical to this scheme is the classification of *ummas* motifs into
two broad categories: one is the ummah as the religious community in Islamic sense, and the other is the ummah as a folk, a people or nation, that is, not necessarily a religious community as such.

Table: A Classification of Motifs for the term “ummah” in the Qur’an

I. Ummah as the religious community

1. “Oneness” (ummah wāḥidah)
   a. existing in the primordial, mythical past:
      2:213, 10:19, 43:33
   c. to Christian community: 21:92, 23:52

2. Ummah explicitly related to the Muslim community: 2:128, 143, 3:104, 110, 16:92, 92

3. Ummah related to “people of the Book (ahl al-kitāb)
   a. Abraham: 16:120, 2:128
   b. Christians: 21:92, 23:52

4. Ummah and ritual (mansak) which God ordained to each Ummah:
   6:108, 22:34, 67

5. Ummah as religious sub-group or sect which became independent from the larger unit of society: 3:113, 5:66, 7:159, 164, 168, 181

II. Ummah as a tribe, a folk, a people or a nation, not necessarily a religious community


2. Ummah as having its own “appointed time” (ajal): 7:34, 10:49, 15:5, 23:44

3. Ummah that perished or will perish:
   a. in the past: 2:134, 141, 7:38, 13:30, 41:25, 46:18
   b. in the future: 11:48

4. Ummah on the Day of Judgment:
   a. witness (shahīd): 4:41, 16:84, 89, 28:75
   b. other descriptions of the ummah on Judgment Day: 7:38, 27:83, 41:25, 45:22, 23

5. Ummah as a tribe
   a. identification of ummah and religion (pre-Islamic sense): 43:22, 23
   b. tribe: 7:160, 28:23

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III. Others (miscellaneous meanings)

1. a "group of animals": 6:38
2. a "set term": 11:8, 12:43

Before we discuss the leit-motif of the term *umma*, let us mention the motif of "one community." Qur'anic descriptions of the "one community" imply that it is an ideal, and, however, that a single community of the human race has not yet been realized. The realization of "one community" is either put back into the mythical past (1-1-a), or described as possible only if God willed it. In both cases, it is not actually realized in history. As for an Islamic community which is open to the human race, the possibility is mentioned — verse 5:48 says that it was possible for the Islamic community, if God willed, to be one community with the Jews and the Christians together — but the Muslim community remains juxtaposed to the Jewish and Christian communities. "One community" seems to be used in the sense of a "religious community without factions," as implied in examples referring to the Christian community (I-1-c). In this sense, the Islamic community is ordered to be "one", though the term "one community" does not directly refer to the Islamic community.\(^{(4)}\)

### III. Leit-motif of the term *umma*

In order to determine an internal relation among the *umma* motifs, it is helpful to start with the second category. As the table above shows, there are several motifs under this category, which have a coherent logical connection. They overlap to a great extent with a particular genre of narrative in the Qur'\-\-
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to "the appointed time" which God had ordained for them (the divine judgment and punishment in history) (II-2, 3).

4. God substituted another people for those destroyed and let them inherit the town or land which had belonged to the former group.

5. On the Day of Judgment, the people who denied God will be judged according to the witness of the messenger (II-4).

As indicated by the number of ummah motifs, most of these motifs are contained in the narratives of the prophets before Muhammad. This course of events depicts the coherent and causal process of interaction between God and man. The process suddenly starts with the Revelation (God sends a messenger to a people), in other words, the self-manifestation of God. When the people deny the Revelation, God destroys them. This is divine judgment and punishment in history, in contrast to the judgment held on the Day of Judgment.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that the religious community (the first category of the term ummah) is a people who believes the Revelation and submits to divine guidance (I-2, 3, 4, (5)). It follows from this explanation that most of the ummah motifs are related to the theme of "God sending a messenger to an ummah," except for the examples from the third motif category. For these reasons, the motif of God's messenger can be regarded as the leit-motif of the term ummah. This is, however, not only the leit-motif of the term ummah, but also the leit-motif of the Qur'an as a whole. The Qur'an is the divine message as an ongoing process through Muhammad. That the concept of ummah is contained in the leit-motif of the Qur'an indicates the central importance of this idea.

The meaning of the term ummah in this leit-motif must be analyzed. The ummah to which God sent his messenger cannot be a religious community in the Qur'anic sense. Since it was wrong and corrupt, God sent his messenger both to warn them and to bring good news (cf. 6:48, 37:72, etc.). It is not a question of a founded community, but one which existed prior to the messengers' arrival. The Arab society to which Muhammad was sent is a typical example of such an ummah (cf. 13:30). In this sense, the term ummah can be considered a tribe, a people or a nation, that is, a kind of sociological unit of human beings usually bound by kinship. The Qur'anic descriptions, examined below, support such speculation concerning the nature of the ummah.

An examination of examples of the term ummah is not sufficient to clarify the features of the ummah as a people, but when Qur'anic descriptions are con-
sidered with the above-mentioned narratives as criteria, it is found that other terms, i.e., qaum and qaryah, are used within the same contexts as the ummah motifs. The identity of these motifs gives proof of the semantic intimacy between the term ummah and the others.

The term qaum is used in the leit-motif of the term ummah. For example:

7:59 And We sent Noah to his people (qaumih); And he said, “O my people (yā qaumī), serve God!”

30:47 Indeed, We sent before the Messengers unto their people (qaumihim) ....

The following verses are examples of the term ummah (or umam, the plural form of ummah):

40:5 The people of Noah (qaum Nūh) before them also cried lies, and the parties after them; every nation (kull ummatin) purposed against their messenger to seize him, and disputed falsely that they might rebut thereby the truth. Then I seized them; and how was My punishment!

16:64 By God, assuredly We sent Messengers to nations (umam) before thee ....

In these four verses, the terms qaum and ummah are interchangeable. The term qaum, however, does not always indicate “a people” as a sociological unit of human beings, but a mere group of persons. In other verses, the term qaum indicates a social group larger than ummah (see below; “ummah as sub-group” (I-5)). Therefore, it is clear that in some instances the term qaum overlaps with the leit-motif of the term ummah.

The following example not only illustrates this, but also explains an important feature of Qur’anic revelation. Verse 14: 4 says:

We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people (bi-lisan qaumih) that he might make all clear to them.

The same idea is also expressed elsewhere (26:192–5, 46:12, etc.). The close relationship among qaum, language, and the Revelation is convincingly explained by Izutsu.(7) He states:

Language is ... a system of verbal signs recognized by common consent as the means of communication among all individuals belonging to one community.

... The Koran shows the clearest consciousness of this fact, and it possesses most evidently the concept of language understood in the sense of this modern technical term langue. The Koran bases its concep-
tion of Revelation and prophetic mission on this very idea. It starts from the recognition of the fact that each “people” (qaum) has its own langue, and it attaches a great significance to this fact in regard to the phenomenon of prophetic mission. Although Izutsu does not mention the concept of ummah in this passage, this Qur’anic concept of language not only belongs to the leit-motif of the term ummah, but also gives evidence of the internal relationship between a community and the revelation. The inseparable tie between qaum (a community) and lisān (langue) elucidates the nature of the community to whom God sent his messenger. That is, this community is identified with its own langue, therefore with ethnicity in most cases.

The term qaum is often used in other ummah motifs such as “the ummah which perished or was destroyed by God” (II–3) and “the substitution of another people” (a variation of II–3). In these motifs, the term qaryah is also used, which literally means a city or a town. For example:

21:11 How many a town (qaryah) that was evildoing We have shattered, and set up after it another people! (qaum akhar)
18:59 And those towns (al-qura), We destroyed them when they did evil, and appointed for their destruction a fixed time (mau‘id).
11:117 Yet thy Lord would never destroy the towns (qura) unjustly, while as yet their people (ahluhā) were putting things right.

These examples of the term qaryah are related to “the destroyed ummah” motif (II–3). The latter half of verse 18:59 overlaps with “appointed time” motif (II–2), though the term ajal is not used. In verse 11:117, the town as such and its inhabitants are distinguished, but in others, the term qaryah implies both a town and its inhabitants. The fact that the term qaryah, instead of qaum and ummah, is found in ummah motifs implies that the notion of community in the leit-motif of the term ummah is possibly that of a territorial community. The close connection between a people and its territory (town or land) can be found in another motifs, such as “God lets another folk inherit the town or land” (44:25–7, etc.) and also in the examples cited below.

Another prominent feature of a people or a community within the leit-motif of the term ummah is, as many Qur’anic descriptions show, their particular religion (millah) and way of life. For example:

7:88 Said the chieftains of his people (qaumih) who waxed proud, ‘We will surely expel thee, O Shuaib, and those who believe with thee, from
our town (qaryatinā), unless you return to our religion (millah).” He said, ‘What, even though We detest it?’

43:23–24 Even so We never sent a warner before thee into any town but (one whose) luxurious men said; ‘we indeed found our fathers following a religion (ummah) and we are following their footprints.

(The warner) said: What! Even though I bring you better guidance than that which you found your fathers following? They said: We are disbelievers in what you have brought. (9)

These examples belong to the leit-motif of the term ummah and express the territorial features of the community. Furthermore, they show that these communities had their own religion, a false one from God’s point of view, like the idol-worship of the Arabs. That they had their own religion is the main reason for their denial of the divine Revelation. Their religion is tribal, folk or national religion. The incompatibility and antagonism between this type of religion and monotheistic faith is expressed in many passages of the Qur’an.

Examined on the basis of ummah motifs, the Qur’an concretely indicates the nature of the ummah to which God sent his Messengers. It is a community which has a particular linguistic, territorial and religious identity. It is a social unit bound together by kinship or ethnicity, such as a tribe, people or nation. Joachim Wach describes such a community as “a unit in which there is an identity of social and religious groupings.” (10) From the viewpoint of the Qur’an, a tribal religion is not the genuine one, and this type of community is regarded as a non-religious community. What is termed ummah, qaum, and qaryah, is the social unit or human framework that is indispensable for daily life in the most concrete sense. This is the “first” meaning of the term ummah in the Qur’an.

IV. The Ummah as the Islamic Community

Muhammad was sent by God to an ummah. Verse 13:30 says:

Thus we have sent thee into a community (ummah) before which communities (umam) have passed away, to recite to them what We have revealed to thee; and yet they disbelieve in the All-mereiful.
Say: ‘He is my Lord, there is no god but He.
In Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn.’

The term ummah here belongs to the leit-motif of the term ummah (II–1). Though
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it is connected with Muhammad, it does not mean the Islamic religious community, but rather is used in the first sense of the term ummah. According to the Qur'an, the ummah to which Muhammad was sent successfully became the Ummah, a religious community. The logical process through which the Ummah as the Islamic community was founded must be clarified, and the basic features of the Islamic community must be further examined. Through this examination, the internal relationship between the ummah in the first sense and the Ummah as the Islamic community will be investigated.

Let us begin by considering the foundation of the Islamic community. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of God, and not the personal religious experience of Muhammad, articulated and expressed with his own words. This means that when one hears the Qur'an, one encounters God manifesting Himself in the form of the Word. The Word of God is “guidance to mankind” (ḥudan li al-nās) (2:185) and a “call to faith” (munādin li al-imān) (cf. 3:193). The Word of God as the Sacred has the power to urge everyone who hears it to respond to God, deciding either to believe or not to believe. This is the most fundamental feature of the language of the Qur'an. Various discourses and narratives in the Qur'an concerning the “creation and sustenance of the worlds,” “the prophets and peoples before Muhammad,” and “the Day of Judgment” all converge on the single theme of a “call to faith,” admonishing the hearer how decisive is the choice to believer or not, when the Word of God is heard. Only those who believe that the word heard through the man Muhammad is the Word of God can understand the decisive importance of faith, and believe in God. Those who regard it as lies or fiction, as many peoples did in the past, will not understand and therefore will deny it.

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that it is each individual’s responsibility to believe or not, and that the prophet has neither authority nor responsibility for another’s decision. The Qur'an says:

72:21 Say: ‘I have no power over you, either for hurt or for rectitude.’
10:108 Say: ‘O men, the truth has come to you from your Lord, whosoever is guided is guided only to his own gain, and whosoever goes astray, it is only to his own loss, I am not a guardian over you.’

The prophets are neither mediators nor saviours in the strict sense of these terms. A person directly and personally confronts God through His Word. The decision of faith is a matter that involves only God and an individual man.
This is an Islamic individualism which pre-Islamic Arabs and the ummahs in the "first" sense did not know. The belief that each individual is responsible for both their own decision of faith and their mode of living thereafter is most explicitly expressed in descriptions of the Day of Judgment. Verse 2:48 says:

Fear the Day when no one will compensate for one another.

Verses 70:8–14 say that no one can ransom even his dearest, and that no sinner can ransom himself from the punishment of that day by his kin who sheltered him. Every person is individually judged on how they responded to God when the Revelation reached them and how they followed divine guidance in this world. Descriptions of the Day of Judgment can be seen to explain that before God each person is a solitary individual and responsible for themselves, and to admonish people how to live and act in this world. Whether or not a religious community in the Islamic sense is founded depends upon the individual's decision of faith. This is the crucial point in the process of establishing an Islamic community. Such individualism (self-responsibility) is considered to be a potential inherent in human nature (otherwise one could not respond to God), but also as being confirmed by a personal decision of faith.

There is discontinuity between ummah in the first sense and the Islamic community (Ummah as religious community). As the Qur'an concretely describes, the Revelation comes to a person when they are a member of a certain ummah identified with linguistic, ethnic, territorial and religious aspects. A person is determined by ethnicity and so forth. To believe in God in the Islamic sense means that one forsakes the religion of the community one naturally belonged to and accepts a new, universal faith. It is by personal faith that ethnic identity is discarded and membership in the Islamic community is obtained. Citing verses 49:11–13, Fazlur Rahman states:

The essence of all human rights is the equality of the entire human race, which the Qur'an assumed, affirmed and confirmed. It obliterated all distinctions among men except goodness and virtue (taqwa). It is the universality of the Revelation that obliterates all distinctions among people. Revelation is also the potential ground for the foundation of an Islamic community as a universal religious community. According to the Qur'an, God gave the Revelation to various peoples in their own languages, but the Revelation itself is universal, one and the same in essence. What is more important is that personal faith (the individual response to God) is the actual ground by which one becomes a Muslim and by which the universal Islamic community
is founded. Therefore, those people who denied the Revelation remained ethnic, and perished or were destroyed as such. Those who believe in God discard their old ethnic identity. Even if one is still physically determined by ethnicity ("color of skin and language" in the Qur'anic phrase), it is no longer one's essential identity, which is as a "Muslim" who is equal before God. This indicates that believers must entirely change their mode of existence from the ethnic or tribal to the real Islamic mode of existence. These two modes of existence are never compatible (7:88 cited above, 12:37, etc.). Those who believe in God must be demarcated from the rest of the ummah (old society). Followers of the new faith establish their own religious community, bound together only by a new, common faith, and disconnected from the previous social unit (the ummah in the first sense). Certainly, the Islamic community is such a religious community, founded on the common faith, universal, and exempt from all distinctions save language. As there is no actual universal language, Arabic has remained the language of the Islamic community, although the Islamic community is logically disconnected from Arab tribal society.

Among the ummah motifs, the "ummah as a sub-group" motif (I–5) is worthy of a brief examination here. If a religious community in the Islamic sense is a founded community, demarcated from old society, the "ummah as a sub-group" could be seen to express this characteristic of a religious community. The Qur'an describes it as follows:

7:159 Of the people of Moses (qaum Mūsā) there is a community (ummah) who guides by the truth, and by it act with justice.
7:160 And We cut them (i.e., qaum Mūsā) into twelve tribes (asbāt), nations (umam). And We revealed to Moses, when his people (qaumuh) asked for water ...
7:164 And when a community (ummah) of them said, "Why do you admonish a people (qaum) God is about to destroy or to chastise with a terrible chastisement?" They said, "As an excuse to your Lord; and haply they will be godfearing."
7:168 And We cut them up into nation (umam) in the earth, some of them righteous, and some of them otherwise; and We tried them with good things and evil, that they haply should return.

Unlike the identification of the terms "ummah" and "qaum" in the leit-motif of the term ummah, the use of ummah here is to describe a sub-group of qaum Mūsā (the people of Moses). In verses 7:159 and 164, ummah can be taken to mean
“a founded religious community, demarcated from the rest of the people of Moses.” In verses 7:160 and 168, however, it is said that the ummah was set up by God and identified with the tribe (sibṭ). This is rather similar to ummah in the first sense. Verse 168 implies that after the ummah as a social unit was set up by God, some ummahs became “religious communities.” Thus, in order for an ummah to become a religious community, it seems that the process mentioned above would be necessary. Generally speaking, in these examples, however, it is not emphasized that ummah as a religious sub-group is a spontaneously founded religious community, only some relationship between the ummah as a social unit in the first sense and the ummah as a religious community in the Islamic sense is vaguely implied.

The basic nature of the Islamic community needs to be considered in further detail. A clue is provided by the fact that the same term ummah is applied to both the ummah in the tribal sense and the Islamic religious community. For example, verse 3:110 says:

You are the best community (khair ummatin) ever brought forth to men, bidding to right conduct, forbidding to dishonour, and believing in God. Had the People of the Book believed, it were better for them: some of them are believers, but most of them are ungodly.

In spite of the great qualitative difference and discontinuity between ummah in the first sense and the Islamic community, the use of the same term seems to imply some internal and conceptual connection between them. We will try to elucidate what this connection may be.

It was pointed out above that the individual’s response to God (personal faith) is necessary for the foundation of the Islamic community. As Islam is undoubtedly universal religion and the Islamic community is founded on personal faith, the Islamic community can be seen to follow the general pattern for the foundation of universal religion. In a passage discussing typologies of relationship between religion and the state, Wach describes the relation between a universal religion and the state. Universal religions are characterized by “an insistent claim for universality on the part of the religious community” and also by “the intensity of the religious experience” and its personal faith. Mainly due to the latter, Wach explains, “responsibility, which in traditional religion is borne by the group, whether tribe, town, or nation, shifts ... to the solitary individual.” Aware of the danger of oversimplification, Wach generalizes that “founded religions ... as a rule represent a more advanced
stage of detachment of religious from political function.” (20) Islam makes “a claim for universality of the Islamic community,” confirming the solitary individual and individual responsibility as noted above. However, it is the preeminent characteristic of Islam as an authentic universal religion that it never intends to detach religious from political functions, and this is due to the basic nature of the Islamic community.

Personal faith is necessary and sufficient for the fundation of universal religions in general. It is necessary but not sufficient for the Islamic community. The following verse, found in a passage of Abraham’s prayer, is an excellent clue to the Islamic community.

2:128 Our Lord! make us (i.e., Abraham and Ishmael) submissive to Thee (i.e., two Muslims) (muslimain laka), and of our descendents a community submissive to Thee (ummah muslimah laka).

The first part, “make us two Muslims”, is concerned with the individual decision of faith. Individual Muslims would establish a religious community according to the pattern by which religions are founded. This community would be called “a (religious) community of Muslims,” or ummah al-Muslimin in Arabic. Abraham’s prayer, however, continues saying, “make of our descendents ‘a community submissive to God’.” The term ummah muslimah has more implications and significance than the earlier term ummah al-Muslimin. The Ummah Muslimah logically includes the ummah al-Muslimin, but the latter would not necessarily be the Ummah Muslimah. The Ummah Muslimah signifies that in addition to each member’s being a Muslim, and thus submissive to God, the community qua community must be submissive to God.

The preceptive and even legislative discourses of the Qur’an signify that the just treatment of other persons in cases of marriage, divorce, inheritance and business transactions is an important aspect of Islamic religiosity. The Ummah Muslimah is the community in which a man raises his family, takes charge of property and engages in economic activities. It is responsible for all the aspects of human life. The founded Islamic religious community never defines itself in presupposition of or in opposition to a secular state. Members of the Ummah Muslimah should be under Islamic rule, and the Ummah Muslimah must meet the conditions of the actual community which is indispensable for human life. In this basic sense of the Ummah Muslimah, we see that the term’s use of ummah displays an internal and conceptual connection with ummah in the first sense. The Ummah Muslimah may be interpreted as superseding and
preserving (Aufheben) the ummah in the first sense, or that the term ummah, common to both meanings, signifies the basic concrete social unit or framework indispensable for human existence.

This concept of ummah must be correlated with Qur'anic anthropology. In the Qur'an, the person is almost always grasped as "the individual in community." The Qur'an confirms the concepts of "the solitary individual" and "individual responsibility": man before God is the solitary individual for whom no one else can substitute. The solitary individual, however, cannot live without community in this historical world. According to Qur'anic anthropology, to be a Muslim is what man "ought to be," or man's "real mode of existence". Since the human being cannot be detached from community, a Muslim must be in a just community (Ummah Muslimah). A Muslim can be fully a Muslim in the Ummah Muslimah and must also be responsible for the maintenance of it. When God sent the Revelation to an ummah in the first sense, He willed that each individual become a Muslim and that the tribal ummah become the Ummah Muslimah. This is explicitly expressed in Abraham's prayer above.

The Islamic real mode of existence is not sought in a "sacred time and space which can abolish history" nor in "world-renunciation" or the "monastic life." Rather it must be realized in daily social life, in history. The Islamic individual is not fully realized in the detachment from society, but must be realized through participation in it. In order for an individual to be a Muslim, subjective morality is necessary; in order for a community to be the Ummah Muslimah, which guarantees just treatment of others, objective morality as law is necessary. The Islamic community does not mean to detach religious from political functions, but to integrate them by means of Islamic rule. Islamic rule is integrally related to the Shari'ah (Islamic law). It depicts the Islamic mode of existence. The Shari'ah is, to put it briefly, that which each individual Muslim should follow on their own responsibility, based upon which disputes among Muslims should be judged and settled and, hence, by means of which the Ummah Muslimah is maintained. In order to understand Islamic rule in detail, the historical relationships among the "Ummah Muslimah," the "Shari'ah and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh)" and the Caliphate (the state or visible political organization) should be examined, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

An analysis of the contextual meanings of the term ummah and others in the
Qur'an has elucidated the basic nature and major features of the Islamic community as the universal religious community. The present investigation has been concerned mainly with a logical explanation of the concept and structure of the *Ummah* based on Qur'anic descriptions, and less concerned with historical formulations of the *Ummah*. In actual course of events, of course, all of those who became Muslims did not make their existential decision of faith in such an ideal manner as that delineated above. As for the paucity of references in the foregoing analysis to Muhammad and his role in the foundation of the Islamic community, we are now able to evaluate an important dimension of his work. The historical foundation of the Islamic community was dependent no doubt upon the prophetic activities of Muhammad and upon the obedience of his followers (Muslims who obeyed God). Muhammad demonstrated the Islamic mode of existence most perfectly and concretely throughout his personal life. The authority of Muhammad is clearly described and affirmed within the Qur'an. There, Muhammad is not a mediator or saviour between God and man, but a mediator between the Word of God (divine guidance) and history. So far as the foundation of the Islamic community is concerned, it is the personal relation between God and the individual that is decisive.

This elucidation of the fundamental nature of the Islamic community, based on analyses of the contextual meanings of the term *ummah* in the Qur'an, aside from its value as such, has also attempted to provide a new perspective for a reconsideration of the historical formulation of the Islamic community.

**Notes**


(3) Frederich M. Denny, "Community and Salvation: The Meaning of the Ummah in the Qur'an" (Dissertation, Divinity School of the University of Chicago, 1974) pp. 44-47.


(6) Citation of the Qur'an is based on the verse numbering of the official Egyptian edition, and usually cited from Arberry's translation (*The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955; reprinted, 1976), with some modifications by the author.

(8) Ibid., p. 185.


Though Arberry translates it as "community," the author follows these classical commentators. According to the context, *umma* here would be taken to mean "religion identified with community" in which the stress is put on "religion."


(11) F. Rahman, p. 31.

(12) Izutsu delineates the qualitative differences between pre-Islamic Arab tribal society and the Islamic community based on a monotheistic faith. See his *God and Man in the Koran*, Chapter VIII, and also his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), Chapters III and IV.

(13) This problem is related to that of human free will and pre-destination in the Qur'an, which caused great controversies in the early phases of Islamic thought and theology. The present interpretation is free of the traditional controversies, and based on a contextual interpretation of the Qur'an.

(14) F. Rahman, p. 45.

(15) Verse 30:22 of the Qur'an says that the different languages (*alsinah*) and colors (*alwān*) (i.e., ethnicity) are "signs of God" (*āyāt Allāh*).

(16) As for the historical process of the formulation of the Islamic community, even the Qur'ānic precepts were influenced by the historical situations of Arab society at that time. Muhammad himself adapted many pre-Islamic customs into Islamic rules. This tendency increased in the early stages of the development of Islamic law, but this historical continuity should not be confused with the logical discontinuity of the Islamic community from pre-Islamic society.

(17) J. Wach, Chapter VII.

(18) Ibid., p. 310.

(19) Ibid., p. 311.

(20) Ibid., p. 293, and pp. 310–1.


(22) Ibid., Chapter II, esp. pp. 71–2.