

Online Islamic *Da'wah* Narratives in the UK:
The Case of iERA

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an in-depth study into two of the UK charity iERA's *da'wah* narratives: the Qura'nic embryology 'miracle' and the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. While the embryo verses have received scholarly attention, there is little to no research in the *da'wah* context for both narratives. Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism was applied to both, which were problematic. It was found that iERA constructed its exegesis of the embryo verses by expanding on classical meanings to show harmony with modern science. Additionally, it developed the Cosmological Argument by adapting it to Salafi Islamic beliefs. The construction processes were found to be influenced by an online dialectic between iERA and its Muslim and atheist detractors, causing it to abandon the scientific miracles and modify the Cosmological Argument. Signs point to a weakening of faith among young people, including Muslims, as they have unprecedented access to unfiltered online information on religion and science. By employing the narratives, iERA aims to legitimate the fundamentals of Islam to Muslims and to attract converts by presenting it as a rational and modern faith. While iERA's *da'wah* template is practical, its errors are relevant to the wider discussions on Qur'anic exegesis and modern challenges to the religion.

DEDICATION

To my mother and father

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A note on transliteration and style

A simplified transliteration of the Arabic terms was chosen in order to allow for a smoother reading. The Arabic letters (*hamza*) and (*'ayn*) are both represented with ('), except when they're not used in proper names or conventional spelling. For example, *da'wah* is written with the (') except when it's not employed in names or titles, such as Mission Dawah and Jaafar Idris.

For the sake of simplicity, (i) is used for both the long and short /ī/ sounds, except for how they are transliterated in quotations.

The Arabic rules for the article 'Al' were disregarded for consistency (e.g. ul-Qur'an or an-Nafs were all transliterated as al-).

The letter (y) was doubled for clarity in words such as Taymiyya, and the letter (h) was added to the ending (ah) to indicate the final Arabic letter / ta' /, except in names or conventional use.

The article (Al) in Arabic titles was capitalised only in the first word of the title for clarity.

Glossary

of Berger and Luckmann's (1991) terms

Dialectical relationship

The relationship between humans and their social world which is in an on-going interaction. Humans construct the external social world, which then acts back upon them, and the process is repeated. The cycles is: externalisation, then objectivation, then internalisation.

Externalisation

Humans produce a social order, knowledge, systems of meaning, and render them external, as if independent of themselves.

Habitualisation

Repetition of actions in a pattern the result of which is economy of decision-making.

Institutionalisation

Takes place whenever there are typified patterns of behaviours or actions shared by members of a group.

Institutions

Humans perceive institutions as an external reality, even though they were constructed.

Internalisation

The social world, human constructions, systems of meanings, are experienced as external to humans. Through socialisation, individuals must learn them as if they were objective truths 'out there', existing in the world.

Legitimation

Second level of objectivation of meaning. It is the production of new meanings to make the first-order meanings objective and plausible. It tells people both why things should be done in a particular way rather than another, and why things are that way. Examples include mythology, science, philosophy and theology. Legitimations can be constructed for institutions or for symbolic universes.

Legitimation, Incipient

Explanations that are inherent in the vocabulary (first level of legitimation). They are pre-theoretical.

Legitimation, Theoretical

A second level of validation that formulates basic theories.

Legitimation, Pure Theory

A third level of meaning with specialised, complex theories removed from pragmatic or concrete concerns of the lay person. It requires specialists. Legitimation at this level reaches

autonomy from the institution it originally sought to validate and might produce its own institutions.

Legitimation, Symbolic Universes

A matrix encompassing the totality of subjective and objective meanings and which produces social order. They are experienced as separate from everyday life and with their own reality that explains and justifies the symbolic universes. They are social constructions with a history. For the individual, they 'put everything in its right place' (p. 116). Because they are human constructions, they are problematic and therefore may require legitimation. Similar to Durkheim's 'religion' and Hjelmslev's 'worldviews'.

Objectivation

The extent to which human constructs are taken for granted, taken to be objective. The objectivity of institutions is constructed by humans.

Objectivation, First-order

The first level of constructions is meanings, e.g. vocabulary.

Objectivation, Second-order

Legitimation.

Objective reality

The human world, which is institutionalised, is perceived as a reality external to and independent of humans. For example: society.

Reciprocity

Members of a group react to or interact with typified actions or behaviours in a predictable manner.

Social Construction

The argument that the human world is socially produced through individuals interacting together in a shared system of meanings and that is perceived to exist objectively, externally and independently of them.

Symbolic universes

See Legitimation, Symbolic Universes.

Typification

Habitualised or predefined patterns of behaviour and actors in an institution become typical in situations or roles, therefore predictable to other members of the group. Typifications are institutions.

Universe maintenance

All levels of legitimations are conceptual machineries to maintain the universes of meaning and their taken-for-granted quality.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORY AND APPLICATION

Man is capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies him.

- P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann

A da'wah dialogue in Birmingham City Centre

I had been in Birmingham only a few weeks. I was on my way to the bus stop in Colmore Row near the Bull Ring shopping centre on a Tuesday in October 2012 when I ran into a group of men with prominent beards standing behind a table displaying leaflets on Islam. I slowed down and wondered whether to stop, as I was in a hurry to go home. But I decided to look at the leaflets and find out more about them. The young man across the table from me greeted me and asked if I'm interested in Islam. I told him I'm researching Salafism and would like to find out more about it. I pointed to the yellow leaflet that stood out on the table because of its colour and the title 'Salafism'.

The man turned me over to another person, and then another young man who appeared next to me started chatting and telling me about Islam. He told me, 'We [Muslims] believe that Jesus was a prophet' and talked about other fundamental Islamic beliefs. He also asked if I believed that Muhammad existed. Although my answer was that he most likely existed, he still launched into the argument of the great number of Muslims who believe he was a prophet,

and how could the idea persist if Muhammad hadn't existed and been a prophet. He then asked where I was from. We were interrupted before I could answer, and a man behind the table gave me more leaflets. I asked which mosque they were associated with. They said it's on the leaflet; they told me to go to the bookstore named on the leaflet and ask about the mosque, that I'd be directed to it. Their websites were also advertised on the leaflets. I asked if the mosque has a name:

Mira: 'Is it Green Lane Mosque?'

The man: 'No. Green Lane is... Do you know 'cc'...'carbon copy'?'

I nodded.

Mira: 'So Green Lane is not Salafi?'

'No', he replied.

Then the young man giving me *da'wah* resumed our conversation. He asked how much I knew about Salafism and why I was interested. I told him I'm researching an area related to identity. To his question on what I knew about Salafism, I talked briefly about emulating the *salaf*. He explained the three generations of the *salaf* and mentioned that the Prophet had spoken about them in a *hadith*.

Mira: 'How long have you been Salafi?'

Young man: 'Three years. Where are you from again?'

Mira: 'Lebanon.'

Young man: 'I'm from Palestine, but I was born in Liverpool.'

Mira: 'How do your parents feel about you being Salafi?'

He said his English mother and her husband became Salafi after he gave *da'wah* to them. But his Palestinian father thought that he was too extreme. Then I asked him why he'd chosen Salafism to other interpretations of Islam. He said he had not been religious at all and was searching. When he talked to Sufis, he found their ideas were very different from Islam, in

their veneration of saints, people and the Prophet, and taking blessings through touching stones. He found Salafism to be the most convincing because it is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Salafis have 'evidence' for all things, he said.

He then continued to give me *da'wah* by talking about science in the Qur'an: He talked about the expansion of the universe, salty and sweet water not meeting, the moon reflecting light instead of generating it, and stages of the embryo's development. They were proof that the Qur'an is from God. When I excused myself to leave, he said they were in city centre (giving *da'wah*) three days a week. I thanked them and took several leaflets from the table.

Throughout our conversation, I noticed a man who would stand beside us, smile and listen in, then he would re-join the other men behind the table. He did this two or three times. Since then I also started noticing that at least twice a week there were three Salafi tables in the city centre for the next two years. They varied after that, but until 2016 there was regularly at least one Salafi table playing the Qur'an in the centre of the city. Absent were Sufi, Shia, or other Islamic *da'wah* tables.

This chapter explains the change in the direction of the research and encountering iERA's work online. It explores social constructionism as an approach to analysing *da'wah* narratives, explains the method adopted for this work and surveys previous research in this area.

1.1 Exploring potential Salafi participation and change of focus

The thesis initially proposed was the replacement of a British identity among White British converts with a Salafi identity. What is meant here by a British identity is a secular identity or

a Judeo-Christian identity for converts from a religious Judeo-Christian background. My interest was in the erosion or substitution of this identity with a Salafi Muslim one based primarily on a Saudi Arabian expression of that identity. This curiosity was raised through meeting Western converts to Salafi Islam in Yemen where I worked for 8 years. They had changed their names to Muslim ones, sometimes in combination with their Christian names and/or surnames, and the men adopted the white garment (*thawb*) and the women the black face veil and dress characteristic of Saudi Arabian culture. In a few cases, after several years the converts missed certain aspects of their native culture, such as particular American foods or sports. The aim of the initial research was to interview converts about their conversion experiences and motivations for choosing Salafism over other interpretations of Islam, as well as to explore whether and how Salafism re-defined their identity. To this end, I arranged to meet in March 2014 with the head of *da'wah* at Green Lane Mosque and with the head of the Salafi Bookstore on Coventry Road, which is connected to the Wright Street mosque nearby. The meetings were to explore the possibility of arranging interviews with converts within their congregations. Both individuals were welcoming and open to the idea, in principle.

1.1.1 Green Lane Mosque

On 10 March 2014, Dr. Ian Draper and I met with the head of *da'wah* at Green Lane Mosque, who spent some time giving me an overview of the mosque. He confirmed the mosque is Salafi and has a mixed-gender congregation. The mosque doesn't call to a specific school of thought; but some in the mosque followed the Hanbali *madhhab* or that of the Pakistani Ahl al-Hadith, which has links with Saudi Arabia. When I asked him if the mosque was Salafi, he answered yes without expressing a preference for the term Wahhabi. In a YouTube video

dated 2011 (Abu Abdullah UK, 2011)¹, Abu Junayd Yusuf Bowers of Salafi Publications accused Green Lane Mosque of being affiliated with the movements of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Surur Zain al-Abidin through its association with the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (*Jam'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami*). The head of Green Lane *da'wah* gave me several books and booklets on Islam, some of which were published by One Reason, which I later found out was the publishing arm of iERA. He also gave me an English copy of the Qur'an (2013) translated and annotated by the Saudi-based Saheeh International (www.Quran.com) and published by the Saudi al-Muntada al-Islami Trust. It is critiqued later in this chapter.

Da'wah

The mosque's *da'wah* department had two branches: one for born Muslims and one for non-Muslims and converts. The *da'wah* for Muslims included classes and social events, while the *da'wah* for non-Muslims consisted mainly of direct *da'wah*, for example through stalls in the city centre, distribution of literature and the Qur'an, visits to schools, the use of the internet, and monthly open days at the mosque. These activities peak in the summer. They sometimes received individuals at the mosque who were interested in learning more about Islam or who had already researched it and wanted only to take the *shahadah* (the Islamic monotheistic testimony). The *du'at* (proselytisers) used to be randomly selected individuals who had passion, he said. Then the mosque began giving *da'wah* training workshops that covered basic Islamic knowledge. They were strict about individuals having a good understanding of

¹ Viewed by 28,969 people on 14 March 2016. The video's claims are contested in a video response titled 'Refutation on Abu Junayd Bowers', published on 13 July 2012, and viewed by only 1,263 people. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rokdh2s08TI> (Accessed: 14 March 2016).

'*aqidah* (doctrine) and *tawhid* (divine unity), and proselytisers received basic training in delivering *da'wah*. However, he said without elaborating that the mosque faced issues with the behaviour or character of some *du'at* and had to dismiss a few.

Conversion

Taking the *shahadah* (the Islamic monotheistic testimony), he explained, had 7 conditions, which included having a basic understanding of Islam, the absence of anything that contradicts monotheism (*shirk*), making sure lucky charms and supplications are not used, and the belief in the last prophet and the five pillars of Islam. Support for converts was through welcome packs, organising social meetups, classes and one-on-one support. But he complained that most converts did not participate in these.

Profile of converts

Although there aren't accurate figures on the number of conversions, he estimated without any certainty that they had approximately 100 converts per year. The majority were from a Christian background. However, he believed that around half of converts reverted back to their previous faith. Of the remaining other half, he thought that perhaps only 2-3% continue to adhere to Islamic practices. By this estimate, only 1 or 2 new converts remain practicing Muslims out of 100 each year.

1.1.2 Salafi Bookstore

Later that week, Dr. Draper and I also met the head of the Salafi Bookstore on Coventry Road in Birmingham. The bookstore, founded in 1996 and which publishes under the brand Salafi Publications, is connected to a mosque on Wright Street and a secondary school. Although he welcomed the idea of assisting me in contacting participants for my research, he warned that due to the negative media portrayals of Salafis and the growing suspicion within the community, individuals may hesitate to participate or may withdraw in the course of the study. For this reason, the risks had to be weighed against the timeframe of the research. On using the label 'Salafi', he quoted al-Albani that it is obligatory to ascribe oneself to Salafism². Al-Albani's justification is presented later in this thesis. He went on to describe himself as a 'pietist' Salafi. He said the Salafis do not have a 'prince' ('*amir*') and instead obey the Qur'an, *Sunnah* and Prophet's companions. He estimated the number of Salafis in the UK to be between 15,000 and 20,000, half of whom were converts, and that the number of attendees of the Eid 2013 prayer in Birmingham was around 4,000. He was critical of Roel Meijer's book *Global Salafism* (2009), and recommended instead a book by Anabel Inge³, as well as Innes Bowen's *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (2014). The mosque's *da'wah* activities included classes for both adults and children, around a dozen weekly free lectures, street stalls, and the use of social media and the Internet. For instance, the website albanico.uk which has a number of al-Albani's writings was developed by Salafi Publications. Classes included English, Somali, French circles and Arabic Qur'an for women, and Saturday classes were exclusively for women. The bookstore publishes 10 to 11 books

² Al-Albani explains this issue in an audio recording. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HGOCX-mUfc> (Accessed: 14 March 14, 2016).

³ In the interview with the researcher, the head of Salafi Bookstore gave the title of Inge's book as M. B. Abdul Wahhab, Saudi Arabia and the Revivalist Movement, but Inge published her research in 2016 as *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*.

per week, he said. He considers propagation of the faith to be important and following the example of the Prophet in winning hearts and minds, while guidance comes from God. Salafi Publications is linked to two other book publishers: the private, non-governmental Dar al-Salam Publishers UK and the Canadian TROID. Similarly to my brief conversation above with the young men operating the *da'wah* table in the city centre, the Salafi Bookstore staff was often engaged in denouncing other Salafis and Muslim sects online. For example, two tweets posted by Abu Iyaad (@AbuIyaadSP) on 1 July 2016 denounced Green Lane Mosque (abbreviated: GLM):

20 years ago UK Salafis began refuting Ihyaa al-Turaath, an Ikhwani organisation who uses wealth to misguide and split Salafi communities.

20 years later, GLM and Luton CTI are in their pockets and serve as platforms for Ihyaa al-Turath to penetrate the UK with their *da'wah*. (Abu Iyaad, 2016)

Although they've operated longer than iERA, the growth of their social media following since the beginning of this research has paled in comparison to iERA's Facebook popularity. Salafi Publications doesn't have official Facebook pages, but their Twitter base has recently overtaken iERA's: they had 26,200 Twitter followers on 31 August 2016 since joining that platform in 2009, compared to iERA's 25,000 (see Table 5.1 in Chapter Five for comparative social media figures).

1.1.3 Encountering iERA's da'wah

In the meantime, I was also conducting online research on conversion and came across numerous *da'wah*-related videos and websites. One of the first videos that I found online was

of a *da'wah* stall in Birmingham New Street set up by the United Kingdom Islamic Mission (UKIM). I had seen their table many times in the city centre – for a long time a fixture along with the Wright Street mosque's – and had taken one of their fliers titled: 'What is the purpose of life?' UKIM had posted several YouTube videos showcasing their *da'wah* work and taking apparent 'live *shahadahs*' (filmed conversions): The videos only showed individuals repeating the *shahadah* as it was read and translated to them. Through these videos I came across a *da'wah* training session organized by UKIM and presented by a speaker named Hamza Tzortzis. The speaker explained a step-by-step template to giving *da'wah*. As I later learned, he was presenting the GORAP template developed by iERA, further discussed below. I became intrigued by this approach and the *da'wah* themes that were being presented.

As the research progressed I decided to narrow the scope of the research. I therefore started focusing on online *da'wah* websites and videos, and found that I was repeatedly coming across iERA's Mission Dawah project. The project had a significant following on Facebook in the hundreds of thousands at the time, and had developed several online videos for *da'wah* training. By contrast, the Wright Street mosque had less than 10,000 Twitter followers at the time. The Mission Dawah website was colourful and targeted the youths, and members of iERA were very active on Facebook. Absent were any forms of explicit sectarian arguments. Additionally, the public availability of iERA's texts and videos online was suitable for exploring.

Salafism's appeal continued to intrigue me, but I decided to reverse the initial research question. Instead of questioning why converts were choosing Salafi Islam, I began to wonder:

how were Salafi activists marketing Islam to the public? I found that there was a scarcity of analyses of Salafi *da'wah* discourses to answer this question. The *da'wah* given to me in the city centre contained several examples of miraculous scientific revelations in the Qur'an, and it was something I had been familiar with, for I had encountered this narrative numerous times before while living in Yemen. I was given various videos and leaflets, and I also picked up my own leaflets in San'a on the themes of science in the Qur'an. Therefore, I wondered whether it was being used in the UK as well. However, what I hadn't seen in Yemen is the Cosmological Argument, probably because questioning God's existence was not done openly in that country. While the Internet had many websites and videos dedicated to *da'wah* and counter-*da'wah*, there was little scholarship on *da'wah* themes and the online debates and arguments taking place in this area. Choosing to focus on iERA was for two reasons: first, its works and videos appeared often in Internet search results as I looked for websites on conversion to Islam and, later, on *da'wah*; second, I soon discovered that, despite the seeming online popularity of this charity, it had ventured out slightly too enthusiastically with its exegesis on embryological revelations in the Qur'an, resulting in a very public outcome.

1.2 Research Questions

As the original focus of this thesis was on conversion experiences, it began with the following questions: Why do White British converts to Salafi Islam appear to abandon their British identity? And how does a Salafi interpretation of Islam define their new, faith-based identity? As discussed above, when the focus of the research shifted to the other side of conversion, i.e. proselytism, the question became whether Salafi discourse had an influence on the significant identity change of converts: What narratives do Salafis present in their proselytism to the

various audiences in the UK? What doctrine do they base their arguments on? However, a closer look at iERA's discourse did not show an explicit doctrine. This is not to say that iERA's discourse does not stem from a doctrinal lens, as there are hints towards a Salafi leaning, such as the emphasis on *tawhid*. But iERA's focus on the foundations of Islam ensures the organisation's appeal to the widest possible audience. Subsequently, learning more about iERA's debacle with the Qur'anic embryology narrative raised the question of how the charity tried unsuccessfully to re-package and market it in the context of the UK. Thus, it became interesting to investigate how iERA constructed its *da'wah* narratives, and the extent of the influence of external constructions (Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Atheists) on iERA's constructions – that is, the dialectical relationship between iERA and external constructions (Hjelm, 2014, p. 109). Another question of interest was regarding the reasons why iERA used those two constructs. While textual/output analysis alone limits the possibility to answer this second question, an overview of the context within which iERA operates as well as clues from various iERA statements help to better understand it.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Rationale: Why social constructionism?

Determining a theoretical framework for this thesis was not a linear process. Discursive theories were initially examined; they mainly focused on discourse and gender, power, ideology or conversation analysis, among others. None explicitly developed an approach towards religious discourse, or more specifically, proselytical discourse.

Initially, a preliminary examination of the data, namely the discourse used by iERA in their *da'wah* videos, led to a possibility of using Teun Van Dijk's work (1995 and 1997) on discourse and ideology. The reason being that the guiding research question, as discussed above, was whether an ideology informed the discourse and, subsequently, the appeal of that ideology to the audience. But as the theory and the preliminary data were examined, it became clear that iERA was not explicitly proselytising a specific interpretation of Islam – although it did so implicitly – but a more generic, or normative, Islam. The exploration of Van Dijk's approach was therefore not altogether unhelpful in this respect.

The research thus moved on to collecting and examining the data to find out whether specific narratives would emerge in iERA's *da'wah* discourse. This search yielded two important narratives, among several. The first was iERA's scientific re-interpretation of the description of the embryo in Qur'anic verses; the second, iERA's use of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. These two narratives became significantly interesting, as they were both controversial. In the first case, iERA's handling of the embryology narrative resulted in such a strong online backlash, from both atheists as well as Muslims, that iERA had to mostly abandon the narrative. In the case of the cosmological argument, iERA's Hamza Tzortzis was accused of plagiarising the developer of this argument, American Baptist apologist William Lane Craig (b. 1949 CE)⁴, and subsequently apologised. However, it has not completely given up both narratives, as will be discussed later. These two narratives thus informed the theoretical framework for this study. In both cases, iERA constructed the embryo and cosmological narratives from various previous sources, and they will be examined in two dedicated chapters.

⁴ Craig is the founder of ReasonableFaith.com, an online Christian apologetic resource.

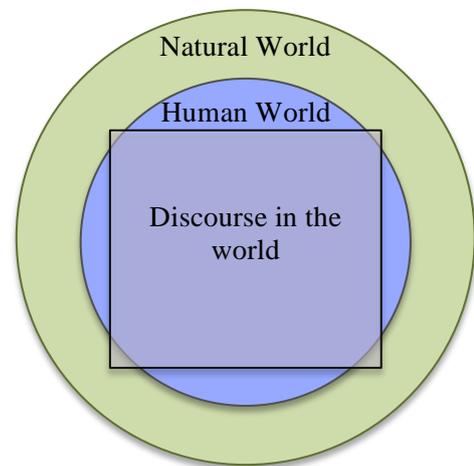
1.3.2 On Social Constructionisms

Since the publication of *The Social Construction of Reality*, theories of social constructionism exploded and resulted in what Titus Hjelm (2014) calls social constructionisms, in the plural. He describes three main features of a constructionist approach: the human world is historically and culturally contingent; constructs are the result of an historical and interactive process; and it has a liberating quality because definitions can be altered (p. 4). The approach further uncovers what the human world is (ontological function), how knowledge of the human world is constructed (epistemological function), and from these it then argues for social change through altering the constructs (critical function). It also has an additional methodological function to analyse the construction process (Hjelm, 2014, p. 4). Furthermore, Hjelm (p. 7) highlights four main traditions of social constructionism: Berger and Luckmann, constructionist research related to social problems and to social psychology, and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

The process of becoming human is an interrelationship between human biology and the environment. In contrast with other mammals, human biology does not delimit our world. Berger and Luckmann (1991) term this as world-openness, in contrast to other mammals' world-closedness. The human environment is then 'both a natural and a human one' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 66). How humans interact with and understand the larger natural world is based on social exchange and is constructed. This position, which Hjelm (2014) calls 'discourse in the world', claims that 'discourse has an effect on the human world but that there are aspects of that world that are independent of us talking about it. [...] [M]ostly the

natural world keeps working regardless of our thinking and talking about it' (pp. 88-9). Figure 1.1 below adapted from Hjelm illustrates this:

Figure 1.1



1.3.3 Knowledge is socially constructed

Peter Berger's theories on religion and identity develop social theorists Emile Durkheim's and Max Weber's theories. Unlike Durkheim and earlier sociologists, Berger (1967) does not consider

the individual and society to be entities that are separate from each other; instead, individuals produce the social world (culture, a system of meaning, knowledge) and the social world produces individuals, in a dialectical process. Therefore, the relationship between the two is complex, continuous and based on interaction. Because knowledge is man-made, it is also unstable and prone to change. Society thus faces the challenge of re-establishing this system with each new development and, especially, with each new generation.

In their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991) developed an anti-essentialist approach to sociological study. Human nature exists only in an anthropological sense, and is not determined biologically (p. 67). They argued that reality is constructed by individuals together; that is, knowledge, including common sense knowledge, is created and sustained by social interaction. Knowledge is a social product, but in turn it is 'a factor in social change' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 104). This is done in three processes: externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. Externalisation occurs when people act or interact in some way. Their interactions reinforce their ideas or beliefs about reality and

produce systems of meaning about their world. Humans also produce social stability and social order through externalisation, which ensure their survival in an otherwise chaotic environment. As people repeat the thoughts or actions over time, the systems of meaning become objective truths, or taken-for-granted knowledge, so that by the next generation the source of this process is absent or forgotten, and the system is understood to be an objective reality. Then it is internalised and subsequently taught to others, e.g. future generations, where it is absorbed into their reality (Burr, 1995, p. 10).

1.3.4 How reality is objectivated

Institutions are an important part of objectifying the social world and its systems of meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Institutionalisation is characterized by habituation, typification and reciprocity. It occurs when meanings and actions are repeated in a pattern which economises the effort and the thinking behind them (habituation). Habituation narrows down the choices that humans have to make, liberating them from what Berger and Luckmann describe as the 'burden of "all those decisions"' (p. 71) when undertaking repeated, habitual activities or behaviours, thereby offering psychological relief as well as the energy and ability to focus on important decision-making when needed:

And by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, it frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasions. In other words, the background of habituated activity opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation.

In terms of the meanings bestowed by man upon his activity, habituation makes it unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step. (p. 71)

By its nature institutionalisation is a process that resists the chaos of the human world. By economizing on the effort to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, institutionalisation facilitates innovation and deliberation. I agree with Berger on this point but only to an extent, for institutionalisation can also restrict innovation or allow only institutionally sanctioned innovation. Innovation here is understood to mean new knowledge, actions, or behaviours that require decision-making, or deliberation. The adverse effect of institutionalisation, particularly where conformity is expected and enforced, is that innovation is viewed with suspicion and at times can only proceed with the approval and regulation of its enforcers⁵. An example of this will be discussed in Chapter Five. The repeated actions or meanings also make them more accessible and predictable to others when shared (typification), which in turn prompts others to interact in a certain, predictable manner (reciprocal). This is best understood when examining social roles, which institutionalisation creates. A person undertakes various roles on a daily basis: parent, sibling, professional, friend, neighbour, and so forth. The various roles facilitate interactions between members of the same institution in that the individual is expected to behave in certain, predictable ways within each role, in 'predefined patterns of conduct' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 72). For example, when a teacher goes into a classroom, their role dictates their interactions with students, and vice versa. It is considered disruptive, confusing or unethical if the teacher or the student behave in a way that is uncharacteristic of their roles. That is because, by allowing for predictability and shared meanings, institutionalisation maximizes social order and stability. Subsequently, any typification that prompts reciprocation in a repeated pattern, or habitualisation, is an institution.

⁵ Berger and Luckmann also discuss the negative consequences of institutionalisation, such as the limits on individuals and inertia (p. 135).

As long as all involved persons accept the institutions that arise out of their interactions, then they gradually become objective truth, to be taken for granted and independently of the persons who were involved in constructing them. They change from ‘There we go again’ (habitualisation) to ‘This is how these things are done’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 77). However, more effort would be required to objectivate reality should some individuals not subscribe to the institutional meanings or actions, or when these are to be transmitted to the next generation. It is usually in the latter case that the transfer of institutions can be more problematic. That is because, when persons together give rise to institutionalised behaviours or actions, they were present during the process and may have even been involved in their construction. However, when the institutions are to be taught to a new generation, they will be taught as ‘This is how these things are done’, where the rationale behind them may have become lost or overlooked; in other words, they are taught as tradition, since they are now perceived to be an objective part of the natural world (reified). Berger and Luckmann (1991) define reification as

the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. (p. 106, italics in original)

Therefore, it may take more to successfully transfer this now-external reality to the new generation, and that ‘more’ is the process of legitimating it. That is because constructs are man-made, not naturally (biologically) an inherent part of being human. They are not ‘biologically given’ as discussed above, but have to be explicitly instructed, along with or

after language instruction (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 70). Language thus plays an important role as a vehicle for the construction of the human world.

1.3.5 Levels of legitimation

Meaning is the first interaction between humans and the world around them. Berger and Luckmann (1991) call it 'first order objectivation' (p. 110). Because they are constructs, objectivations require on-going maintenance and explanations, horizontally across society and vertically across a person's lifetime and subsequent generations. This maintenance is legitimation, and it's a 'second order' objectivation of meaning (p. 110). In other words, they are (new) meanings to explain or justify the first meanings. 'The function of legitimation is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the 'first order' objectivations that have been institutionalised' (p. 110). It tells the person not only the reason to do certain things, but also the reason why things are that way. Thus legitimation is cognitive as well as normative, with knowledge preceding values. Legitimations become necessary when institutions become problematic. But similarly to institutions, since symbolic universes are theoretical constructs, they can be constantly problematic (pp. 123-4) either when they are to be passed on to the next generation as seen above or when they encounter other symbolic universes (pp. 123-6). Therefore, the authors argue that legitimations become necessary to the extent that symbolic universes become problematic and have to be maintained. Additionally, by ordering not only history and the world but also everyday roles, symbolic universes may instil even simple everyday interactions with 'profound significance' (p. 117).

For analytical purposes, Berger and Luckmann (1991) divide legitimation into four levels, but empirically they can overlap. The first level immediately occurs with language. This level of legitimation is incipient as soon as a concept is constructed linguistically. Because it's at the linguistic level, it's pre-theoretical. Linguistic objectivations at this level are transmitted, such as vocabulary. They are simple affirmations: 'This is how things are done' (p. 112). The next level is a basic form of theory-making. Explanations at this level are pragmatic and directly connected to concrete actions. Some examples include proverbs, legends, moral maxims, and folk tales. The next level of legitimation consists of more advanced theoretical propositions and are entrusted to specialists. Legitimations at this level are beyond the pragmatic and become 'pure theory'. Because theorising at this level may not have any immediate or concrete application, third-level legitimations may become their own institutions, which in turn require their own legitimations to maintain them. Finally, the final level of legitimation is termed 'symbolic universes' (p. 113). They define realities beyond the immediate, everyday ones. Berger and Luckmann (1991) explain the symbolic universe as:

the matrix of *all* socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe. What is particularly important, the marginal situations of the life of the individual [...] are also encompassed by the symbolic universe. Such situations are experienced in dreams and fantasies as provinces of meaning detached from everyday life, and endowed with a peculiar reality of their own. Within the symbolic universe these detached realms of reality are integrated within a meaningful totality that 'explains', perhaps also justifies them (p. 114).

The authors explain that the concept of symbolic universes is close in meaning to Durkheim's concept of religion (p. 226). Hjelm likens them to 'worldviews' (2014, p. 27) Additionally, to understand symbolic universes, it is important to understand the history of how they were constructed. Because symbolic universes are theoretical, they require their own universe-

maintenance, which functions in the same way as institutional legitimations, except without the first, incipient level since it is pre-theoretical (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 123).

Legitimations are ‘mostly a further elaboration, on a higher level’ of theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 127).

Berger and Luckmann (1991) give four examples of universe-maintaining legitimations: mythology, theology, philosophy and science. Mythology is a more naïve form of legitimation, since its explanations are shared by lay people as well as the experts and does not require theorising. The other three legitimations are more advanced, in that the experts or specialists may formulate theories that are removed from the lay people and which may not be common knowledge. Thus the distinction between naïve and sophisticated legitimations lies in the degree to which they are taken for granted (p. 123):

Unlike mythology, the other three historically dominant forms of conceptual machinery [theology, philosophy and science] became the property of specialist elites, whose bodies of knowledge were increasingly removed from the common knowledge of society at large. Modern science is an extreme step in this development, and in the secularisation and sophistication of universe-maintenance. *Science not only completes the removal of the sacred from the world of everyday life, but removes universe-maintaining knowledge as such from that world.* [...] Put more simply, the ‘lay’ member of society no longer knows how his universe is to be conceptually maintained. (1991, p. 130, my italics)

1.3.6 Knowledge is culturally and historically contingent

Importantly, the implication of institutions is social control and historicity (p. 72). Hjelm defines historicity as not only that something took place, but also that ‘ideas do not pop up out of nowhere, but are products of people’s thinking and communicating in a sequence of time’

(2014, p. 4). He notes that constructionists 'pay careful attention to the *social processes* in which the human world is constructed... the idea of process assumes that the construction of ideas, for example, takes place in stages in history' (p. 4, italics in original). Berger and Luckmann argue that institutions cannot be understood well without knowledge of the historical development from which they came into being (1991, p. 72). And in this dialectical relationship between the individual and society, the habitual actions and behaviours of individuals that give rise to their institutionalisation subsequently establish patterns of behaviour that serve to control the individuals. This characteristic of control doesn't only arise from the enforcers of the institutions but is inherent in the institutionalisation process (p. 72) and can be found in all societies, although how effectively the institution exercises this control varies. Thus, '[t]o say that a segment of human activity has been institutionalised is already to say that this segment of human activity has been subsumed under social control' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 73).

1.3.7 Critique of social constructionism

Criticism of social constructionism has been made both by its detractors as well as from within by constructionists. The main external criticism of constructionism is its inability to address particular questions. Internal critique, on the other hand, attempts to define how constructionism can be a social science. Hjelm (2014) points to the ontological premises of social constructionism as the main flashpoint of disagreement (p. 88). The spectrum of contention extends from the 'world in discourse' on one end – the relativist position – to the 'discourse in the world' on the other – the realist position. The 'world in discourse' position holds that the world can only be understood through discourse. On the other end, the

‘discourse in the world’ position argues that only the human world is understood through discourse, but that there are aspects of the natural world that are independent of this discourse. Consequently, the position one takes along this spectrum has implications for human agency.

The world in discourse

A criticism of social constructionism comes from an article by Woolgar and Pawluch (1985a) attacking the approach as ‘ontological gerrymandering’:

First, authors identify certain conditions or behaviours. Second, they identify various definitions (or claims) made about these conditions (or behaviours). Third, the authors stress the variability of the definitions vis-à-vis the constancy of the conditions to which they relate. They imply that since the condition does not vary, variations in the definition of the condition must result from the social circumstances of the definers, rather than from the condition itself (1985a, quoted in Hjelm, 2014, p. 90).

Thus scholars’ assumptions about the objectivity of those conditions are just as much constructions as the conditions themselves. This leads to relativism. Edwards et al. (1995) responded to this criticism with the examples of furniture and death. The physical existence of furniture is evidence that things exist independently of discourse. And death, particularly reprehensible death caused through genocide or murder, is morally ‘real’ (p. 92). Realists respond that in such cases detached relativism makes evil possible (Hjelm, 2014, p. 92).

Another example is gravity. Hjelm (2014) explains:

It is one thing to say that the *meaning* of, say, gravity is dependent on our ways of talking about it – a position that all constructionists would happily embrace. It is another for me to jump out of a sixth story window and assume

a safe landing because I'm shouting 'I'm not falling!' on the way down. (p. 93, italics in original)

For example, in the embryology chapter, the verses of the Qur'an describing the embryo appear to exist objectively, while the different interpretations vary according to the definers' needs, as in the examples of iERA and Bucaille. Thus, even though humans can only understand their world through discursive constructs, their constructs can still be tested against the real world, which exists independently of them.

Discourse in the world

Because they study oral and written discourses, constructionist theories are often criticised for not being able to answer why-questions (Hjelm, 2014, p. 93). Their assumption is that discourse influences thoughts about the world, but they seldom reveal the mechanisms of how discourse does that.

Where is the self?

The above spectrum of contention subsequently raises the question of human agency. If the human world is a product of society, then how much agency do individuals have in it? And how does social constructionism account for individual subjectivity, differences, thoughts, motivations, and so on? The self would seem to disappear in a socially constructed human world. It becomes 'an effect of language, fragmented and distributed across discourses and interactions' (Burr, 1995, p. 179). Thus the relationship between the individual and society

becomes problematic. Is it bottom-up, where the individual pre-exists society, or top-down, where society pre-exists the individual?

If the relationship is bottom-up, then society is the result of individual decisions and actions. This preserves human agency but does not explain homogeneity and order in society. Burr (1995) asks, 'Why should millions of individuals independently choose to get married, have children, decorate their houses in similar ways or wear similar kinds of clothes?' (p. 182) On the other hand, if the relationship is top-down, then it does away with human agency or turns it into an illusion. Human choices become a product of their own society's values and norms. Critiquing social constructionism from the perspective of psychology, Burr notes that a socially constructed discourse means the death of the subject. Ian Parker (1999) argues that social constructionist theories of psychology need to reincorporate agency and subjectivity.

Ontological premises of this thesis

Hjelm (2014, p. 109) advocates that in any constructionist work, it is important to define the ontological premises. This thesis does not subscribe to anti-realism, i.e. the position that all of reality is socially constructed and, thus, that there isn't a real 'world out there' (Hjelm, p. 93) to be understood empirically; in other words, that all of reality is socially constructed. In the relativist view, since humans can only understand and experience their world through language, then reality depends entirely on constructs. This is the 'world in discourse' (Hjelm, p. 88). The next question in the realist approach is, what is specifically being constructed? If it's not all of reality, then what? The way that humans make sense of their world is primarily

through language. Thus, the focus of this thesis is the construction of narratives in iERA's *da'wah*.

1.3.8 Theological framework

The theological frame of this thesis is limited to Sunni Islam due to the fact that iERA works within this tradition. The core texts that inform Sunni exegesis are the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the four main schools of thought, and the following authoritative *tafsirs*: al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), al-Zamakhshari (d. 1143 CE), al-Baidawi (d. 1260 CE), al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE), Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) and al-Jalalayn (1459 and 1505 CE). Often the later *tafsirs* are very similar to the earlier ones, e.g. to that of al-Tabari, due to *taqlid*, or the process of not imitating the traditional exegeses.

1.3.9 Use of the term 'Narrative'

The term 'narrative' is defined by Abbot (2002) as the 'representation of an event or a series of events' (p. 11). The larger definition of 'narrative' is adopted in this study, which involves the triangle: event -> representation -> audience (Abbott, p. 15). Additionally, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that a narrative should be viewed in terms of the functions that it serves for the teller' (Bryman, 2001, p. 401).

1.4 Method used in this study

1.4.1 Data collection

This research was informed by Berger and Luckmann's social construction of knowledge. To explore if and how iERA constructed these two main narratives, several of the organisation's works were selected for examination. A development in the narratives was not the initial focus of this thesis and was not immediately apparent, because the aim was to explore whether iERA was promoting a particular doctrine in its GORAP discourse. However, the evolution of the two narratives began to gradually appear, and it became interesting to examine this process. To survey this development, it was important to also to compare a selection of iERA's works on the same topic.

Data collection began with transcribing the seven training videos of iERA's GORAP. Subsequent research highlighted two main narratives: embryology revelation in the Qur'an (*I'jaz 'Ilmi*) and the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. Tzortzis has published essays on his website to support the various arguments in the videos. For iERA's use of the embryo narrative, I searched for the deleted document on the topic authored by Tzortzis, and the search also yielded a critical document developed by anonymous atheists online to counter this narrative. Other relevant works on the topic were a later essay by Tzortzis advocating an alternative approach and the GORAP video of 2014.

Thus, the works examined for the *I'jaz* narrative were:

1. A 2011 document by Tzortzis with an exegesis of Qur'an 23:12-15,
2. A blog post by Tzortzis proposing a different approach,
3. iERA's 2014 video with an overview of GORAP.

For the *Kalam* narrative, a combination of videos and texts were also collected:

1. A GORAP video featuring Green, posted in 2012,
2. An undated essay (after 2011) posted on Tzortzis' blog: 'The Qur'anic Argument for God's Existence',
3. A talk by Tzortzis filmed and published in 2013,
4. A GORAP video by Tzortzis from 2014.

1.4.2 Data analysis

To examine the narrative of scientific revelations in the Qur'an, I conducted an analysis of iERA's online texts in two genres (a blog post as well as transcripts of training videos) and the text of Maurice Bucaille in this area. I further consulted classical exegeses on the same Qur'anic verse in order to find out to what extent modern interpretations might depart from the classical in light of modern science and, if they do, how they construct the narrative through their re-interpretations. I also investigated the historical development of the inimitability of the Qur'an in order to put the scientific miracles narrative into context.

A document written by Tzortzis in 2011 provided an exegesis of the Qur'anic description of the embryo in verses 23:12-15, in which he argued that the description was scientifically

accurate and consistent with modern knowledge. iERA thus used this verse to argue for the divine nature of the Qur'an and for the prophethood of Muhammad. A controversy then followed the online publication of this document, to which Tzortzis reacted in the subsequent redrafting of the work in question before finally removing it altogether and replacing it with an alternative approach. The training video (iERA, 2014b) reflects this change in discourse that distances iERA from directly using *I'jaz 'Ilmi* in their arguments. To find out how this narrative was initially constructed by Tzortzis, I transcribed the videos and compared them with Tzortzis' work on embryology to study the organisation's inter-discursive texts. In addition, I compared other texts on the same subject, such as Bucaille's work, to contextualize the subject and to survey its inter-textual aspects. The reason that Bucaille's text was chosen is because of Bucaille's pivotal role in propelling this narrative forward and in targeting a Western audience, as will be discussed below. It was also relevant to find out to what extent the interpretations departed from or remained close to authoritative traditional exegeses, each case with its own implications. When interpretations diverged, it was interesting to see what processes were used and to what end.

To examine iERA's use of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, I examined William Lane Craig's development of this argument in his book *On Guard* (2010), a practical manual for Christian apologists, and compared it with how iERA adapted the argument for *da'wah* to argue for the existence of a deity. Tzortzis was accused of plagiarising Craig, and he subsequently apologised in a post on his personal blog (Tzortzis, 2013b). Craig is aware of the plagiarism⁶.

⁶ In a conversation with the researcher, March 2015, University of Birmingham.

1.5 A survey of research on *da'wah* narratives

The purpose of this review of the literature is twofold, to identify gaps in the knowledge on the topic of *da'wah* narratives, and to identify an appropriate research method for this thesis.

1.5.1 *Da'wah*

Surveying the existing research on *da'wah* yields very little in the way of examining *da'wah* narratives, except for hermeneutical approaches to Qur'anic verses that are not within the context of proselytism. A notable book on *da'wah* is Larry Poston's *Islamic Da'wah in the West* (1992), which surveys the different proselytism paradigms in North America by Muslim organisations from overseas. Poston examines in particular the *da'wah* approaches of Abu 'Ala' al-Mawdudi and Hassan al-Banna, whom he calls the 'pioneers of modern Islamic pietism' (p. 64). He borrows the term Pietist from Christianity and sees Sufism as a similar movement within Islam to Christianity's move towards Pietism. He describes Christian Pietist missiology as follows (pp. 59-60):

1. An emphasis on individual conversion, personal experience and spiritual life rather than preoccupation with liturgy and religious institutions;
2. An activist approach to spiritual growth instead of conformity to orthodox doctrines;
3. Promoting a separation between the spiritual and the political, 'the effect of this being the ability to enter a target society at a level other than that occupied by the controlling agencies of that society';

4. 'An eschatological motivation' more concerned with the salvation of the individual than the nation.

Poston links al-Banna's pietism to his Sufi background in discussing his strategy of starting with the Muslim individual by bringing them to the true Islam, then the family, then the *umma* (Muslim community), and finally the Islamic state (p. 67). Al-Mawdudi also wanted to reform Muslims' faith and practices and his *da'wah* approach began with Muslim individuals. He began to address political and social questions only after the establishment of Jama'at-i Islami. Al-Mawdudi was also raised in a (strict) Sufi household. What they have in common is their bottom-up strategy, which Poston calls 'internal-personal' as opposed to the top-down strategy, 'external-institutional' (p. 49). These are further discussed later in the chapter. This approach is based on the prophetic model: Muhammad began his mission, as shown in the Mecca verses, preaching the basic foundations of monotheism, and as the community of his followers grew, his mission became increasingly concerned with ritual, practice and law in the Madinah period. Poston then goes on to look at how *da'wah* was institutionalised in North America. He also attempts to explore the profiles and experiences of converts, but unfortunately it was 'met with such suspicion that for the most part, it had to be abandoned' (p. 8).

While Poston's book contributes significantly to our knowledge of *da'wah* in North America, what it lacks is the identification of the Salafi movement. Poston never uses the term 'Salafi', even though he was advised by Muslim experts, and instead opts for using the terms Pietist and reformist. This could be understandable as his work was published in 1992, i.e. before

Salafism as a movement became better known in the West, which began to take place later in that decade.

1.5.2 Scientific miracles in the Qur'an

Campanini (2005) explores how a philosophical hermeneutic approach can be used to interpret the Qur'anic verses related to cosmological and natural descriptions. He adopts Hans Gadamer's perspective that the text is a fixed linguistic object that has its own rules, and the interpreter brings to the text their own presuppositions that result in a personal interpretation.

He provides an overview of the three positions concerning the relationship between science and the Qur'an: complete agreement between them, partial agreement, and no agreement.

Scholars have taken different stances in each case. Proponents of the complete agreement between science and the Qur'an believe that since the Qur'an is for all times and all people, it contains all of human knowledge and, therefore, scientific knowledge can be extracted from it. Subsequently they believe that the revelations in the Qur'an are scientific miracles because Muhammad and his contemporaries did not have that knowledge. Additionally, any apparent contradictions between the Qur'an and modern science are due to human errors or wrong theories. When this position insists on a literalist reading of the text, it can restrict scientific interpretations, for example if the text is understood to describe the Earth as flat then the interpreter cannot probe any further (p. 50). For example, Saudi preacher Bandar al-Khaybari recently responded to a question about the Earth's rotation by insisting that the Earth is

stationary and the sun revolves around it⁷. Those who reject any agreement between the text and science defend this stance by arguing that religion and science deal with very different topics and purposes. The third position, fundamentally a reconciliatory one, argues that the Qur'an is a spiritual guidebook rather than a book of science. There remain for this position the verses that are related to the natural world, and subsequently its proponents believe that they are meant to provoke thinking and contemplation of human existence and the relationship with the divine. There are disagreements within this group as to what extent the Qur'an can be claimed to be scientifically miraculous.

Campanini discusses two scholars' views on the topic: Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE) and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010 CE). Ibn Rushd favoured philosophical hermeneutics based on a linguistic, not esoteric, interpretation that reconciles the seeming contradictions between the text and human knowledge. Campanini (2005) writes about Ibn Rushd's method:

Language displays the being as it is, but the different sides of being are captured by the different ways in which language can be understood. In this sense, *the role of the interpreter is central*: it is the interpreter who decodes the meanings of the text and its linguistic structures. Ibn Rushd, on a semantic level, regards as equivalent two propositions so apparently in contradiction as 'the world is created' and 'the world is eternal'. These propositions are equally true because they are only expressed in different linguistic ways. (pp. 57-8, my italics)

Therefore, Campanini places Ibn Rushd in the camp of the Qur'an and science being in partial agreement. For Ibn Rushd, science and revelation are different expressions of the same Truth, and therefore do not contradict each other. His position, however, inevitably results in the necessity of interpreting the text allegorically when differences between the two do surface.

⁷ English subtitles provided by MEMRI: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9Jp_XCvVto (Accessed: 19 February 2015).

On the other hand, Egyptian liberal theologian Abu Zayd argued for the historicity of the text, which means that it can only be interpreted linguistically and therefore not as a carrier of scientific truths. However, an exegesis of the text is not simply a linguistic analysis but a 'hermeneutical circle' (Campanini p. 59), or a dialectic in Berger's terms, between the interpreted text and the interpreter. Campanini concludes that the above three hermeneutical approaches to the text do not necessarily have to be contradictory, since the intentions of the interpreter lead to a plurality of meanings (p. 60). Finally, he quotes Mu'tazili proponent Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935 CE) on the validity of a plurality of interpretations:

There is no true or false interpretation, right or wrong understanding. There are only different efforts to approach the text from different motivations... There is no one interpretation of a text... An interpretation of a text is essentially pluralistic. (p. 60)

Campanini and others attempt to reconcile the contradictions between the Qur'anic and modern scientific knowledge, as well as between the three different positions above. His argument for a plurality of meanings of a text is valid. Campanini fails, however, to be persuasive on how a reader who is a believer can achieve certainty in their faith if the text is not perceived as an absolute and does not provide such certainty.

The approach could lead to a democratisation and personalisation of scriptural interpretation. While Salafi scholars encourage Muslims to read and find their proofs in the Qur'an, their aim is not a plurality of meanings, but the opposite: the homogenisation of religious beliefs and practices. In *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), Berger argued that Protestantism led to secularisation. Protestantism aimed to return to Biblical Christianity by removing intermediaries between the individual and the text. Its leaders encouraged Christians to read

the Bible, the Word of God, and this reduced the individual's relationship with the divine to the text, which proved to be a fragile connection. This increasingly secularised life as religion receded from the public to the personal and private, and rationality gradually eroded the textual connection.

Historicity of the Qur'anic text

On the other hand, Abu Zayd argues that 'the text is a cultural and historical product' (quoted in Campanini, 2005, p. 58). In addition, Abu Zayd iterates a less popular opinion than the Muslim mainstream:

in the last analysis, religious texts are simply linguistic texts. This means that they belong to a well-determined cultural structure, that they have been produced in agreement with the laws of the culture which gave birth to them and whose language represents correctly. (quoted in Campanini, p. 58)

Campanini further asserts that '[o]ne of the most serious issues contemporary Islamic culture is facing in its confrontation with modernity is the problem of the historicisation of the Qur'an and Qur'anic hermeneutics' (p. 59).

An important book on the topic of scientific revelations in the Qur'an is by an opponent of the approach, Algerian Muslim astrophysicist Nidhal Guessoum (b. 1960 CE). In *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (2011), Guessoum critiques the methodology of proponents of the scientific miracles narrative and provides his own approach, inspired by Muslim scholar Ibn Rushd (Averroes). He questions the reasons

behind the popularity of the *I'jaz 'Ilmi* trend in the Muslim world and asks important questions:

What kind of understanding does the Muslim world have of science today? What level of critical thinking and analysis do we find in the Muslim society? How eager are Muslim peoples today to turn their general defeat in all fields into a position of precedence and superiority and to convince themselves that their religion and civilisation are indeed true – in the absolute sense – and superior? (p. 166)

Khair (2000) provides a useful classification of scholars according to their stances regarding the scientific miracles in the Qur'an. They are categorised as: the modernists, the advocates, the rejectionists, and the moderates (pp. 24-32). The modernists advocate a reinterpretation of religious concepts regarding modern science and human knowledge and appear to be influenced by Western ideas. This perspective was first proposed by Sayyid Ahmed Khan (d. 1898 CE). The advocates support a scientific exegesis of the Qur'an and include M. Rashid Rida (d. 1905 CE). As their name implies, the rejectionists are opposed to this approach that is seen to do injustice to both science and religion. Bint al-Shati' (d. 1998 CE) is among the rejectionists. Khair thinks that they tend to be supported by traditionalists; however, his view was not confirmed by this study, as evidenced by Salafi scholar Abdul Majid al-Zindani (b. 1942 CE) and the Saudi Commission of the Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an. Finally, the moderates, such as Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949 CE), take a conciliatory position between the supporters and opponents. They do not object to the use of science to better understand the Qur'an; however, they are of the view that interpretations must adhere to the methodologies of exegesis. Khair, furthermore, discusses Qutb's (d. 1966 CE) position on this issue as a moderate supporter. Khair rightly points to the difference between the Islamic experience with science with that of Christianity's, in that medieval Islamic scholars pursued the sciences to

better understand the Qur'an's signs. However, in the modern era, and perhaps due to the strong influence of modern science, the proponents of *I'jaz 'Ilmi* are less interested in discovering the natural world than in either validating particular religious beliefs or reconciling apparently contradictory claims by science and religion, exacerbated by a literalist reading of the scripture. This issue will be further explored in this thesis. Khir offers a helpful recommendation that scholars differentiate between exegesis and commentaries. The first would provide explanations particularly related to context or language. The second, on the other hand, could present opinions built upon the exegesis. Khir comments: 'If scientific interpretations are viewed in the light of human constructions, there will be no objection in principle against them' (p. 33), but their validity will depend on their methods and evidence. The approach that is undertaken in this study is that interpretations in the area of *I'jaz 'Ilmi* are constructs.

Abu-Milha (2003) adopts Khir's four categories above towards the scientific miracles trend. He provides an overview of scientific knowledge in pre-Islamic civilisations and explores the possible venues through which they may have reached the Arabs. They may have been through trade, with the resulting exchange of knowledge and culture. Another possible channel was from the Hellenistic world through Nestorian missionary activity among Arabs and from Byzantine-Greek culture through Monophysite Christian missionary work. War among neighbouring Byzantine, Persian and Abyssinian powers as well as the migration or displacement of populations could have been another channel through which Arabs may have encountered more advanced knowledge about the natural world than their own. Abu-Milha does not explore the academy or hospital of the Persian Jundishapur that some historians claim to have had some influence on the Arabs' scientific knowledge through the physician al-

Harith bin Kalada (Fiori, 2015). Further research into this institution would be useful to better understand the context of the early Islamic period. iERA, as will be seen in Chapter Three, has attempted to deny such a link with Jundishapur. Furthermore, Abu-Milha highlights that the Pythagoras (d. c. 495 BCE) had argued that the Earth's shape is spherical and that the moon reflects the sun's light, and Thales (d. c. 546 BCE) reached the conclusion that water was at the origin of living beings. Abu-Milha undertakes interesting work through translation theory to explore to what extent scientific exegeses remain faithful to the Arabic linguistic meanings in the Qur'an. His purpose is only to explore how those meanings were expanded to incorporate scientific knowledge, and how this process masks the original meanings for non-Arabic speakers. Through comparing 25 verses related to the Creation, Abu-Milha finds that Arberry's translation is the closest reflection of the Arabic text, followed by that of Shakir, then Yusuf Ali and Pickthall concurrently, and lastly al-Hilali and Khan.

Guessoum (2011) critiques a prominent propagator in the Middle East of the scientific miracles (*I'jaz 'Ilmi*), Egyptian geologist and television preacher Zaghoul al-Naggar (b. 1933 CE). He outlines (pp. 156-7) al-Naggar's ten guiding principles, worth listing here briefly:

1. A good understanding of the Qur'an and the rules of the Arabic language;
2. Consulting the commentaries on the Qur'an, such as the reasons for the revelations and the *hadiths*;
3. Grouping the scattered verses on a topic before working on a new interpretation;
4. Avoiding exaggerating interpretations or squaring circles, so to speak, in order to reconcile them with modern science;
5. Avoiding questions around *ghayb*, the unseen which is exclusively known to God;
6. Interpreters should limit themselves to their own areas of scientific expertise;
7. Maintaining accuracy and intellectual honesty;
8. Using only established scientific facts, not uncertain theories, except in the cases of Cosmology and Creation; significantly, Zaghoul here argues that Qur'anic statements on these issues can be elevated to established truth because they are not directly observable;

9. Distinguishing between a scientifically-informed exegesis, which relies on yet uncertain scientific knowledge, and the scientific miracles, which are based on established scientific facts;
10. Respecting the tradition of previous scholars.

Even though most of the principles are generally accepted, Guessoum is critical that proponents of *I'jaz* do not adhere to them. For example, al-Naggar himself breaks the sixth principle by delving into the topic of embryology in the Qur'an while he himself is a geologist. Guessoum also advocates a plurality of meanings for the text without either burdening it with *I'jaz 'Ilmi*, or denying that it can carry new meanings other than those of the Prophet and the companions (see, for example, p. 160). Guessoum proposes that the Qur'an has multiple layers of meaning, it is not wrong, and human knowledge of the natural world changes over time. Any attempt to understand natural descriptions in the Qur'an should take those three principles as a starting point. This approach, again, liberates the Qur'an from literalism and problematic claims and allows believers to have a more personal relationship with it. Therefore, it is constructive for the individual. However, at the level of the institutional construction of knowledge and providing certainty in an uncertain world, this approach will not suffice and will have to be adopted cautiously. It requires a methodology that restrains the enthusiastic exegete, as shall be seen in iERA's handling of the embryo interpretation in Chapter Four. Guessoum acknowledges the challenges of this position. He proposes the possibility of a synthesis of science and religion similar to Ibn Rushd's attempt but admits his inability to formulate one (p. 217). While Guessoum's intentions are admirable, a solution to this dilemma could in fact be the opposite: to separate the two, as religion is more concerned with the personal and spiritual and science with understanding and bettering our world.

1.5.3 Kalam *Cosmological Argument* in Islamic *da'wah*

While research is available on the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, there aren't studies that investigate it in the modern *da'wah* context.

1.6 Notes on Saheeh International's translation of the Qur'an

Saheeh International's translation of the Qur'an (2013) is published by the Saudi-based al-Muntada al-Islami. The full-text along with al-Jalalayn's commentary and other translations are available online (www.quran.com). It includes comments that reflect its Salafi leanings, which is the reason that it was used in this study⁸. For example, a footnote to Qur'an 2:19 expounds on the issue of divine attributes (hearing, sight, hands, anger, being encompassing, etc.) and stresses as 'correct belief' the following, consistent with Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328 CE) views:

Correct Islamic belief requires faith in the existence of these attributes as Allah has described them without applying to them any allegorical meanings or attempting to explain how a certain quality could be (...) and without comparing them to creation or denying that He (...) would have such a quality. (p. 4)

This addendum is not part of the commentary of al-Jalalayn (Al-Siyuti, and al-Mahali, 1505), which is available on Sahih's Qur'an website. In addition, consistently with the stance of the Saudi government on atheism (Withnall, 2014), Saheeh International lists 'disbelief and its imposition on others' – along with terrorism – among the examples of *fitnah* (discord or

⁸ In the analysis of iERA's scientific interpretation, two other translations were also included for comparative purposes.

strife). *Lisan al-Arab*, by contrast, defines *fitnah* as an affliction, a test, an ordeal, disbelief (without mentioning its imposition), and disagreements in opinions (Ibn Manthour, 1290).

1.7 On the terminology 'convert' versus 'revert' and *Fitrah*

The Islamic worldview sees people as born Muslim, with the innate belief (*fitrah*) in God, and that they are taught to be other than Muslim, such as Christian or atheist, by their parents.

This is based on the Qur'anic verse:

So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the *fitrah* of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know. (Qur'an 30:30)

Hadiths in both al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim also repeat it:

Narrated Abu Huraira:

Allah's Messenger said, 'No child is born except on al-Fitrah (Islam) and then his parents make him Jewish, Christian or Magian, as an animal produces a perfect young animal: do you see any part of its body amputated?' Then he [recited,] 'The religion of pure Islamic Faith (Hanifa), (i.e. to worship none but Allah), The pure Allah's Islamic nature with which He (Allah) has created mankind. Let There be no change in Allah's religion (i.e. to join none in Allah's worship). That is the straight religion; but most of men know not...' (Sahih Muslim, Book 30, Hadith 30)

Therefore, some Muslims prefer the English term 'revert to Islam' rather than 'convert' to indicate this return to the innate nature. However, the first use of the term 'revert' in English is

uncertain. Zebiri (2008) explains it in reference to born Muslim reverts as 'Muslims who discover or rediscover their faith' (p. 39). By contrast, in Arabic the common wordings are: 'became Muslim' (*aslama*), 'entered Islam' (*dakhala fil-Islam*), or 'embraced Islam' (*I'tanaqa al-Islam*). The term 'convert' is used in this study.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, iERA is introduced in Chapter Two and situated in the wider context of *da'wah*. For this purpose, the late Saudi Mufti Bin Baz's position on *da'wah* and the qualities of the proselytisers is examined. Chapters Three and Four are similar in structure. In Chapter Three the evolution of the concept of the Qur'an's miraculous nature (*I'jaz al-Qur'an*) is surveyed in order to study the historical contingency of the narrative. In modern times, the trend of Bucaillism is highlighted because it further popularised the narrative internationally. iERA's controversial exegesis of the embryo verses in the Qur'an is then examined, along with atheist and Muslim critics of this approach. The charity's second narrative, the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, is examined in Chapter Four, again with the historical development of the argument until modern times, and criticism of iERA's adoption of the argument by atheist as well as Muslim detractors. An in-depth analysis of both narratives is then undertaken in Chapter Five through the application of social constructionism, with interesting results. Particularly, the process of how iERA constructed each narrative is examined and reveals the dialectic between iERA and its audience. Finally, Chapter Six provides a summary of the research and highlights areas that will be of interest for future research.

1.9 Findings

This thesis was able to investigate how iERA developed its Qur'anic embryo miracles and *Kalam* narratives between 2011 and 2014 through examining a select number of the organisation's essays and videos. Understanding iERA's processes was useful to see how it has built a *da'wah* template that users appreciate for being practical, simple and targeted. In the case of *I'jaz al-Qur'an* (Chapter Three), iERA resorted to a scientific exegesis of Chapter 23 verses 12-15 that describe the development of the embryo. While iERA's methodology was largely faithful to traditional exegeses by starting with the classical definitions of the terms, their commentary then took a significant leap by stretching the meanings to fit contemporary scientific information. Challenges to their work then pressured iERA to revise the document four times between October 2011 and April 2012, before finally deleting it and advocating a different approach by 2013. Similarly, the adoption of William L. Craig's *Kalam* Cosmological Argument was marred by iERA's plagiarism of the American Baptist apologist's work. The investigation into iERA's process revealed that, what began as a simplistic presentation of Craig's more complex template, was modified to bring it more in line to Islamic principles, and particularly, to include Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328 CE) arguments rather than Craig's use of al-Ghazali's (d. 1111 CE)⁹. The changes again reflect interactions with iERA's audience; however, the charity was able to maintain this narrative. iERA has stated in several instances that its goal is to challenge widespread atheist narratives and make a 'rational and positive' case for Islam. Analysing these processes demonstrated how iERA

⁹ Ibn Taymiyya was a medieval conservative, Hanbali theologian and reformist who sought to unify various Muslim factions under a single doctrine that reconciles reason and revelation (Laoust, 2012). He is discussed in greater depth later in this thesis. Al-Ghazali was a theologian, thinker and religious reformer whose works on philosophy had a significant influence on Islamic theology and the incorporation of philosophical methods (Watt, 2012).

tried to do this through the use of modern scientific facts and rational argumentation. An equally important purpose of adopting this approach is to reassure Muslims of their faith while at the same time providing of a sense of purpose through involvement in *da'wah*.

1.10 Limitations

The main drawback of utilising this approach to analysing the construction processes is that it limited the research to how-questions based on the texts and videos. Thus, any attempts to understand the intentions, goals or reasons of iERA's work is restricted to what is available online. Answering why-questions then relies on the context within which iERA works and statements made by Green and Tzortzis. iERA has been forthcoming to an extent about its goals to counter atheist arguments, which was helpful for the analysis. Furthermore, due to the nature of iERA's work online, the Internet was used to find critics of the charity's work. This had to be done cautiously as sources are difficult to verify. However, a positive aspect of the Internet is that it is a record, albeit limited, of events. Thus it was possible to find some of iERA's interactions with its detractors and challengers. Further research, e.g. interviews, would be useful to fully understand the iERA's reasons and processes.

1.11 Conclusion

This introductory chapter explained the change of the thesis' initial focus and finding iERA's *da'wah* work online. The frame as well as the method of the investigation were detailed, along with a survey of existing research. Finally, the chapter also provides an outline of the thesis

and its findings. The next chapter will introduce the charity iERA, its two main public figures, and locate it in the wider Salafi and Islamic *da'wah* contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCING iERA

This chapter introduces iERA with profiles of Abdurraheem Anthony Green and Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, their conversion experiences in their own words and the *da'wah* approach that they developed. In order to shed some perspective on why iERA is encouraging mobilising young people to do *da'wah* and what is different about iERA's model, it's helpful to look at the bigger picture of *da'wah* in Islam, specifically in the Qur'an. The late Saudi Mufti Abdul Aziz Bin Baz's recommendations on *da'wah* are also examined along with the Saudi institution for spreading the religion, the Muslim World League. It also discusses conversion as it relates to *da'wah*, to extract from the studies of al-Qwidi and Köse on conversion whether *da'wah* had any impact on participants' decision to convert.

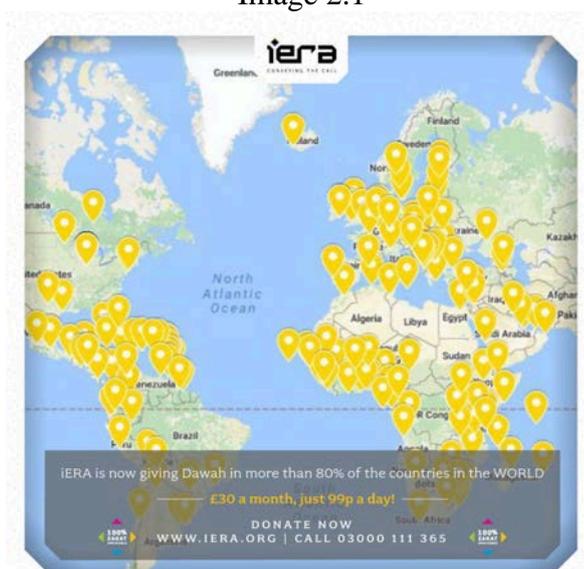
2.1 Who is iERA?

The Islamic Education and Research Academy (with the resulting catchy acronym iERA) is a registered charity in the UK working towards training Muslims to invite to Islam and to 'create a mass movement in *da'wah*'¹⁰. It branded itself on its website as the 'new era in *da'wah*', while its Twitter profile states: 'iERA is a UK-based charity dedicated to articulating an intelligent and compassionate case for #Islam all over the world' (iERA, 2016). It was founded in 2009 by Abdurraheem (Anthony) Green, a British convert to Islam from a Roman

¹⁰ See: <http://www.missiondawah.com/about-us/> (Accessed: 15 June 2015).

Catholic background. Among its speakers are Green (b. 1962 CE) and Hamza (Andreas) Tzortzis (b. 1980 CE), a Greek convert to Islam and a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir. The organisation is being investigated by the Charity Commission (2014) into its events, invited external speakers, and payments to trustees¹¹. As part of their *da'wah* training activities, iERA speakers travel both within the UK and internationally to give talks and take part in various events. Online, iERA maintains several websites under its umbrella, including NewMuslims.com and its flagship project MissionDawah.com. Its website reported in 2015 that iERA had organized 72 *da'wah* missions in the UK and also delivered training in 17 countries (see Image 2.1 for locations in 2016).

Image 2.1



Source: www.facebook.com/AbdurraheemGreen.
(Accessed: 16 September 2016).

¹¹ The Council of ex-Muslims of Britain (2014) documented past instances when Green and Tzortzis made statements that the Council described as hate speech. Both have clarified their controversial previous views; see <http://www.hamzatzortzis.com/clarifications-and-responses/> (accessed: 15 September 2016) and iERA's response to the Council's report: <https://www.iera.org/2014/05/iera-responds-fraudulent-document-written-anti-religion-extremists/> (accessed: 15 September 2016).

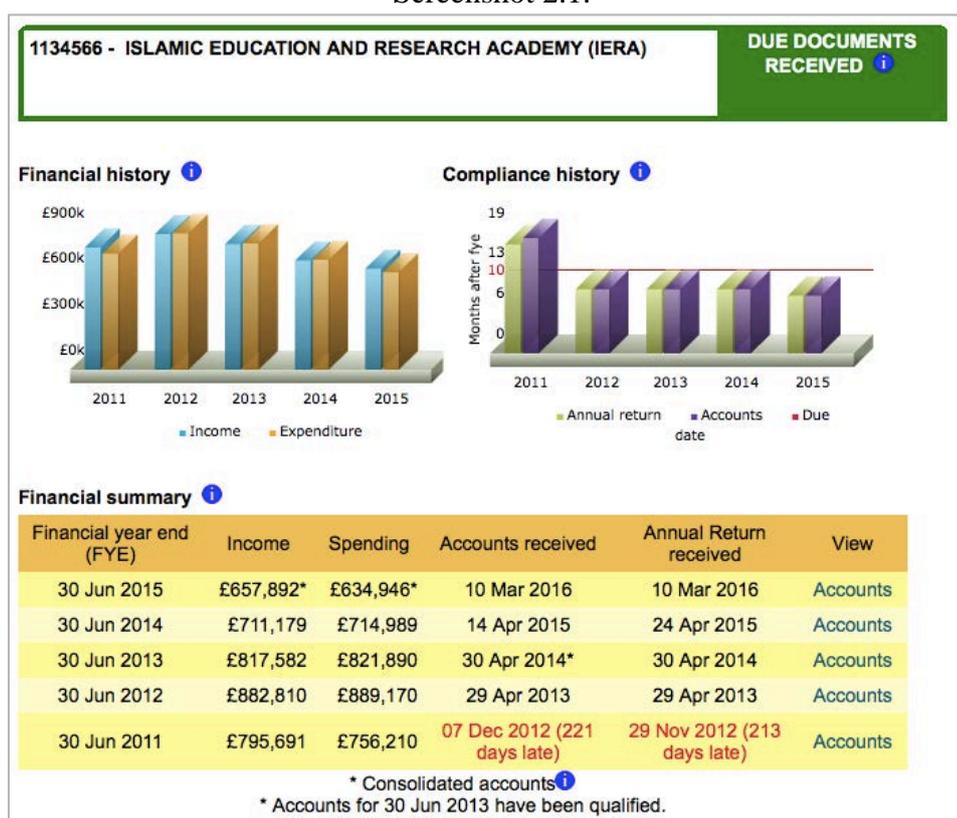
The organisation is also very active on social media. The number of Facebook followers of its Mission Dawah page nearly doubled within a year to over 646,000 in June 2015, while Green had over 721,000 Facebook followers. These figures have reached over 1 million and over 800,000 on 17 February 2016, respectively. Monitoring iERA's Mission Dawah page on Facebook consistently showed a demographic of 18 to 24 year-olds in October 2014, mainly in the Malaysian capital at the time. While on 10 November 2014, the city of highest followers was in Riyadh. Unfortunately, Facebook's demographic feature is no longer publicly available. In 2014, iERA stirred controversy again when five young men who were involved in its Mission Dawah project in Portsmouth travelled to Syria to join the Islamic State (in al-Sham and Iraq) and were later all killed (Burke, 2015). However, iERA (2014a) denied that they were members of the organisation and explained that they had only purchased its *da'wah* products online where they are available to the public. It further stated that Green 'has repeatedly implored members of the Muslim community in the UK and Internationally not to leave the important work of community engagement in their homelands' (iERA, 2014a). In fact, Mission Dawah aims to produce grassroots *da'wah* teams which the organisation promotes and supports; it is unclear to what extent it does this but they do not appear to be institutionally affiliated with iERA.

As part of its training program, iERA has developed a simplified blueprint to *da'wah* called GORAP. The acronym stands for four steps of argumentation in the following order: God's existence, Oneness (of God), Revelation and Prophethood. Videos explaining the GORAP steps are available on the iERA website as well as its YouTube channel. They are complemented online by essays written by Tzortzis on topics related to *da'wah*, such as the inimitability of the Qur'an, and offline through various workshops and talks. The group adopts a 'cool' approach that primarily targets the Muslim youth. It uses bright and colourful visuals online and memorable slogans for its *da'wah* campaigns, such as 'What's your goal?' during

the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and #WhoDoYouLove in April 2015, a combined online and offline campaign to communicate to non-Muslims why Muslims love the Prophet. These campaigns, among others, now recur annually.

iERA's financial statements between 2011 and 2015 show a diminishing income, nearly £658,000 in 2015 and a drop from over £817,000 two years earlier (see Screenshot 2.1 below). Although the iERA main offices are located in London, it is listed as based in Canada on the Charity Commission website¹².

Screenshot 2.1.



Source: www.charitycommission.org.uk.

¹² See:

<http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/FinancialHistory.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1134566&SubsidiaryNumber=0> (Accessed: 17 March 2016).

In addition, iERA maintains online stores on its One Reason website for *da'wah* books and on the Mission Dawah website which provides a combination of free and purchasable *da'wah* paraphernalia (see Appendix A).

2.1.1 Why research iERA?

iERA's *da'wah* narratives deserved a closer look due to the charity's visibility, including on the Internet, the scope of countries it operates in, and the international invitations it receives to deliver *da'wah* training. iERA's GORAP videos were examined, and they contained familiar theistic arguments for God's existence used in the Christian evangelical tradition, such as the Watchmaker analogy. Additionally, and departing from Christian apologetics, iERA developed *da'wah* techniques to argue for God's oneness, that the Qur'an has a divine source and that Muhammad was a Prophet. The seven videos posted on MissionDawah.com are as follows:

- Episode 1: Introducing the GORAP + Initiation (23 min)
- Episode 2: Common sense agreement (10 min)
- Episode 3: God's existence + Oneness (17 min)
- Episode 4: Revelation + Prophethood (23 min)
- Episode 5: Getting the *shahadah* + After *shahadah* (14 min)
- Episode 6: Bonus – *Da'wah* to Christians and Atheists (23 min)
- How to give *da'wah* with Hamza Tzortzis (40 min)

The first six episodes consist of Haroon Qureshi interviewing Abdurraheem Green on the steps of GORAP and were filmed in 2012. The last video was filmed later, in 2014, and features Tzortzis giving a general and more structured overview of the GORAP arguments. The setting of this video is more informal. Tzortzis is shown sitting with a group of six young trainees in front of a stadium. They are all wearing purple T-shirts with iERA's World Cup 2014 slogan 'What's your goal?' as seen in Screenshot 2.2 below. The *da'wah* slogan was developed to coincide with the 2014 World Cup in Brazil when iERA organised its annual Global *Da'wah* Day. It is possible to see in the videos how iERA's narrative evolved between

2012 and 2014, as well as the differences between Tzortzis' and Green's presentations. The evolution of iERA's narrative will be further discussed later in this thesis.

Screenshot 2.2.



Tzortzis giving *da'wah* training. Source: iERA, 2014b.

Researching iERA, Green and Tzortzis on Google yielded accusations of plagiarising Christian apologist William Lane Craig, and critical websites such as RationalSkepticism.org, Harry's Place (HurryUpHarry.org), MuslimAnswers.net and AsharisAssemble.com. The search highlighted two main arguments which iERA had drawn ire for from atheists and Muslims. The first was its plagiarism of an online article by Craig on God's existence and of his *Kalam* Cosmological Argument in 2010, and the second was iERA's scientific reinterpretation of the Qur'anic embryo description between 2011 and 2013, which prompted online rebuttals from atheists and condemnation of the approach by Muslims. These incidents raised interesting questions over how iERA constructed these two GORAP narratives and how those constructs subsequently developed as they came under scrutiny and were challenged online. The Cosmological Argument supports iERA's first GORAP step on God's existence, and the embryology in the Qur'an argues for the scripture's divine origin, which is the third step in the GORAP template. For the latter, although iERA also uses its linguistic

uniqueness and historical prophecies as arguments, the Qur'an's scientific miracles is by far the most controversial and, despite its popularity in many Muslim communities in the Middle East and Asia, has many Muslim detractors as well. The choice of the narratives for analysis in this thesis is due to how problematic they were for iERA. The result of the 'embryology debacle' was that Tzortzis warned against its use as it caused converts who had been persuaded by the science in the Qur'an narrative to leave Islam after scrutinising the arguments against it. iERA subsequently modified how it portrays the natural descriptions in the Qur'an. And the analysis of the *Kalam* approach reveals useful insight into Tzortzis' familiarity with the history of *Kalam* in Islam, as well as his (mis)handling of his critics.

2.2 How GORAP was developed

According to Green, the idea of GORAP started when he met an Egyptian sheikh, whom he identifies only as Muhammad bin Isma'il, during his visit to the UK. The sheikh went with Green to Speaker's Corner and observed him giving *da'wah*. Afterwards, the sheikh noted that people were going up to Green to challenge him, and his approach was too defensive. His perspective was that since the Islamic worldview is very different to the secular, materialistic worldview of his audience, Green had better explain the worldview rather than the resulting practices. Green recalls that the sheikh told him:

why don't you explain the premise, why don't you show that, look there is a God, and why don't you show that God is one, and why don't you explain to them that the Qur'an is from God and that Muhammad is the Prophet? Because if they accept those foundations, then they'll accept everything that comes with it. If they don't accept those foundations, what's the benefit of persuading them that pig is bad for you and alcohol is damaging and interest-based economy is not the best way to go? (iERA, 2012f)

Green took his advice. He found that there were a limited number of questions that people asked. He realised that people were more familiar with arguments against God's existence even when they did not object to the idea of a deity, and it became important to him to refute those arguments. Green continues:

... so if in your conversation you can dispel or contradict some of those counter-arguments, then it's psychologically very powerful to the person you're having that conversation with. And that's why we've tried to build into the GORAP which may... it may seem to some people a little bit complicated, but it's based upon years of experience and the understanding that there is a narrative out there amongst the public – an atheist narrative – that has to be countered, and the GORAP makes an attempt to counter some of that narrative as well. (iERA, 2012f)

Green also emphasises good conversational skills as being more important than the arguments of GORAP. Instead of taking a defensive stance trying to answer a question, he proposes introducing oneself and smiling in order to make a connection with the person. He explains:

... you smile, almost automatically the person will smile back, they'll feel... You know, it's about state change, it's about putting the person in a more comfortable zone so they're gonna be... [interrupted thought]. So relax the person because, you know, you want them to be able to accept what you're saying. (iERA, 2012f)

2.3 Profiles

The following are Green's and Tzortzis' own narratives about their conversion experiences. They are relayed here in their own words in order to allow their voices to come through. The narratives that take shape have parallels with other conversion narratives. They contain recurring themes such as *hidayah* and the impact of reading the Qur'an, as well as retrospection and a narrative arc.

2.3.1 Abdurraheem (Anthony) Green

Screenshot 2.3.



Source: Screen grab from YouTube.com (Islam Net Video, 2011).

Green was christened Anthony Vatswaf Galvin Green. He was born in 1964 in Dar al-Salam, Tanzania while it was still a British colony and where his British father worked as an administrator. His father was an agnostic until the final few days of his life, when he was filmed taking his *shahadah* in hospital. Anthony and his younger brother were raised Roman Catholic by their Polish mother and grew up in an Upper Middle Class household. In a filmed talk about his conversion to Islam¹³, Green recounts that when his mother was a toddler, her family fled Poland during the Second World War to Iran then to Kenya (Islam Net Video, 2011). Green says he doesn't have any recollections of his time in Tanzania. Upon Tanzania's independence, when Green was only two years old, the family returned to the UK, where his father took up employment in Barclays International Bank. At the age of ten Green moved with his parents to Cairo, Egypt, where his father was tasked with setting up a branch of the bank and where the family remained for a decade. In this year, 10-year-old Green was sent to Yorkshire's Ampleforth College, a monastic boarding school run by Benedictine monks and where he would spend the next nine or ten years until his graduation, except for holidays

¹³ The talk was organised in Norway by IslamNet. The audience appears to be predominantly Muslim.

spent in Egypt. He says he never understood why he was sent there, and while he's uncertain that his hatred of the school made him convert to Islam, it did make him question what he was being taught (Islam Net Video, 2011). He converted to Islam in ca.1988.

According to Green, even though his mother was devout, his home was not religious and she never taught him about religion. Green explains that the only person who took him to church was his Aunt Zosha, but 'his mother never bothered' (Islam Net Video, 2011). Yet his earliest memory of a religious instruction was from his mother. Apparently motivated by getting him into the boarding school, she taught him the Hail Mary prayer. He says he recalls that, even at the age of 8, the prayer struck him with the idea that Mary was the mother of God, that 'God has a mummy'. He goes on to say in what appears to be more of a retrospective reconstruction of this narrative:

And I'm thinking in my head, 'God has a mum?' I'm thinking, God is supposed to be eternal, without beginning and without end, and God has a mummy. How... OK, I didn't really get that. But then you know when your mum tells you something at that age, I mean you believe it absolutely, you don't question what your mum tells you, because what your mum tells you, you just accept it. I just said well, I figured it out in my head, I said well, if Mary is the mother of God, the only way that could work out is she had to be a bigger god than God. [...] So I put that [*waves, in the back of his mind*]. But that was my first question. (Islam Net Video, 2011)

Green goes on to talk about the troubling idea of the Trinity, which Muslim converts sometimes point to as one of the difficulties they had with Christianity. He was given many examples to illustrate the Trinity which he says are in fact considered heretical in Christian theology: water in three different states, the human mind, body and soul, the three parts of an egg, or, he thought, it was akin to the three candles in his mother's candle-stand. To him, the

examples are simply people's efforts to 'make sense of something that doesn't make sense' (Islam Net Video, 2011).

Interestingly, his profile on iERA's website contradicts his remark that he was not explicitly taught religion. It states that while he had 'strong Christian principles', he still 'dabbled with other religions'¹⁴, without specifically mentioning his conversion to Buddhism, which he embraced for three years prior to Islam. Green says that while he still thinks that aspects of Buddhism are true, he came to disagree with its fundamental premise, that 'life is suffering' and the cause of it is the self, or the ego, which he equates to the Islamic *nafs*. Green argues that not all of life is suffering. He says: 'Even in the Qur'an, you will find that the *nafs* is referred to in negative terms' (Islam Net Video, 2011). But in actuality, he goes on, the *nafs* is 'essential' and only causes suffering if it exceeds the limits, for example, when hunger becomes gluttony, anger becomes uncontrollable, or jealousy becomes irrational.

Green became involved in *da'wah* shortly after converting and proselytised in Hyde Park's Speakers Corner for years, at times making controversial remarks or inflammatory anti-Semitic comments (Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, 2014). He has also appeared on Zakir Naik's Peace TV¹⁵ and supported the group that founded Salafi Publications, which included Abu Khadeejah and the late Dawud Burbank (Brown, 2014).

¹⁴ See: <http://www.iera.org/education/book-a-speaker/meet-our-speakers/abdurraheem-green> (Accessed: 26 April 2016).

¹⁵ Zakir Naik (b. 1965 CE) is a popular Indian Islamic televangelist and preacher. He owns the international broadcasting channel Peace TV as well as several educational institutions in India. He also founded and heads the Islamic Research Foundation. He stirred controversy and Peace TV was banned in Bangladesh following being quoted by one of the Dhaka attackers (PTI, 2016). Previously, he was banned from entering the UK (Home Office, 2010). A report by Stand For Peace (2014) claims that Naik served as iERA's board of advisors; however, the page on iERA's website that is cited as the source of this information is no longer online. In addition, iERA's financial reports between 2011 and 2015 do not list Naik as a member of the board. Therefore, it was not possible to confirm this. Swami

While narrating the story of his conversion to Islam in the above-mentioned YouTube video, Green expresses his views on the British Empire:

It was not long ago that Britain of course had one of the biggest empires the world has ever seen. As they said: the sun never set on the British Empire. And now look at the British Empire. Yeah? All we have left... Hong Kong went back in 19... what is it... 1999 or 1998. And now all we have is a few islands in the Atlantic where there's more sheep than people. The Falkland Islands (*laughs with some in the audience*). Had a big battle over that. Some sheep! You know. That's it. But you know that's, that's one of the signs, actually, from God. In the Qur'an, Allah says: Travel the Earth and see the end of those people who rejected faith. See the end of people whose power and strength is actually greater than yours, more numerous, more powerful, their buildings were more magnificent. But you can travel the Earth and see the *ruins* of those civilisations and see what has become of them. This is the reality of course that civilisations come and civilisations go, but there are some truths that always endure. (Islam Net Video, 2011)

In the talk about his conversion to Islam, in a university hall with segregated gender seating, Green mocks aspects of Catholicism that he experienced as a child in the monastic boarding school, such as: the literalism of consuming the flesh and blood of Jesus, the weekly confession, the holiness of the monks whom he saw as his equal to him, not holier (Islam Net Video, 2011). Green recalls that when he complained about his headmaster, his mother refused to believe him and thought that the monks were infallible. In contrast to the ritualistic aspects of Catholicism that Green found absurd, he was exposed to the simplicity of worship practised by the Muslim cook, Ibrahim, working for his parents in Egypt. Green describes Ibrahim as a simple and humble man who wore simple clothes, the Egyptian *jalabiyyah* form of dress. Seeing Ibrahim pray in his parents' kitchen had a 'very powerful impact' on Green

(2008) describes Naik as the 'most influential Salafi ideologue in India'; however, Naik is opposed to the use of the label 'Salafi' because it leads to divisions among Muslims (Wahhabi Salafi Exposed, 2011).

as he observed him prostrating silently and privately (Islam Net Video, 2011). He'd hated his first two years of holidays in Egypt because it was a third-world country that was very different from Britain. But as he became a teenager between around 15 to 19 years old, he started looking at it differently. He was becoming disillusioned with Western society and questioning it along with questions of the purpose of his existence. This was fuelled by his hatred for the school and why he was being forced to stay there. He had come to feel that he was just a 'cog in the wheel'. He refers to Pink Floyd's phrase 'Brick in the Wall' – from the movie *The Wall* (1982) which he likes 'even though it has music' – and that he felt he was just 'part of the machine' (Islam Net Video, 2011). That was the beginning of his search for a deeper, more meaningful understanding of existence. In Egypt, after the age of 15, Green discovered the widely available Hash, the 'instant nirvana' as he calls it, through his brother. But the 'different states of being' that he experienced through his experimenting with drugs still did not explain why he existed and what was the purpose of his life (Islam Net Video, 2011).

Green's long 'hippy' hair at the time of the video made people compare him to Jesus, which he jokes about:

So I was looking through all of these different religions. And what happened is that I reached a stage where what I had done is I had invented my own religion. So what did I do, as I got bits and pieces of all the different, you know, a bit of Christianity, a bit of Buddhism, a bit of psychosomatic yoga, a bit of, you know, these New Age philosophies, I got dem bit of rasta stuff, you know, and I mixed it boom chanka and stuff like that [...], so I got myself my own religion. I actually still somewhere have the book where I sort of started to detail its principles. And it was... you know, if I tell you, you'd probably love it. I could probably form a sect, actually. I could probably do a cult, you know. It would be quite easy, I mean, [I] look a bit like Jesus [*audience laughs*]. (Islam Net Video, 2011)

The principles of the religion Green developed were: oneness, peace and love. But he thought that this religion he made was 'absolutely atrocious' and it still didn't answer his question as to why he was alive. He then gave up and resigned himself to the possibility that there wasn't an answer to this question. Instead, he started exploring the possibility that money would bring him happiness. But he confesses that he wasn't in need of money at this time as the spending money he received from his father was 'more than lots of people's wages' (Islam Net Video, 2011). He candidly tells an entertaining story of how he wanted to find the easiest way to get rich fast, and as he thought about this he realised that while Britons, Americans, Germans and the Japanese worked hard for their wealth, the Saudis were rich just through prayer. So he wanted to find out how that had happened. He knew a bit about Islam and the Qur'an at this point. He bought an English translation of the Qur'an, started reading it, and two weeks later still hadn't finished it. Green found it difficult because it didn't have a structure or consistency of themes. But it made him think. One day on the train to work in London where he was a life insurance salesman, he had an epiphany while reading the Qur'an: 'I said to myself, if I have ever read a book that's from God, this is the one' (Islam Net Video, 2011). He started to pray the way he remembered Ibrahim praying but without knowing the exact steps. He recounts an instance when he came across a Muslim bookshop in 'a part of London he was not used to' and met a man who thought he was Muslim because of his long 'hippy' hairstyle (Islam Net Video, 2011). The man invited him to pray in the mosque. Green says he may have taken the *shahadah* afterwards but it was a blur. The mosque was owned by Arabs, and he remarks that Arab mosques are usually very welcoming. He describes leaving the mosque feeling like he'd 'got this shower from the inside' (Islam Net Video, 2011). He felt high without drugs.

Green had another epiphany two years later. He had stopped practising Islam after his then-girlfriend, whom he was in love with, reacted negatively to the news that he had converted to Islam. Two years later, while she was in Spain, the relationship suffered when he suspected that she wasn't faithful to him. She hadn't contacted him for two weeks while he was at his parents' retirement home in Portugal, and he was tormented. His epiphany came while he was gardening one day, and he blamed the chaos of his life on the fact that he was certain that Islam was the truth, but he wasn't living it or doing his daily prayers. He pleaded with God that if his girlfriend called him that day, he would start doing the five daily prayers. Later that day, the telephone call did come, and he says that he has been praying ever since, overall only purposely missing one prayer. He considers that day to be when he became Muslim, not when he took the *shahadah*, and emphasises that prayer is what distinguishes a Muslim from a non-Muslim.

Green ends his talk with expressing how humbled he feels by *hidayah*, by being privileged to have been guided to the light of Islam out of the darkness of his previous life. He doesn't know what he did to deserve it. *Hidayah* is a powerful narrative in the Islamic conversion experience. Green emphasises it when he narrates his father's conversion on his deathbed. In the YouTube video 'The Amazing Story of my Dad's *Shahadah*' (iERA, 2011b), Green is filmed in Africa talking about his father's *hidayah*. The camera occasionally cuts away to show him hiking with his mother. Green recounts how his father converted to Islam days before his death, while he was on respiratory support in hospital. The 20-minute video concludes with his father repeating after Abdurraheem, with difficulty, the words of the Islamic testimony.

Following his above monologue on his conversion to Islam, Green took a few questions from the audience. One such question related to whether belief is enough or whether one should practise the faith. To this Green responds that *iman* (belief) constitutes three parts: *iman* with the heart (faith), the tongue (speech), and the limbs (action). *Iman* increases or decreases relatively to one's obedience to God. Likening the belief-action relationship to people running when they hear a warning about a fire, he says: 'Belief must translate itself into action.... [I]f you really believe, you must have some action' (Islam Net Video, 2011).

A woman in the audience then asked Green how to deal with her parents who stopped talking to her after she converted to Islam and wouldn't allow her to live with them, particularly since the majority of Islamic opinions prohibit a woman from living alone. Green disagreed with her on this issue and spoke about his own experience with his parents. They were deeply disappointed with his conversion and rejection of British lifestyle, they asked him to leave Portugal and return to London, and they removed him from their will. But the relationship changed when Green and his wife had their firstborn son. He then advises the woman that if her parents don't re-establish a relationship with her after she gets married and has children, then they may not be worth it because their hearts must be made of stone. Green goes on to credit Islam with the significant improvement in his relationship with his parents. But after talking about the importance of *arham* (wombs) ties, Green reconsiders his advice and tells her to persist in staying in contact with her parents, send them gifts and do whatever it takes to re-establish the relationship, 'without compromising – I have to say – the religion' (Islam Net Video, 2011).

Finally, asked about the importance of wearing the headscarf when the person is otherwise a practising Muslim woman, Green says that the question is difficult to answer because people have different circumstances. But he asks the audience to think of it not in terms of trivializing the headscarf compared to prayer and other practices, but in terms of ‘how great is the One who you are disobeying’ (Islam Net Video, 2011). Green says God asks women to wear the headscarf for their own good, even though they may sometimes not know why it’s good for them. He likens disobeying God to not believing in Him or defying Him.

Three years after converting to Islam, Green was married and had a son when he decided to join the *jihad* in Afghanistan. Green (2014) reveals it without much detail in an article for Islam21c.com, and he argues against criminalising returning *jihadis* such as he himself once was. Green describes stories of the *mujahidin* dominating social meetings at the time, where ‘almost everyone’ he knew had either joined or was planning to become a *mujahid* (*jihadi*). Green (2014) continues:

The question I faced is one challenging young men today. I had no real enthusiasm to either fight, or kill, or be killed. But I did want to do the right thing. I wanted to be part of ending tyranny and occupation. I wanted to support the oppressed in their struggle for freedom.

2.3.2 Hamza (Andreas) Tzortzis

Tzortzis was born in England in 1980 to a Greek father and Greek Cypriot mother. He has a brother and a sister. His working-class family lived in apartment buildings until he was 14 years old. His father, who worked in a factory, is a New Age Humanist and spiritualist who was not interested in organised religion but admired Jesus. He was more interested in existential questions such as what it means to exist. The interviewer comments that Tzortzis’

father is a typical Greek man, to which Tzortzis replies that he is more of typical ancient Greek man, as the modern Greek men have 'been drowned in the tsunami of materialism and avid capitalism' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). His mother was a refugee from the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

Tzortzis became familiar with Islam through his classmates in school. He had a religious friend who was born in London to Bengali parents. Tzortzis was puzzled that he wouldn't talk to girls unnecessarily, which his friend explained was because women are honoured in Islam.

Tzortzis says:

He was linking some of his practices to his beliefs. That to me was fascinating because I was attracted to that type of difference: different attitudes towards people, and different behaviours that were not part of 'normal' society. I found that quite attractive that he was distinct and honourable in that way. (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014)

Later in high school, Tzortzis went to Friday prayers at the mosque with his classmates, who were Muslims of different backgrounds, such as Pakistani and Turkish. He saw that his Muslim friends were 'empowered' in their belief because they behaved as if it were 'self-evident' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). Due to his father's influence, Tzortzis was curious about religions and began reading about Buddhism in college as he began to search for the greater meaning of life:

What makes a chocolate bunny any different from me? If I crush that chocolate bunny, it's just a rearrangement of carbon (...) From a materialistic, physical scientific perspective, it's just a rearrangement of carbon, so what makes any difference? There must be some kind of *meaning* that has a basis for our lives. (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014, emphasis in original)

Tzortzis admits that his friends were not exemplary in that they didn't practice as they should and were 'doing other naughty things as well' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). But what he admired was the brotherhood they had because it went beyond social and ethnic boundaries.

Even though he was a good student, Tzortzis stopped being concerned about passing his A-levels, because he felt that 'who cares I become a doctor? Who cares I get married? Who cares I become a millionaire?' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). He found that these things didn't have any meaning; they were delusions, because one day he was going to die. When Tzortzis was studying psychology in university, he found himself in a society that was very different from his Muslim schoolmates – presumably the university society was predominantly White British. He became very unhappy and describes it as the worst time of his life. In contrast to the brotherly ties of his Muslim friends, the university society was individualistic, opportunistic ('what's in it for me?'), and shallow. For example, Tzortzis used to be criticised if he wore the same item of clothing for several days in a row. He felt very out of place because it conflicted with his upbringing.

Tzortzis had to take a year off from university due to an incident that he doesn't delve into, and therefore he found a job during this time. During the office Christmas party on a boat, an attractive woman came up to Tzortzis and he struck a conversation with her. (He remarks that he found it strange to be more comfortable talking to strangers than to those close to him.) He found out that the woman was Muslim and was surprised that she was at the party drinking alcohol. Hamza told her that the people there didn't respect her, and that because she was beautiful they would try to take advantage of her. He then took away her alcoholic drink and

bought her orange juice. After some time had passed, she contacted him and they started a relationship. While he was still reading about Buddhism, he had also begun reading about Islam. And even though he hadn't converted to Islam yet, he would hang posts about God and Islam on his girlfriend's wall, and he would preach to her. He felt that the young lady wanted to be close to her religion, but that there wasn't love in her family and that kept creating distance for her from the religion. It would appear that her Muslim family may not have been religious or may have been liberally so. At this point, Tzortzis raises several Islamic teachings in the interview on loving the divine and having love and compassion for one another. Eventually, the young woman moved away – he thought perhaps to get married. But she later telephoned Tzortzis to let him know that she began to pray five times a day and had started wearing the *hijab*. Here Hamza pauses and is overcome with emotion. He realised that he had 'guided her back' to Islam even though he wasn't a Muslim, and he wasn't yet ready to become Muslim because of unresolved personal issues that he doesn't discuss. Tzortzis subsequently went to Greece to try to re-order his life.

Tzortzis in this period began drinking alcohol less frequently and spent more time at home reading an English translation of the Qur'an. His friend advised him that when he was in prostration (*sajdah*) in the prayer, he was the closest to God. That prompted Hamza to shout to God: 'If this is You, and if You're real, and if this is the Truth, then show me!' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). But then he didn't pursue Islam any further, until his old conservative classmate from school re-entered his life for professional advice after many years of separation. Tzortzis comments about this: 'It's so amazing how things work out, how Allah plans' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). The man began to give *da'wah* to Tzortzis and gave him booklets that persuaded him again to believe in Islam. Tzortzis reflects on this

that although intellectually he believed the truth of Islam, that God existed, and that He had sent the Qur'an, it had still been 'abstract' and Hamza hadn't yet 'internalised' this belief in his heart (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). His friend then tried to appeal to his emotions to help him, he says. One night, he iterated the Qur'anic words: 'Every soul is going to taste death' and spoke to Tzortzis about death while they were sitting in the car. His words were of such eloquence that Tzortzis was very moved. He felt that he needed to internalise everything that he knew intellectually about Islam and no longer wanted to be a 'donkey carrying books' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). The next day, on 5 October 2002, Tzortzis went to a mosque and took the *shahadah*. Yet the transformation wasn't drastic because he had already been in the process of changing his life. Tzortzis continues candidly: 'But I think the most amazing thing for me – something which I miss actually – when I became Muslim was the first few months when I went to the mosque at *fajr* time, and it was an amazing feeling' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014).

Although his parents had many Muslim friends and were open-minded, his conversion to Islam still upset them. His mother was not happy that Andreas changed his name to Hamza. What disappointed his father was that he had tried to intellectually stimulate his son away from religion to be humanist, liberal, progressive, and spiritual. It was as if he'd thrown all his father's life lessons in his face (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). For the next six years, Tzortzis would argue with his father about his beliefs, and he attributes this to his excessive zeal and passion early on. He admits that, in retrospect, he realised that he was very wrong to stop perceiving his father as his hero during this time. He speaks highly of how his father himself nursed his ill grandfather for three years in Greece. Hamza describes him as a 'walking Muslim without faith' due to his generosity and compassion, but adds that his father

now believes that Muhammad was a prophet, 'so he's almost there, *insha'Allah*' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014)¹⁶. Here he pauses again and fights back the tears. He reflects on his relationship with his father after converting:

I think the worst thing was – and this is advice to new Muslims – that subconsciously, just because you found the truth, you think everyone who loved you is baseless now, and you want to try and make sure that they are wrong and they're bad. And this is what I tried doing with my father, because he was a hero to me, and he wasn't Muslim, and I became Muslim, so what do I do with this hero? I was trying to hack him down basically, and I would really make him feel really, really bad. (...) And, I'm a father; if my children did that to me [*breaks down in tears*]... [Interviewer: It would be devastating.] Of course! (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014)

After six years of a turbulent relationship with his father, where he eventually was rarely in contact with him, Tzortzis was consumed with guilt and telephoned him to tell him that he was still his hero. It was an emotional conversation, and his father was also in tears. Hamza proceeds to speak highly of his father's good deeds. For instance, his father selflessly gave his entire inheritance to his brother. Tzortzis then remarks: 'We Muslims don't even do that.' The interviewer comments: 'As you said, he was Muslim but without the faith,' to which Tzortzis replies: 'Of course' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014). As the interviewer tries to steer the conversation away to Tzortzis' work, Hamza interrupts because he wanted to also speak positively about his mother and her love for them. That is because he says he tends to speak more about his father due to his influence but didn't want to forget to give due credit to his mother. He describes how, following the invasion, his mother frantically searched for her brother among the victims because he had been fighting against the Turks. He says: 'How

¹⁶ In an undated blog post (c 2015) to apologise for past statements on the permissibility of killing apostates, Tzortzis wrote that two members of his family converted to Islam then later left the religion, and that he still had love and respect for them. Available at: <http://www.hamzatzortzis.com/clarifications-and-responses/beheading-is-painless-comment-apology-clarification/>. (Accessed: 1 August 2016).

many women are refugees and accept people, accept the race that entered her homeland and took over her house?' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014).

Tzortzis says that *da'wah* has greatly improved since 2002, because a new convert at the time used to be very lonely, whereas now there are scholars and mentors who can guide and support converts. He also admits that iERA has made some mistakes but that lessons have been learned from them. Tzortzis also speaks about an important aspect of the appeal of Islamic *da'wah*. He gave a talk while he was in Texas to an audience of Muslims and non-Muslims. He says that an African-American man named Terry, aged 55, stood up and expressed his surprise at learning about Muslims. In Tzortzis' words, Terry said:

I don't believe Muslims are like this. They believe in Jesus, they believe in the Bible, they have family. Look how multicultural they are. He said, in my church there's black people. I can't go to a white church sometimes, I feel a bit... different. He said, these people are full of love. Because... I [Hamza] gave advice to a non-Muslim saying, if you wanna engage with Muslims, knock on the door and say, can you feed me please, I want dinner. *Every* Muslim is gonna say: come to my house. (Tzortzis then demonstrated this through everyone in the audience agreeing by a show of hands, which shocked Terry). (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014, emphasis in original)

Terry, tearful, said that he had never experienced that before and that they had changed his heart. And Tzortzis thought: 'This is what it's all about.' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2014).

2.4 Is iERA Salafi?

iERA doesn't publicly self-identify as Salafi; however, exploring their networks may give clues to their doctrinal orientation. In their 2015 financial statement, iERA (2015c) reported

that 'key working relationships have been built' with the following organisations: Madinah University Students, Islamic Online University, Chat Islam (Saudi), ICNA and Why Islam (both USA), eDialogue and al-Muntada (Lebanon), and Bayyinah Institute and Qalam Institute (both USA). These institutions, some of which appear to be Salafi-oriented, could be useful to shed light on iERA's doctrine. Below is a brief profile of some of them.

Islamic University of Madinah, Saudi Arabia

Madinah University Students: Searching online for 'Madinah University Students' returned pages related to the Islamic University of Madinah (IUM). A page with the URL madinahstudents.com is described as 'American Students at the IUM (Islamic University of Madinah) who volunteer to serve the american [sic] student body' (Madinah University Students, 2011). And another, madinahstudent.co.uk, is described as the official page for British students of IUM¹⁷. Its information about the university describes it as the Islamic 'equivalent of Oxford or Yale University', with a student body of around 12,000, 'most of whom are from outside Saudi Arabia. The syllabus and education at the University are based on the Qur'an and the Authentic Sunnah as understood by the Sahabah'¹⁸. Noteworthy alumni of Islamic University of Madinah include¹⁹:

- Isma'il Menk: Grand Mufti of Zimbabwe.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.madinahstudent.co.uk> (Accessed: 17 March 2016).

¹⁸ See: <http://www.madinahstudent.co.uk/#/info-about-the-university/4542000391> (Accessed: 17 March 2016).

¹⁹ This list is publicly available. See:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Islamic_University_of_Madinah_alumni. And also:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_University_of_Madinah#Alumni. And:

http://www.ranker.com/list/famous-islamic-university-of-madinah-alumni-and-students/reference?var=3&utm_expid=16418821-179.L_j85cRBSIGuH4I7Qr719g.2&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.uk%2F

(Accessed: 17 March 2016).

- Rabi' al-Madkhali: Former head of Sunnah Department at IUM and founder of the Madkhali movement.
- Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wad'i: founder of Dar al-Hadith in Dammaj, Yemen, a school popular with Salafi converts.
- Bilal Philips (Abu Ameenah): founder and head of the Islamic Online University in Qatar (see below).
- Yasir Qadhi (Abu Ammar): former Salafi.
- Prince Nayef bin Mamdouh bin AbdulAziz al-Saud: Saudi Royal.
- Ali al-Tamimi: Islamic teacher serving a life sentence in the US on terrorism charges.
- Abu Usamah al-Thahabi: Imam of Birmingham's Green Lane Mosque.

On 25 April 2016, iERA was invited for the second consecutive year to Madinah by the university students to deliver an advanced *da'wah* training course to a multinational group of pupils, led by Tzortzis. One student who was interviewed had flown from Uruguay, where he said that there were only 80 Muslims in his country. The student went on to praise iERA's course because it contained updated information not available to him elsewhere in Saudi Arabia on how to give *da'wah* to atheists and Christians (iERA, 2015a). Another student from Venezuela said that his village also had a small number of Muslims, around 100 only. An American student from Minnesota said that the course echoed their theoretical studies at the university with a practical approach to *da'wah*. Tzortzis describes the students as 'loving', 'non-sectarian' and 'nuanced', and he adds that the course's intellectual aspects are based on scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ghazali, al-Razi, Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi – 'a myriad of *ulama* that answered questions for us' (iERA, 2015a). In a press release on the same course the previous year, Tzortzis was quoted as saying: 'These *du'at* (proselytisers) will be an intellectual force against atheism and all other 'isms' that attempt to challenge the Deen of Allah' (iERA, 2015d).

Islamic Online University, Qatar

Founded in 2001 and headed by IUM alumnus Dr. Bilal Philips, the Islamic Online University offers online courses in the Madinah and Azhar curriculums. Bilal Philips had over 4 million followers and the university over 1 million followers on Facebook on 17 March 2016. The university's profile boasted of over 180,000 students from 224 countries in March 2016, but the website has since been updated without that figure. Instead, its statistics page shows that nearly 20,000 students were admitted between 2010 and 2015 (Islamic Online University, 2016). It offers a tuition-free diploma in Islamic Studies and other fields; however, students still pay a registration fee. Also, its degree programs have a tuition scale based on the student's country, and it ranges from \$70 to \$160 each semester. The tuition for a complete degree program can range from \$560 to \$1260. The university offers degrees in Business Administration, Education, Information Technology, Islamic Banking and Finance, Psychology and Islamic Studies. The university's advisory committee includes IUM alumnus Abdul Hakim Quick, Ibrahim al-Nu'aimi, former president of Qatar University, and Saad al-Shithri, former member of the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars (*'ulama*).

The university's doctrinal system is specified as Athari²⁰. Atharis are traditionalists, i.e. followers of Ahl al-Hadith and whose most famous figures are Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya;

²⁰ A recent survey (Pickersgill, 2016) commissioned by the British web publication 5Pillarsuk.com showed that respondents selected the following to describe their theological orientations: 19% Salafi, 13% Ash'ari, 11% Athari, 2% Sufi, with 19% not wishing to specify and 9% reporting they didn't know. However, the survey notes that while around 19% chose either Ash'ari (13%) or Maturidi (7%), '[it] is a well established fact that many Sufi groups... within Sunni Islam may ascribe to one of these creeds,' and therefore they were grouped with Sufis, as a very low percentage selected the designation 'Sufi' (p. 16). Similarly, Athari respondents were grouped with Salafis. The survey further notes: 'it could be understood that those who selected the "Athari" creed were actual adherents of what is commonly understood as "Salafism," whilst those who ascribed themselves under the broader "Salafi" category were unaware that "Athari" is the creed of most "Salafis"' (p. 16).

however, Atharis are not strictly Hanbali. An undated post on the university's blog discusses the difference between Atharis and Ash'aris. It explains that Atharis are Salafis who follow the authentic narrations (*athar*) about the Prophet and the *salaf*. The post's author writes: 'They [Ash'aris] claim that we (those who follow the true way of the Salaf today) interpret meanings of attributes literally or metaphorically, hence giving Allah a *jism* (body). And so they thereby conclude that we are not true Atharis. But this is obviously a lie and distortion [...] (Ahmad, no date). When a questioner on the discussion forum ummah.com inquired about the Islamic Online University, a user replied:

It is headed by Bilal Phillips who is controversial for some people I guess you could say. Almost all the teachers are University of Madinah graduates. They don't really advocate adhering strictly to one *madhhab* like some people do so that is something different. Also [they] don't teach Ashari *aqeedah* like many institutions and masjids do. (InProgress, 2013)

eDialogue

Searching online for eDialogue returned the website edialogue.org, an Internet chat website aimed at non-Muslims who have 'concerns' about Islam and answers their questions about the religion. A separate seemingly unrelated website is eDialoguec.com in Arabic with telephone numbers based in Saudi Arabia. However, it is likely linked to the chat website because its contact email address is info@edialogue.org (Accessed: 21 April 2016). The company has two online academies based in Saudi Arabia: The New Muslim Academy and Messengers of Peace Academy, operated in collaboration with iERA²¹. In fact, both Tzortzis and Green are on the latter's teaching body (see www.mopacademy.org).

²¹ Available at: <http://www.edialoguec.com/page/8>. (Accessed: 21 April 2016).

Al-Muntada (Lebanon)

Al-Muntada (Islam-Forum.net) organised Hamza Tzortzis' talk in Lebanon in November 2015. Their Facebook page (www.facebook.com/eIslamForum) had less than 14,000 followers in May 2016, and their YouTube channel had only a few videos that were two or three years old, one of which was of British speaker Abdullah al-Andalusi (previously Filippe Santos). The Forum is headed by Ahmad al-Zaatari. In his weeklong visit to Lebanon, Tzortzis delivered the following talks which are his staple lectures: 'My Journey to Islam', 'God's Testimony', 'The Divine Reality' and 'Why Belief in God is Rational'. He has also given undated talks titled 'Is it possible to be a Secular Muslim', in which he spoke about his conversion, and 'How to Debate a Secularist' with Adnan Rashid and Saleem Chagtai, head of iERA's communications. Other speakers it has invited include Yusuf Estes and Adnan Rashid. The Forum declared among its activities on its website cooperating with the Saudi World League for Introduction to Islam (wwaii.org) which is affiliated with the Muslim World League. Al-Andalusi and Estes are named among the Forum's eight charitable donors (*tadhkiat al-muntada*), the top two being from Kuwait and Dr. Khalid al-Rumaih of Saudi Arabia's International Association for New Muslims of the Muslim World League.

Bayyinah and Qalam Institutes, Texas, USA

Bayyinah Institute was founded by Nouman Ali Khan in 2005 and provides lessons on the Arabic language and the Qur'an. In 2011 it collaborated with Qalam Institute to provide Qur'an lessons by Qalam's founder Abdul Nassir Jangda. In November 2011, Khan participated in the Twins of Faith convention in London alongside Haitham al-Haddad.

Bayyinah also partnered with Hamza Yusuf's Zaytuna College and Mishkah University in 2012. Khan was born in West Germany to Pakistani parents. He studied Arabic in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan before moving to the United States to teach it. He has over 1.8 million Facebook followers.

Abdul Nasir Jangda established Qalam Institute in 2009. He studied in Karachi's Jamia Binoria for seven years where he graduated in 2002 from the 'Alim (Scholar) Course and specialised in Hanafi *fiqh*. Jamia Binoria in Site Town is a Deobandi *madrassa* whose leadership is described by the International Crisis Group (2007) as being pro-jihadist and anti-West. Its Wikipedia entry cautions against confusing it with Jamia 'Uloom Islamia. Its founder, Mufti Muhammad Naeem, is a graduate of Jamia Uloom Islamia, known as the Binori Town *madrassa*, a producer of Deobandi militancy which led the anti-Soviet *jihad* and has ties to the Taliban (Crisis Group, 2009).

2.5 iERA's influence – *da'wah* affiliations worldwide

iERA is well on its way of achieving its stated mission of creating a global *da'wah* movement. The charity's website states: 'iERA is involved in supporting more than 80 local community and volunteer groups around the country, many unknown to the organisation'²². Mission Dawah frequently endorses or publicizes *da'wah* missions around the world. The missions do not appear to be institutionally affiliated with iERA. The following is a sample of groups publicised by Mission Dawah between 15 and 17 February 2016, with a rounded number of followers as of 17 February 2016:

²² See: <http://www.iera.org/about-us> (Accessed: 17 February 2016).

Table 2.1.

Name	Facebook followers	Facebook page
Street Dawah – Bengaluru	22,000	https://www.facebook.com/STREETDAWAHBLORE/
Japan Dawah Movement	20,600	https://www.facebook.com/Japan-Dawah-Movement-1508095132790215/
Grassroots Dawah NYC	16,000	https://www.facebook.com/grassrootsdawahnyc/
One God SG – Singapore	8,900	https://www.facebook.com/OneGodSG/
Dawah Türkiye	7,700	https://www.facebook.com/DawahTurkiye/
Muslim Association of Finland and the Baltic Countries	5,900	https://www.facebook.com/Muslim-Association-of-Finland-and-the-Baltic-Countries-1521546678065738/
Dawah 'centrum de middenweg' – The Netherlands	5,500	https://www.facebook.com/dawahmiddenweg/
CDD – Mauritius	5,300	https://www.facebook.com/cdd.net/
Street Dawah Nigeria	4,900	https://www.facebook.com/Street-Dawah-Nigeria-521017324636401/

Table 2.1. International online Mission Dawah teams.
Source: www.Facebook.com/MissionDawah, 17 February 2016.

iERA's influence in Sweden

The group Swedish United *Da'wah* Centre (SUDC) is a Salafi street *da'wah* group. Olsson (2014) chose them because they are a rare street *da'wah* presence in Stockholm and they appeared to be influenced by iERA, since their website (www.sudc.se) linked to videos by iERA as well as Zakir Naik.

2.6 How iERA uses the Internet

The Internet has become an important tool for religious groups. Campbell (2005) explores four discourses that justify Internet use for religious purposes: they are the narratives of the ‘spiritual network’, ‘worship space’, ‘mission tool’ and ‘religious identity’ (p. 20). Using the Internet as a mission tool allows missionaries and proselytisers to propagate the religion to a wider audience and in a variety of ways, using videos, web pages, or social media. On the other hand, the Internet in general, and social media in particular can help maintain a religious identity among users. This can be done through networking, building community cohesion, and reinforcing beliefs. iERA primarily uses the Internet as a mission tool, to reinforce beliefs and to affirm a religious identity. It has several websites, a YouTube channel and social media pages on both Facebook and Twitter. They are detailed in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2.

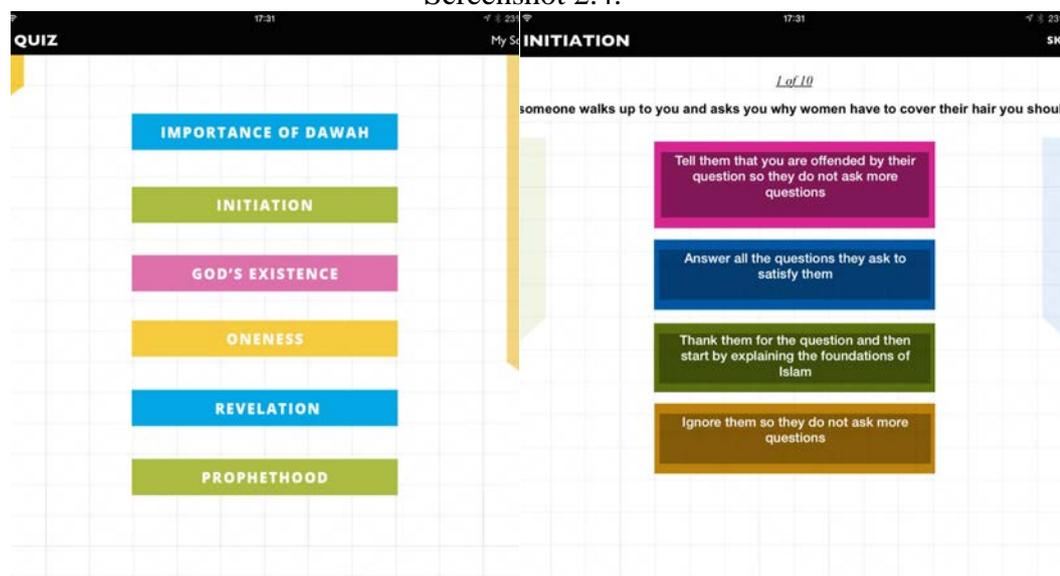
Websites	Purpose
iERA.org	Updates of the organisation’s events and activities, press releases, announcements, and so on.
Mission Dawah	<i>Da’wah</i> training videos, availability of free <i>da’wah</i> literature, products to set up a <i>da’wah</i> table, and sale of clothing items.
Muslims Now	Support for new converts through annual retreats, webinars and literature.
One Reason	Publishing and distribution entity.
The Big Debates	Several debates per year addressing current issues, such as a discussion on whether Islam is compatible with British values and whether Islam needs reform.
Social Media	Purpose
Facebook.com/iERA	Informational
Facebook.com/MissionDawah	<i>Da’wah</i> , promotion and support of <i>da’wah</i> groups worldwide, information sharing, discussions, motivational messages.
Facebook - Green	Similar, focuses more on personal trips or thoughts and general announcements.
Facebook - Tzortzis	Similar, focuses more on personal trips or thoughts and general announcements.
Facebook – Imran Hussein	Similar.

Facebook – New Muslims	Focuses on help and support for new converts. Shares stories of converts and announcement of the annual New Muslim Retreat in the summer.
YouTube Channels Purpose	
iERA Mission Dawah	Videos of Don't Hate, Debate! events. Most of the videos are of the new Global Dawah Movement (GDM) weekly show.
YouTube Channels by fans Purpose	
Reminders from Hamza Tzortzis²³	Videos of Hamza's talks.
Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans²⁴	Videos of Hamza's talks.

Table 2.2: A selection of iERA's platforms on the Internet.

In March 2015, iERA developed a pocket *da'wah* manual app to quickly teach users the basics of *da'wah* and then test their knowledge with a quiz. The app is only available in India and no longer in Apple's UK App Store.

Screenshot 2.4.



Source: Apple App Store. (Accessed: 16 April 2016).

²³ The channel had 7,083 subscribers when it was last accessed on 10 May 2016. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9EuG2Gtr3BS827NEPYLTVw>).

²⁴ The channel had 2,371 subscribers when last accessed on 10 May 2016. (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCICh9J2uAP3pRg5WT_bbGsw).

The MissionDawah.com website describes iERA's goal to create a "mass movement" in *da'wah* through training and mobilising a network of *du'at* or Islamic missionaries'²⁵.

Screenshot 2.5.



Source: www.missiondawah.com/about-us.
(Accessed: 13 April 2016).

Applying Campbell's model (2005), Mission Dawah serves not only as a mission tool but also to build a religious identity through its Facebook page. To reach its proselytism objectives, Mission Dawah on Facebook informs, trains, converts, and maintains a unifying narrative. Campbell explores the reasons, the 'why', and encourages looking at the 'how'. I will briefly explore how iERA achieves this as follows (see Chart 2.1 below).

²⁵ Available at: <http://www.missiondawah.com/about-us/>. (Accessed: 13 April 2016).

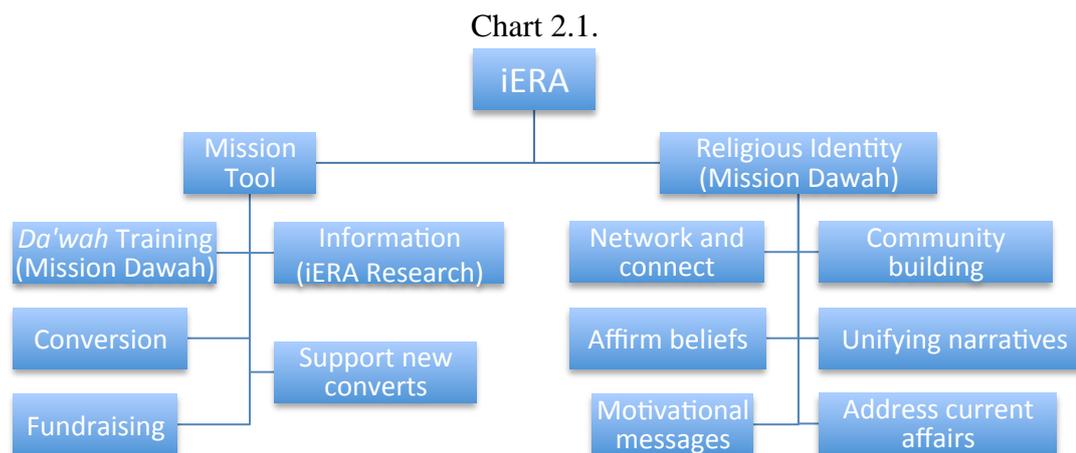


Chart 2.1: iERA's use of the Internet.

To inform its audience, Mission Dawah is a form of mouthpiece for iERA's other arms, such as its research published on its website and undertaken by its research department headed by Hamza Tzortzis, as well as the promotion of its print material created by its publishing arm, One Reason. Through these, iERA not only seeks to inform non-Muslims, but Muslims as well. Arguably, it can also educate Muslims on the 'correct', or in its own words, 'orthodox Islam', in the same way that Salafis try to correct other Muslims' beliefs and practices. Also in its use of the Internet as a mission tool, iERA provides *da'wah* training to train individuals in how to communicate Islam to others, particularly to atheists and Christians in the West. Whether directly through the Mission Dawah page or indirectly through the street teams, iERA aims to attract converts to Islam. Mission Dawah also helps connect individuals across borders through a shared common goal of *da'wah*. But although we see some interaction between *da'wah* groups and online users, there isn't evidence in the public domain whether individuals are connecting with each other on a personal level. This could create a sense of community, but how concretely communal is it? iERA engages its Facebook followers by occasionally asking them to answer questions the proselytisers sometimes receive. For example, on 13 April 16, a Mission Dawah post asked: 'The man said, "you're all Muslims

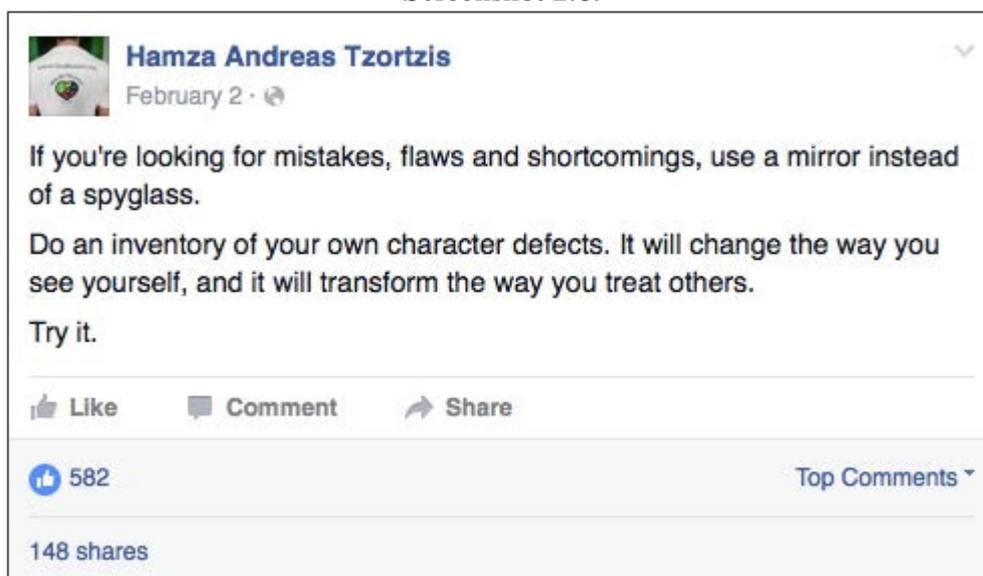
because you were born into a Muslim family, you had no choice.” How would you respond?²⁶

I would also expand on Campbell’s list of reasons to use the Internet with the following three reasons as they apply to iERA: to fundraise, to generate renewed interest in the religion, to address current affairs, and to deliver motivational messages. Particularly in the month of Ramadan and during Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, but also occasionally throughout the year, iERA launches fundraising campaigns for its projects with mixed results. Its most popular fundraiser tends to be the Mission Dawah project. iERA also aims to generate renewed interest in Islam among the youth. By giving them *da'wah* training, it encourages young people to be acquainted with the arguments for Islam. These include arguments for the existence of God, for the divine origin of the Qur'an and for Muhammad’s prophethood. This process helps to affirm and reinforce their beliefs and encourage them to find more examples and arguments to support them. iERA has also recently begun to address various current issues. It has released press statements following certain significant events, such as terror attacks. Following the attacks on the staff of the publication Charlie Hebdo in France in January 2015, iERA launched a project titled 'Don't Hate, Debate!' in defence of the Prophet. The debates address current topics in the news. For example, iERA organised a debate on the compatibility of Islam with British values following David Cameron’s speech on the topic, and another debate on whether Islam needs reform following media discussions on the topic.

Furthermore, Hamza Tzortzis occasionally posts motivational messages encouraging followers to improve themselves. For example:

²⁶ Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/20531316728/posts/10154009990506729/> (Accessed: 13 April 2016).

Screenshot 2.6.



Source: <http://www.facebook.com/HamzaAndreasTzortzis>.
(Accessed: 14 April 2016).

2.6.1 Accusations of plagiarism

In February 2012, blogger Geoff Shorts discovered that Hamza Tzortzis had plagiarised William Lane Craig in Tzortzis' response to Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. Shorts demonstrated several sections of plagiarism in Tzortzis' piece, such as the following in which Tzortzis erroneously misquoted the numerical chance:

Hamza Tzortzis: 'Big Bang's Low Entropy Condition: Roger Penrose of Oxford University has calculated that the odds of the Big Bang's low entropy condition existing by chance are on the order of one out of 10^{10} . Penrose comments, "I cannot even recall seeing anything else in physics whose accuracy is known to approach, even remotely, a figure like one part in 10^{10} ."'

William Lane Craig: 'Roger Penrose of Oxford University has calculated that the odds of the Big Bang's low entropy condition existing by chance are on the order of one out of $10^{10^{(123)}}$. Penrose comments, "I cannot even recall seeing anything else in physics whose accuracy is known to approach, even remotely, a figure like one part in $10^{10^{(123)}}$.'" (Shorts, 2012b)

Shorts' discovery received a trickle of tens of views until atheist evolutionary biologist P. Z. Myers publicised the incident in a short blog entry titled 'An Unsurprising Case of Plagiarism' on 20 June 2012 (Myers, 2012). As a result, Shorts' post received significantly more attention of over 1,700 views, which prompted Tzortzis to react. Initially Tzortzis rejected the accusation of plagiarism and responded in tweets screen-grabbed by Shorts: 'Why don't you actually read it? They're different. Atheists have now lost the argument & [sic] are now attacking personalities' (Shorts, 2012a). However, two days later and bowing to public pressure, Tzortzis updated the article and tweeted to Shorts: 'I've updated the article with a bibliography and mentioned it is a compilation. It is still a draft in progress,' and also: 'Thanks. It'd have been better if you just emailed me & [sic] I would have updated it. This was my intention anyway' (Shorts, 2012a). Shorts notes that Tzortzis then references several Christian apologists, including Craig, Keith Ward and Frank J. Tipler, and one atheist, American philosopher Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, but Muslim sources are absent except for quotations from the Qur'an. Tzortzis' claim that the article was only a draft is also questionable since Shorts was able to trace it back to May 2010. Accessed in 2016, the article still carries the draft number 0.3 that Shorts reported in 2012 and has not been updated since June 2012 (Tzortzis, 2012a).

Additionally, a post dated 9 July 2013 on Tzortzis' blog apologises for the 'unintentional lack of citation' in Hamza's writings in general. It goes on to state:

There are other articles that use references taken from some of Dr. Craig's work. Although Hamza Tzortzis has read copies of the referenced material, some of the references were taken from Dr. Craig's and others' work. This is clearly mentioned as an editorial note in the beginning of the pieces. (Tzortzis, 2013b)

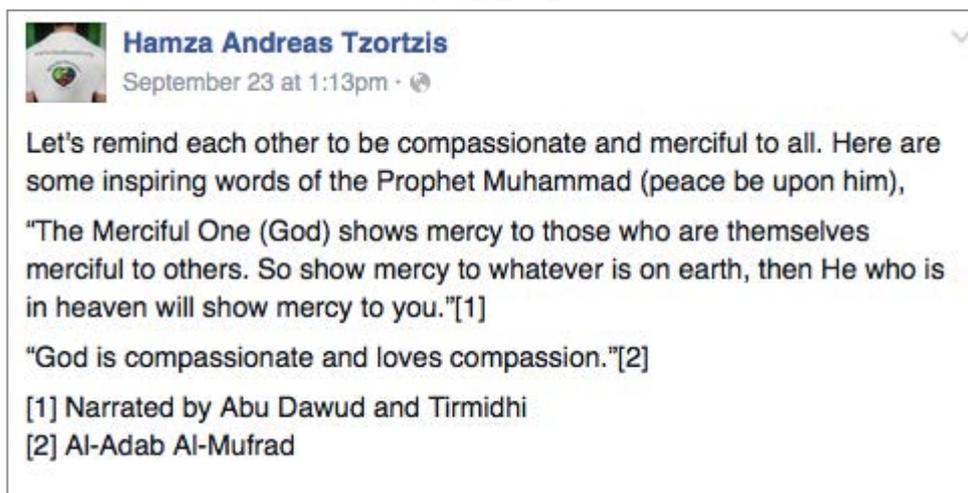
One such article is 'The Qur'anic Argument for God's Existence' (Tzortzis, no date) which begins with a similar disclaimer and is further discussed later in this thesis.

2.7 iERA's methodology

2.7.1 Compassion and positively communicating Islam

Tzortzis often writes in his Facebook posts about the importance of compassion in giving *da'wah*. For example:

Screenshot 2.7.



Source: www.facebook.com/HamzaAndreasTzortzis.
(Accessed: 14 April 2016).

Screenshot 2.8.



Source: www.facebook.com/HamzaAndreasTzortzis.
(Accessed: 23 October 2015).

2.7.2 *Planting the seeds*

Tzortzis urges proselytisers not to get frustrated and weighed down by ‘intellectual gymnastics and philosophical ideas’, but to see *da'wah* work as ‘planting the seed’, and that it’s ‘Allah’s job’ to lead people to Islam (iERA, 2014b). He also indirectly addresses the limited nature of the Qur'anic arguments and attributes it to the text’s primary purpose, which is only to awaken the *fitrah*.

2.7.3 *Orthodox Islam as the solution*

While promoting its event ‘Tackling Extremism: Is Islam the Cause or Solution to Extremism?’ that took place on 16 October 2015, iERA has for the first time openly argued that ‘orthodox Islam’ is the ‘only’ solution to radicalisation, as Tzortzis writes below, again with emphasis on compassion:

Screenshot 2.9.



Source: www.facebook.com/HamzaAndreasTzortzis.
(Accessed: 23 October 2015)

While Tzortzis does not elaborate on what ‘orthodox Islam’ signifies, an article on iERA’s website briefly describes it as follows:

Orthodox Islam is loosely defined as the traditional adherence to the Islamic source texts, via the understanding of classical scholars. This understanding of Islam is nuanced, compassionate and is applicable across different cultures and times. (iERA, 2015b)

2.8 *Da'wah* in Islam

Da'wah literally means invitation. In the Islamic context it means inviting or calling to Islam. It is considered a duty for individual Muslims, and a Muslim who successfully converts others to Islam receives rewards for the deeds of each new converts’ deeds along with his or her own good deeds. This is based on the following *hadith*:

Abu Hurairah reported: The Messenger of Allah said, ‘He who calls others to follow the Right Guidance will have a reward equal to the reward of those

who follow him, without their reward being diminished in any respect on that account' (Muslim, Book 13, Hadith 7)²⁷

Da'wah in the *Qur'an* and *hadiths*

Several verses in the *Qur'an* encourage believers to invite others to the religion:

And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful. (Qur'an 3:104)

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (Qur'an 16:125)

And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.' (Qur'an 29:46)

And never let them avert you from the verses of Allah after they have been revealed to you. And invite [people] to your Lord. And never be of those who associate others with Allah. (Qur'an 28:87)

And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness and says, 'Indeed, I am of the Muslims.' (Qur'an 41:33)

'If any does not hearken to the one who invites (us) to Allah, he cannot frustrate (Allah's Plan) on Earth, and no protectors can he have besides Allah: such men (wander) in manifest error.' (Qur'an 46:32)

The *hadiths* report that when Muhammad told his wife Khadijah about his encounter in a dream²⁸ in the Harra' cave, she immediately believed that he was a prophet. Similarly, Ali ibn

²⁷ This *hadith* is often quoted by iERA.

²⁸ One version in Ibn Kathir's prophetic biography describes that the encounter between Muhammad and Gabriel occurred in a dream while he was asleep, while others report it as a vision.

abi Taleb, Abu Bakr and Zaid were the first male believers in his prophethood. A narration attributed to Ibn Ishaq reports that when he was 9 years old²⁹, Ali found Muhammad and Khadijah praying in secret. Ali asked Muhammad, ‘Muhammad, what is this?’ Muhammad responded, ‘This is Allah’s religion that he has favoured for Himself (*istafa linafsihi*) and sent to his messengers, so I invite you to Allah alone who has no partner, and to worship Him, and to disbelieve in al-Lat and al-Uzzah.’ Ali replied that he’d never heard of this religion before and therefore asked to speak to his father Abu Taleb first. He promised Muhammad to keep his secret. Upon his return the next day, Ali inquired again about what he had to do. Muhammad told him, ‘You should witness that there is no deity but Allah alone without a partner; to disbelieve in al-Lat and al-Uzzah; and disown other worshipped beings (*tabra’ min al-andad*)’ (Ibn Kathir, 2007, p. 159).

iERA often quotes the following *hadiths* to encourage Muslims to undertake *da’wah*:

Abdullah bin 'Amr bin al-'As reported: The Prophet said, ‘Convey from me even an Ayah of the Qur'an; relate traditions from Banu Israel, and there is no restriction on that; but he who deliberately forges a lie against me let him have his abode in the Hell’. (Al- Bukhari, Book 13, Hadith 5)

Sahl bin Sa'd reported: The Prophet said to Ali, ‘By Allah, if a single person is guided by Allah through you, it will be better for you than a whole lot of red camels’. (Muslim, Book 13, Hadith 4)

A popular *hadith* sometimes used as a model for *da’wah* is when Muhammad sent Mu'adh bin Jabal to proselytise in Yemen:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: When the Prophet sent Mu'adh to Yemen, he said to him, ‘You are going to a nation from the people of the Scripture, so let the

²⁹ Ali was thought to be 10 years old in other versions.

first thing to which you will invite them, be the [Tawhid]³⁰ of Allah. If they learn that, tell them that Allah has enjoined on them five prayers to be offered in one day and one night. And if they pray, tell them that Allah has enjoined on them Zakat of their properties and it is to be taken from the rich among them and given to the poor. And if they agree to that, then take from them Zakat but avoid the best property of the people'. (Al-Bukhari, Book 97, Hadith 2)

It is seen as gradual steps: first. informing people about God, then once they believe, teaching them to pray, and followed by the remaining steps.

2.9 Bin Baz on *Da'wah*

The website of Salafi Publications (<http://www.salafipublications.com>) lists a few links³¹ to articles in English that give advice on how to invite people to Islam (*da'wah*). One such article is a lengthy undated document titled 'Inviting towards Allaah [sic] and the Qualities of the Caller' attributed to the late Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz (d. 1999 CE). The translator of the article is not named, and it is unclear whether Bin Baz wrote it for a specifically Western audience or for proselytising in general - although the latter appears more likely. It gives reasons to worship God, answers why God sent prophets, what Islam is, and a brief account of the Prophet's *da'wah* mission – presumably as reminders for Muslim readers. In addition, it addresses other-Muslims in the question of 'What constitutes belief in Islam?' I will explore this issue briefly in this section.

The article discusses *da'wah* under four main themes:

³⁰ The oneness of God.

³¹ See

<http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?secID=DAW&subsecID=DAW01&loadpage=displaysubsection.cfm>. (Accessed: 31 August 2013).

- i- God's command to call people to Him and its virtues;
- ii- The method to invite people to Islam;
- iii- The message people are invited to (Islam);
- iv- The qualities and values that the proselytiser should have.

2.9.1 God's command to call people to Him and its virtues

According to Bin Baz (no date), *da'wah* can be any of the following depending on circumstances and conditions, and he supports his points with Qur'anic verses:

1. *Da'wah* as *wajib* ('essential') and *fard* ('almost obligatory'): Qur'an 3:104, 16:125, 28:87 and 12:108.
2. *Da'wah* as *fard kifayah* ('collective responsibility'): Qur'an 3:104 and he refers to Ibn Kathir's commentary on this verse.
3. Similarly, *al-wala' wal-bara'* - commanding good and forbidding evil - is to be considered *fard 'ayn* ('extremely obligatory'), that is for the individual to carry out, and *fard kifayah* ('collective responsibility') for a sufficient number of members of the community to carry out.
4. *Da'wah* is Sunnah and is thus considered a virtue.

Bin Baz does not explain what the legal terms mean and only briefly mentions when they should be applied, that is, when there is an absence of *da'wah* work. In Islamic jurisprudence, there are five main types of rulings (*al-ahkam al-khamsa*): *wajib* (duty or obligation, sometimes used synonymously with *fard*); *mustahhab* or Sunnah (recommended or desirable); *mubah* (allowed or neutral opinion); *makruh* (hated or abominable); and *haram* (forbidden or sinful). There are differences of opinion over the distinction between *wajib* and *fard*, in Hanafi jurisprudence for instance (Juynboll, 2012). In addition, *fard* rulings are of two types: one which is obligatory for the individual (*fard 'ayn*), such as daily prayers; and one which is not obligatory for the individual on the condition that there are others in society undertaking it, such as Bin Baz's opinion of *da'wah*. This legislation has been used to

organise commandments in the Qur'an and *hadiths*, such as in interpreting conditions for *jihad*. Furthermore, Bin Baz advocates that countries have permanent bodies for *da'wah* activities, and that all modes of communication be used to this end. Additionally, he warns against the spread of Christianity: 'It is also essential to [check] all pervading and deluding theories widespread by Christian missionaries. (...) The prime need of the hour is to reinforce and strengthen one another through mutual help and cooperation as the enemies of Islaam [sic] are trying hard to create atheism and scepticism amongst the people' (Bin Baz, no date). He does not specify where the Christian influence is being exerted. In contrast to Saheeh International, Bin Baz does not describe atheism as '*fitnah*' in this document. Proselytising is virtuous, and callers to the faith are considered to be, after the prophets, the best in speech, as the verse in the Qur'an states: 'And who is better in speech than him who calls unto his Lord...' (Qur'an 41:33). Bin Baz quotes various *hadiths* that report that proselytisers are rewarded equally to the individuals they convert.

2.9.2 *The method to invite people to Islam*

Bin Baz proceeds to list the qualities that proselytisers should have: they should be wise, knowledgeable, persuasive, and patient. They should avoid being rude or harsh to those who resist or speak harshly to them when they're being introduced to the religion. This is supported with the Qur'anic verse 16:125: 'Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation and reason with them in better ways.' He gives the example of the Prophet's patience and steadfastness in the face of the adversity he faced over the years. However, Bin Baz states that the exception to 'reasoning with them in better ways' is when people show enmity, then they can be dealt with in the same way, according to this verse:

O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Be harsh with them! Their ultimate abode is Hell, a hopeless journey's end. (Qur'an 9:73)

2.9.3 *The message that people are invited to*

Proselytisers should invite people to Islam and explain what Islam means. Bin Baz expounds on what becoming Muslim means, from saying the *shahadah*, to prayer, pilgrimage, but also including *jihad* and *al-wala' wal-bara'*. In fact, the term '*jihad*' is mentioned eight times in the article, and '*mujahid*' or '*mujahidin*' twice, as Bin Baz advocates using force 'if necessary' to spread Islam - without elaborating on what would constitute a necessity to spread the faith through *jihad*. For example, he says:

In this way a Muslim calls people to the way of Allaah, and also makes Jihaad (striving for the way of Allaah) in the way of Allaah that is he fights against a person who turns renegade. Thus he follows the Qur'aan, enforces its commandments with determination even by the use of force if necessary. (Bin Baz, no date)

And more explicitly in the example of Muhammad: 'From here [Madinah] he ordered Jihaad (striving in the way of Allaah) with the help of the sword (if necessary)' (Bin Baz, no date).

Bin Baz then goes on to explain that Islam is a 'complete code of life' that needs to be fully adopted. Its teachings and rulings extend to social, economic and political issues. An important feature that he also highlights is the fact that Muslims form a brotherhood and that a Muslim's 'property, his blood and his honour is forbidden to another Muslim', according to a *hadith*. Bin Baz further quotes several *hadiths*³² that promote a brotherhood among Muslims, such as Muslims being 'a wall and every Muslim strengthens it'. He is emphatically against

³² The sources of these *hadiths* are not provided.

the selectivity of religiosity. ‘Guard against only accepting the belief and neglecting the deeds and morals [or vice-versa]... In short we must adopt Islaam [sic] in its entirety, that is in belief, action, worship, Jihaad [sic] in social matters, politics and economics, in other words a perfect Muslim, as has been enjoined by Almighty Allaah’. Bin Baz adopts the Sunni traditionalist view that becoming Muslim entails full submission. He also warns proselytisers against inviting people to a particular *madhhab* or sect, and to look to the imams and scholars as long as they follow Sunni authorities, yet without blind loyalty to any. His view is that *mujtahids* should be learned from and are rewarded for their *ijtihad* even when they err³³.

2.10 The Muslim World League and international *da'wah*

The Muslim World League was established in Saudi Arabia in 1962 during the General Islamic Conference (Pew Research Center, 2010). It has had general consultative status in the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1979. It is an umbrella for a group of over a dozen councils, among them: the World League for Introduction to Islam (wwaii.org) and the International Association for New Muslims. The Muslim World League also oversees the Institute of Training for Imams, Spiritual Leaders and Preachers (www.itimams.net) in Mecca. The institute offers a free year-long training programme in Arabic to Muslims under 45 years old, preferably involved in *da'wah*. The cost of the programme and the travel ticket to Saudi Arabia is fully undertaken by the Muslim World League³⁴. Trainees are not allowed to leave the country during their studies³⁵. The programme

³³ If they interpret correctly they earn two rewards, and when incorrect they earn only one (Bin Baz, no date).

³⁴ See (in Arabic): <http://www.itimams.net/node/27> (Accessed: 20 April 2016).

³⁵ See (in Arabic): http://www.itimams.net/sites/default/files/Application_Learning.pdf (Accessed: 20 April 2016).

is practical and is linked to each trainee's culture in order to help them develop their societies along the 'correct understanding of Islam'³⁶. It aims to develop the preachers' education and behaviour and to 'strengthen the faith in their hearts'. Trainees attend evening events in addition to the daily 5 hours of instruction.

Among its 'important links', the website of the Muslim World League London (mwlllo.org.uk) links to London Central Mosque, the East London Mosque, and the website of the Islamic Sharia Council (Islamic-sharia.org) (Accessed: 20 April 2016). The London office is headed by regional director Dr. Ahmad M. Makhdoom.

2.12 Creating an Islamic ambience in non-Islamic environments

Poston (1992) describes two historical approaches to *da'wah*, which are similar to Christian missionary methods. The first is a top-down approach, or what he calls external-institutional (p. 52), which controls political, economic and judicial institutions and thereby creates an 'Islamic ambience', a term coined by Levtzion (p. 16). Historically following the conquest of a country, an Islamic ambience would be created:

the purpose of which was to allow Islam to gradually pervade the culture at all levels and thus make conversion more socially acceptable than it would have been had Islam remained a completely alien faith (Poston, 1992, p. 52).

Whaling (1981) argues that despite conquest, early Muslims did not immediately convert Jews and Christians but imposed a tax system, and conversion was a gradual process that

³⁶ See (in Arabic): <http://www.itimams.net/node/31> (Accessed: 20 April 2016).

followed. This was done through three stages: contact, penetration, then dominance (p. 332). Penetration occurred through the Arabic language and mixing between Arabs and local inhabitants.

In contrast, early Sufi *da'wah* was spread without the advantage of an ambience and the control of institutions, particularly when Sufis were themselves escaping persecution. Rather, Sufi *da'wah* was individual-to-individual, then later through the establishment of the *tariqas* (p. 19). This is the second form of *da'wah* that Poston calls internal-personal (p. 49).

Furthermore, Sufism in 19th century Africa developed a dual approach of the internal, the spiritual life of the individual, as well as the external, working towards an Islamic system, but this proved to be a failed model due to competing priorities. The Ahmadiyya in 20th century America followed the model of Christian missionaries and were able to convert 500 people by mid-century, most of whom were Asian or black, with whites constituting only 5 to 10 percent of converts. The Ahmadiyya's success was in its presenting Islam as a racially non-discriminating faith and which is based on reason (Poston, p. 115). However, it is considered an unorthodox Islamic sect and at times deemed to be heretical (Kadri, 2011, p. 237).

Another approach to *da'wah* which attempted to create an Islamic ambience was the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Washington, D.C. It sought to do this by Islamising knowledge, through producing textbooks for use in Islamic higher education and that gradually and eventually, its developers hoped, would trickle down to other tertiary institutions (p. 120). In 1977 the Muslim World League became the first organisation to propose the establishment of Islamic schools. They would serve as an alternative to secular

education, but they wouldn't exclude non-Muslims. On the contrary, they would attract non-Muslims in order to expose them to Islam (p. 121).

2.12.1 Lifestyle evangelism

Generally, however, there hasn't been in the past a specifically 'Islamic' approach to *da'wah*. In his book, Poston studies several organisations as well as individual efforts in the United States and summarises their methods. Despite the Ahmadiyya's model, not all Muslims groups support imitating Christian missionary models. However, some have established broadcasting stations and distribute missionary literature similarly to Christian missions. Another strategy similar to Christian missions is indirect *da'wah* through 'lifestyles evangelism', adopted by Palestinian-American Islamic scholar Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi (d. 1986), among others. This is done through befriending and mixing with non-Muslims so they can experience an Islamic lifestyle and values. Its proponents believe that it is God who guides people to Islam, not Muslims, therefore individuals can only embody the religion's values as an example. For example, al-Faruqi promoted the family unit as a *da'wah* tool in the West, and encouraged Muslims to invite non-Muslims to visit them once a week in order to experience the Islamic family lifestyle (Köse, p. 25). I encountered similar Christian missionary principles in my travels, whereby Christian missionaries do not proselytise but rather seek to be living examples of a lifestyle imbued with Christian values. A feature of this approach that Köse highlights is that when its proponents interact with non-Muslims, they tend to seek common ground and shared values between them rather than stressing Islam's supremacy (p. 26). The drawback of this method is that, while it succeeds at dispelling stereotypes and builds bridges across communities, it may not result in conversion, but just

better relationships (Poston, 1992). Moreover, Akbar Muhammad argued that Christian evangelism has been successful due to the conversion experience itself, and as such Muslim converts have been better able to gain conversions than born-Muslims through sharing their own conversion experiences³⁷ and attempting to help others recreate them in themselves (p. 117). Both Green's and Tzortzis' initial exposure to Islam was through interacting with Muslims, in the case of Green, through seeing his parents' Egyptian cook pray, and Tzortzis by interacting with his Muslim schoolmates.

2.12.2 *Direct da'wah*

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (Qur'an 16:125)

Those who are critical of the ineffectiveness of the indirect approach argue for more proactive proselytising, as does Bin Baz above. Verse 16:125 inspires *da'wah* methods related to proselytising positively. 'Allal al-Fasi promoted 'gentle preaching with reasonable and acceptable ideas which will attract the people' (quoted in Poston, p. 122). Köse holds that Muslims born in British are more likely to adopt this activist approach than their immigrant parents, who more likely favoured the more passive lifestyle approach (p. 27). Due to the advanced educational development of British society in the natural and social sciences, Mawdudi in 1967 encouraged Muslim proselytisers to pursue education to participate in social life and formulate solutions to social problems so as to be more effective (Köse, p. 27).

³⁷ iERA organises the annual event 'My Journey to Islam', in which converts Green, Tzortzis, Yusuf Chambers and others speak about their conversion experiences.

Direct *da'wah* involves various approaches, from individual-to-individual, door-to-door, to organising public events and inter-faith dialogues.

In a Cambridge study on female conversion to Islam (Suleiman, 2013), *da'wah* was discussed in passing although the study does not focus on the topic. Participants who commented on it differed over *da'wah* strategies. A participant commented on the use of the term *kuffar* in a *da'wah* context: 'If I see a [*da'wah*] stall in the street, I don't want to hear about the *kuffar* – I don't want to hear my family described like this. It's not about putting other people down. How can a majority population see Islam in a positive light if it is constantly subjected to hearing that their system is not good enough and needs to be replaced?' (p.75). A participant in a subsequent Cambridge study on male conversion (Suleiman, 2015) pointed to an unidentified statistic that 95% of the British public was not interested in learning about Islam. He therefore proposed that *da'wah* needed a new approach based on shared values instead of the current methods that were 'fifty years out of date' (p. 82). Another remarked that he found *da'wah* organisations to be 'smug and self-indulgent', and that they did not engage with non-Muslims. He advocated instead personal interactions at the social level (p. 83).

Before Tablighi Jama'at, Jamaat-i Islami and, now, iERA, there hasn't been a structured method of *da'wah* in Britain. Mohammad (1991) attributes this to several factors, such as the low self-image among British Muslims, their preoccupation with sectarian arguments – as was seen above between Green Lane Mosque and the Salafi Bookstore – their lack of knowledge about Christianity, cultural restrictions that prevent from engaging with non-Muslims, and those who do engage not being equipped to communicate their religion to non-Muslims. These issues have been exacerbated after the 9 September 2011 attacks in the US.

iERA, as will be seen in this thesis, has developed a strategy that addresses many of the above issues: firstly, it does not publicly delve into sectarian disputes but remains focused on external ones (e.g. with atheists); it aims to improve Muslim youths' self-esteem through presenting Islam as a modern, rational faith that is also compatible with science and to point out its rich historical legacy; and its GORAP template is a practical guide to arguing against atheists and Christians, and thereby giving Muslims the tools to better communicate the fundamental teachings of the faith while also avoiding being defensive about specific practices when challenged.

2.12.3 *Sufi da'wah versus Salafi da'wah*

Lofland and Skonovd (Köse, 1996) classified general conversion experiences into six types, the first three of which are relevant for the purpose of briefly contrasting Sufi and Salafi *da'wah* approaches:

1. Intellectual: individuals read books or become acquainted with alternative worldviews through different media. This might occur as solitary work or through social interaction with members of the religious group. This may be a short process.

2. Affectional: Conversion through attachment or admiration for practicing religious individuals. Some social pressure usually exists in this type of conversion. It may also be a lengthy process, and the emotional intensity of the individual is medium.

3. Mystical: This type of conversion is sometimes also called ‘Damascus Road’ or ‘Pauline’. Even though the conversion is fast, it is preceded by a period of stress or trauma. The emotional intensity in this form of conversion is very high. A higher number of Sufi than non-Sufi converts reported having a mystical experience in Köse's study (p. 109).

The other experiences are experimental, revivalist, and coercive. When applied to Köse's sample, he found that intellectual conversion was highest (71% of total numbers), especially among men, while affectional conversion was highest among women (90%).

An example of an experimental conversion is a form of Sufi *da'wah* which involves participation in a group *dhikr* ceremony. *Dhikr* literally means ‘mention’ or ‘remembrance’. The ceremonies involve chanting words related to God or the Prophet, and may or may not be combined with musical instruments (Köse, p. 159). *Dhikr* ceremonies provoke emotional experiences among participants, which have been described as freeing, peaceful or purifying (Köse, p. 60). Köse links the Sufi groups' warmth to attracting individuals with past traumatic experiences (p. 83).

By contrast, al-Faruqi argued for a rational approach to *da'wah*, and was critical of the Sufi method:

B. Da'wah is not a psychotropic induction

It follows from the nature of judgement that *da'wah* cannot have for objective anything but a conscientious acquiescence to its contents on the part of the called. This means that if the consciousness of the called is in any way vitiated by any of the common defaults or defects of consciousness, the *da'wah* is itself equally vitiated. Thus a *da'wah* that is fulfilled through, or whose fulfilment involves in any way, a lapse of consciousness, a lapse of

forgetfulness, a lapse in *ta'aqqul* or the intellectual binding of ideas and facts so as to make a cohesive and consistent whole, or a transport of emotion and enthusiasm, a sort of 'trip', is not Islamic *da'wah*. *Da'wah*, therefore, is not the work of magic, of illusion, of excitement, of any kind of psychotropia. In such work, the subject is not in control of his power of judgement, and hence, his judgement cannot be properly said to be his 'personal free judgement'. (Al-Faruqi, 1976)

He defines *da'wah* as an intellectual process which can be continually improved and transformed according to new needs and new scientific discoveries (p. 394). Thus,

In Köse's study, 47% of converts reported having struggled in the two years prior to conversion with cognitive questions, such as the sense of meaningless and lack of purpose, and therefore conversion was an intellectual process for them. Green's and Tzortzis' conversion experiences would fit into this category as they were searching for the meaning of life.

2.13 *Da'wah* to Muslims as well as non-Muslims

Al-Faruqi, moreover, favours giving *da'wah* to Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The lifestyle approach requires Muslims to practice their faith on a daily basis and discourages them from lapsing, thus reinforcing their commitment. Al-Faruqi (1976) writes: 'Islamicity is never a *fait accompli*. Islamicity is a process. It grows, and sometimes it is reduced' (p. 393). This confirms Berger and Luckmann's concept of legitimation. Religion, as a social construct, needs to be maintained and reinforced continually, and the *da'wah* approaches discussed above contain this internal element. In his book *The Islamist*, Ed Husain (2007, pp. 57-8) recalls participating in *da'wah* events that were mainly aimed at Muslim students and with the

purpose of recruiting them to the Young Muslim Organisation UK. Similarly, the Tablighi Jama'at's main purpose is to give *da'wah* to Muslims, and *da'wah* to non-Muslims is of a lesser priority (Gaborieau, 2012).

2.14 Conversion to Islam

‘I used to have dreams about nothingness after death. [...] I thought there must be something after death, there must be life; you can’t just die.’
Janet, quoted in Köse (1996, p. 88)

Although this thesis is not focused on conversion to Islam or the impact of *da'wah* on conversion, it is useful to discuss conversion briefly as part of the context of *da'wah* activity in the U.K. An examination of the findings of the research undertaken by Maha al-Qwidi and Ali Köse reveals contrasting views on conversion. Although both studies are small and not representative, they are among the few but increasing studies on conversion to Islam and could provide some clues for future research on the role of *da'wah* in conversion.

2.14.1 Using Rambo's model with Muslim converts

In her unpublished doctoral thesis, Maha al-Qwidi opted to use Lewis Rambo's seven-stage model as a framework for her study of converts to Islam, undertaken in 2000, due to the limitations she found in other theories. The results were unexpected but at the same time informative for future research. Most notably, al-Qwidi's findings yielded a six-stage conversion process rather than Rambo's seven. Rambo's (1993) seven stages are: Context,

Crisis, Quest, Encounter, Interaction, Commitment and Consequences. He argues that there are four aspects to consider: cultural, social, personal and religious. Rambo notes that professional proselytising is a new trend in Islam, whereas historically proselytising was done informally by ordinary individuals through trade or other encounters (p. 70). For the participants in al-Qwidi's study, the Interaction and Commitment phases appeared to coincide because all the converts' interaction with Islam was not through significant contact through Muslim friendships or proselytisers, but mainly through reading the Qur'an, following which they decided to convert.

A second significant finding in her research was similar to Köse's results: participants did not report childhood or adolescent turmoil that could have contributed to their conversion. Both studies concluded that the converts' conversion process was mainly of existential, cognitive motivation rather than social or psychological. While this may be valid and true, some critique of both al-Qwidi and Köse's analyses is necessary. For one, al-Qwidi acknowledges inconsistencies in the participants' responses. For example, participants confirm that they found a copy of the Qur'an by chance and that they hadn't come into contact with any *da'wah* efforts. However, al-Qwidi notes that 'other Islamic material' including books, booklets, leaflets and videos, all of which were mentioned, can only be obtained through *da'wah* outlets' (2002, p. 250). Al-Qwidi attributes this to the possibility that respondents were 'unaware' of the proselytising links to the materials. Another example is those who stated that early in the process they fasted in Ramadan or performed the Islamic prayer but were '[unaware] of the Muslim community'; whereas fasting in the Islamic holy month or learning how to do the prayer would necessitate contact with Muslims and Islam outside of merely reading the Qur'an. It's unclear whether respondents intentionally or unintentionally

downplayed other factors and stressed the role of the Qur'an and other Islamic-oriented factors.

Al-Qwidi writes that *da'wah* efforts in Britain were few or ineffective, and that the study participants' encounters with *da'wah* were rare or non-existent. Al-Qwidi cites an interesting observation that existing *da'wah* revolved around the extension of Christian concepts in Islam and narrowing the gap between the two faiths. An example is that some booklets can be found in Birmingham titled 'Jesus in the Qur'an'. However, with time, there were perceptions that Britain was evolving into a post-Christian environment, causing the *da'wah* message to be shifted against materialism.

2.14.2 Similarities between al-Qwidi's and Köse's findings

Unlike academic research that largely based conversion on Christianity and New Religious Movements, both al-Qwidi and Köse's studies did not support claims of turbulent youth experiences or conversion during adolescence. Both found that a recurrent factor was the rejection of a 'hedonistic' Western lifestyle and culture of materialism. The data from both studies supported Köse's 'cognitive and existential' pursuit of a belief system rather than an emotional and psychosocial one. In al-Qwidi's study, more respondents reported an intellectual pursuit instead of the more affectional or mystical factors in Köse's study, which included converts to Sufism. Finally, respondents in both appeared to have had few encounters with Muslims, which could have contributed to conversion but were not felt to be significant.

2.14.3 Differences between al-Qwidi's and Köse's findings

While the age range in Köse's sample was wider and the average age of conversion was 29.7 years, al-Qwidi's average age was 25, but still higher than the period of adolescence which many studies of conversions to other religions found. Al-Qwidi's respondents did not actively seek out Islam as did Köse's sample. They responded that their encounters with the religion were accidental, such as in the case of an individual who was searching for the Bible in a bookstore and came across the Qur'an. Furthermore, Köse's (1996) respondents felt that the conversion resulted in 'major transformations in [their] basic religious identity' (p. 126), whereas this was not the case for al-Qwidi's respondents, who were from loosely religious or non-religious backgrounds. The latter's descriptions were rather of a 'return to faith' than a dramatic change.

2.14.4 An Islamic worldview: on the roles of *hidayah* and *fitrah*

One possible explanation for why respondents may have knowingly or unknowingly downplayed other psychosocial factors of their conversion could be due to the Islamic worldview which they adopted (al-Qwidi, 2002). This is not to assert that psychosocial factors must play a role; the theories cannot be imposed on the data collected in the research. However, the probability of psychosocial factors to have an influence have been shown in conversions to other faiths; thus, one way to interpret al-Qwidi's and Köse's data not supporting them could be the important Islamic concept of *hidayah*, a point which was raised by the participants. It is possible that respondents may downplay psychosocial or other factors, because they adopt the Islamic view that they have been fortunate that God led them

to Islam (*hidayah*), as Islamic tradition holds that only believers whom God inspires are guided (from *hada*, which also signifies giving as a gift):

And who is more unjust than one who is reminded of the verses of his Lord but turns away from them and forgets what his hands have put forth? Indeed, We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if you invite them to guidance - they will never be guided, then – ever. (Qur'an 18:57)³⁸

Therefore, in retrospect, converts may reinterpret events in light of this perception, highlighting chance encounters and establishing a narrative that supports this view. This can be seen in both Green's and Tzortzis' narratives of their path to conversion, discussed above. Green speaks about *hidayah*, and they both see an overarching divine plan that connects the sequence of life events that led them to Islam.

Another Islamic concept is the Arabic term *fitrah* (al-Qwidi, 2002). In its general linguistic use *fitrah* means 'innate' or 'by birth'. From an Islamic perspective, *fitrah* is given or created by God, and Islam is perceived as '*din al-fitrah*' (Qur'an 30:30) or the religion of the innate or the God-bestowed qualities. Essentially, this describes Islam as a religion that corresponds to human nature and to what humans are naturally inclined to believe. Al-Faruqi (1976) thus characterises *da'wah* as inviting individuals to 'return' to themselves (p. 395). Therefore, many respondents in al-Qwidi's study are quoted as saying that when they read the Qur'an they felt they were Muslim or had the desire to become Muslim, because they saw that it was in line with their personal beliefs.

³⁸ See also verse 41:5.

2.14.5 Roald's four post-conversion stages

Anne Sofie Roald (2012) builds on Peter Schindler's three psychological phases that converts to Catholicism experience following their conversion. However, Roald proposes a Weberian four-stage model for Muslim converts. They are: zealotry, disappointment, acceptance, and secularisation. In her model, Roald incorporates Warner Susman's two types of character: Character and Personality. Character is the modal type which behaves according to the norms and standards of the group, and has such features as sacrifice. On the other hand, Personality is a shift to the actualisation of the self based on the personal needs and interests of an individual (Roald, 2012, p. 349).

2.14.6 Doubting or leaving Islam: how many converts remain?

Although it is difficult to estimate how many converts to Islam remain Muslim, anecdotal numbers from Green Lane Mosque estimate 2 to 3 percent of around 50 converts annually remain Muslim, as discussed in Chapter One. This question needs further investigation but is not without difficulties due to its sensitive nature and the stigma surrounding apostasy from Islam. Blog posts can give an idea of the difficulties that converts face. One such blog post, which received 10,100 views by 10 March 2016, was written by convert K. T. Lynn (2015), who discusses four main challenges. They are briefly as follows:

1. Lack of support within the local community. Converts tends to experience loneliness and isolation due to the lack of communal support. The author attributes this to the new challenges

of forming social bonds with their new co-religionists, such as receiving support when a convert experiences doubt.

2. Lack of educational resources. The author explains the difficulty in learning about Islam and says that ‘most reverts are self-taught’ using mainly books (Lynn, 2015). She attributes this to the differing opinions on Islamic matters and the resulting confusion in knowing which opinion to follow.

3. Cultural clashes between the convert culture and the adopted ‘Muslim culture’. This is often due to the convert adopting the culture of their spouse and experiencing culture shock.

4. Spiritual ‘burnout’. Following the initial euphoria of conversion, Lynn describes the reality that sets in:

Real life as a Muslim is far less exciting, fresh and energising than those first few rounds of *salat* (prayer), fasting or *dhikr* (remembrance). It is quite common to start spiralling. The constant cycle of seeking the initial spiritual and emotional high by setting tiring and unrealistic expectations and failing to attain the desired level of perfection is enough to dampen the highest of spirits. (Lynn, 2015)

She adds:

Being a Muslim is exhausting. There is a constant battle between who you were, who you are, and who you want to be. (Lynn, 2015)

The author concludes by asking Muslims to be more supportive and helpful towards new converts, who ‘hold a special place in the community’, in order to help them maintain their faith.

The following are reactions from readers who said they could relate to the four challenges that Lynn highlighted. There were at least 9 who agreed with the article and described similar experiences, out of a total of 28 comments (on 10 March 2016), most of which were from Muslims giving suggestions for online communities to join and other advice.

Screenshot 2.10.



Gary Dargan · Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

I have experienced all of those. The worst was a complete betrayal by the person who led me to Islam in the first place and the ignorance and abuse by other Muslims at that time. It has been an ongoing struggle ever since to stay on the path. Some days are better than others but the deep sense of connection i once had is all but gone.

Like · Reply ·  10 · Dec 2, 2015 11:40pm



Jeremy James Davidson · Toronto, Ontario

All the stages are definately something that come by after years pass. I converted 5 years ago when I was 18. Go from extreme points in most things, burnout, excitement of things disappearing, real life outside of university in the past year/2 punching you in the gut, etc. Going from constant interaction with muslims and at the mosque all the time to little interaction and barely at the mosque. Love for cultures develops then hatred develops towards a lot of parts of various cultures. Praying all sunnah prayers to praying the bare minimum. Loneliness. A lot of things. But if one becomes an apostate then there was no real faith just a phase. Im only 5 years old as a Muslim and I want to say it is hard and as a Muslim we are expected to be tested and have difficult lives. However, you shouldnt put people into tests and difficulties. Unfortunately many muslims make it very hard for reverts.

Like · Reply ·  4 · Dec 11, 2015 2:44am



James Theoret · Roussin Academy

Asalamu Alykum. i have reverted almost 5 years ago and im still learning my prayers. i find it very hard cause what i have learned so far i do not understand a word that im saying, its not in my heart so i have no connection to Allah when i pray in arabic. when i try to learn arabic its just lines squiggly lines and the books that try to teach you or on line is very hard to learn cause its written in the view of a person that already speaks it. it would be nice to have like when you learn english letters something that breaks it up in to vowels etc. arabic is very hard to learn. from me any ways

Like · Reply ·  2 · Dec 4, 2015 5:12am



Tier Blundell

Revert is such a silly terminology. Its synonymous with the arrogance that is reverberated within the muslim community. I converted to Islam and still respect it. However the main that put me off and many other converts I know is the arrogance and pedantic attitudes of Muslims who wag their finger and pronounce jahannam on everybody. Everybody is doing something wrong and it seems like you cant walk to the shop without checking if its permissible to do so with someone with "knowledge" I could go on. The only thing people need to revert to is the actual deen not this 21st century status quo of madhabs and madrassahs.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 2 hrs

Source: Lynn, 2015.

2.15 Salafism: From Ibn Taymiyya to the U.K.

This section is an overview of Salafism with the aim of placing the *da'wah* charity iERA in context. Themes examined are the origin of Salafism as a movement, scholars Ibn Taymiyya and al-Albani, the major trends within Salafism, and the effects of the Madkhali split. The choice of these two scholars is because iERA often cites Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), while al-Albani (d. 1999 CE) is associated with quietist Salafis and some of iERA's critics. The section on Ibn Taymiyya begins with Salafi Sheikh Khalid 'Akk's (d. 1999 CE) support of the medieval scholar and the four main reasons he outlines for why Ibn Taymiyya was needed in that period of history. Because Salafis are often said to shun the four Sunni schools of thought, it is useful to also look at Ibn Taymiyya's contentious juristic status, whether he remained affiliated with the Hanbali school or became an independent *mujtahid* and if so, whether his example is what influences some contemporary Salafis to question traditional Islamic scholarship. Finally, a brief look at the historical context of Ibn Taymiyya could shed light on whether Salafis turn to him because they see modern parallels with that era. iERA at times quotes from both scholars but sparsely. An important schism among Salafis, the so-called Madkhali split, occurred in the 1990s. Since Salafism has evolved to become a heterogeneous movement, there have been scholarly attempts to categorise the various trends within it. One such widely adopted typology is by Quintan Wiktorowicz, and a more recent one that tests and revises Wiktorowicz's typology is by Zoltan Pall.

2.16 In their own words

The Arabic term *Salafīyyah* is a term describing the way of ‘*al-salaf al-salih*’, or the pious ancestors. Salafis revere the first three generations of Muslims and strive to emulate their beliefs and practices. This is based on a *hadith* in Bukhari and Muslim's collections of the Prophet's sayings: ‘The best of mankind is my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them’ (Salafi Publications, no date a)¹.

Another *hadith* further solidifies this belief: ‘And this nation of Muslims will divide into 73 sects, all of them will go to the Fire except one.’ That victorious group is ‘ “[t]hat which I [the Prophet] and my Companions are upon today.” (Tirmidhee, authentic)’ (Salafi Publications, no date). Subsequently, Salafis believe they are the only group of Muslims whom God will ‘save’ (*al-firqah al-najiyah*) or ‘make victorious’ (*al-ta'ifa al-mansoorah*) because they follow the true and pure religion of the Prophet and the early Muslims.

The three generations of pious forefathers are believed to span a period of nearly 250 years from the estimated year of the divine revelation in 610 CE and ending with the death of Ibn Hanbal in 855 CE (Haykel, 2009). Defining this period is important not only to knowing where Salafis look to formulate or justify their creed, but also to attempt to trace the ambiguous beginnings of this movement by contrasting the period with Muhammed Abduh's understanding of the term *salaf*, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹ Both quotations are the translations used in a flier titled ‘Who are the Salafis?’ handed out in central Birmingham.

2.17 What is Salafism?

In the tradition of Ibn Taymiyya, Salafis aim to rid Islam of interpretations and accumulated corruptions which they believe veered the Muslim *umma* away from the right path. Their goal is to purify Muslims' beliefs and practices from cultural and other influences and at times simplify it by ignoring or challenging the established authorities of the four schools of thought (*madhahib*) and the principle of *taqlid*, which led to a stagnation in Islamic thought and belief and formed an obstacle between the believer and the scriptures of the faith. Instead, every believer is seen to be able to refer directly to the Qur'an and *hadith* and in a literal manner, as opposed to the more traditional historical or contextual approach.

The core of Salafi theology consists of: the return to the practices of the first three generations of the *salaf*; the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) in a particular, Salafist interpretation; persistently fighting unbelief, and *shirk* in particular, in all its forms, whether it is in new or familiar manifestations; the purging of innovations (*bida'*); a literalist interpretation based on the Qur'an and the *hadith* as the sole reliable sources; and the belief that the Qur'an and *hadith* are enough to guide Muslims in all times and conditions (Haykel, 2009).

The various Salafi groups are generally united on matters of theology. Their differences begin to appear, however, when addressing issues of jurisprudence and politics. In jurisprudence, while Ibn Taymiyya does not altogether reject *taqlid* for ordinary Muslims, Haykel (2009) argues that Salafis seem to take their stance against it from his disciple, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1348 CE), and Salafi groups are in disagreement among themselves over the extent to which to adopt or reject it.

Similar disagreements can be seen in political issues. All Salafis adopt the concept of *manhaj*, or a method of living that expresses the creedal tenets of the group, developed by Nasiruddin al-Albani. However, not all subscribe to his argument against joining political parties or any forms of organizing into groups for fear that they will create divisions among Muslims, as al-Albani saw it. Salafis can thus be divided into 3 main groups according to their political stances: the Jihadist Salafists who advocate violent *jihad* to establish an Islamic state based on divine law – which can be described as a top-down approach; the non-violent Salafis who pursue activism without *jihad* and who were influenced by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood – and thus taking more of a grassroots approach; and the apolitical, quietist Salafis who are more in line with al-Albani's teachings of rejecting all forms of political involvement that could lead to divisions and conflict (*fitnah*) among Muslims (Haykel, 2009).

Abou el Fadl (2001), who argues that Salafism and Wahhabism became 'indistinguishable' in the 1970s, describes Salafism as an egalitarian movement that rejects elitism. By being egalitarian in reaction against the status quo created by the blind imitation of the Muslim scholars, Salafis empower the individual but they also fall into a crisis of authority, especially when disagreements arise. This can be seen when disagreement over the Saudis allowing US forces on holy soil split Salafis into those who stayed loyal to the authority of the rulers and those who rejected their alliance with the U.S., considered to be an enemy. This is further discussed below.

2.18 When did Salafism originate?

Haykel (2009) poses the question: ‘How old is the term Salafi as a designation for a particular group or movement among Muslims?’ (p. 34). The origin of the Salafi movement has been at the centre of scholarly debate since the 1990s. Up until then, the accepted scholarship had been that it originated mainly in Egypt in the late 19th century as a reformist, modernist movement led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Persia), Muhammed Abduh (Egypt) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (Tripoli, then-Syria)³. But this view is now being challenged⁴. Salafism's evolution since – if it can be considered to have evolved as such – has raised a problematic question. If Salafism in its modern form was (re)introduced by Muhammed Abduh and his contemporaries, then how can one consolidate the position of Abduh with that of Salafism vis-a-vis the West? The former was a revivalist who argued that Western achievement can be integrated into Islamic society, whereas contemporary Salafism rejects not only Western hegemony but also Muslim beliefs and practices that contradict the Qur'an and the tradition of the *salaf* as they are interpreted by Salafis. Did Salafism evolve into an increasingly extreme form since Abduh in a manner comparable to Sayyid Qutb's radicalisation in reaction to Western politics? Or was Abduh mistakenly associated with Salafism? (Lauzière, 2010).

Additionally, Salafism's Egyptian roots are contested by Hourani (1962) and Weismann (2001), who make a strong case for Syria as its birthplace - at least in its modern form. ‘[Rida] interpreted Sunnism in the direction of strict Hanbalism, of which the tradition was more alive

³ See for example Encyclopaedia of Islam (Shinar and Ende, 2012) which describes Abduh as 'not purely Salafi), and Kepel.

⁴ See Hourani, Weismann, and Haykel.

in Syria, particularly in Damascus, than in Egypt' (Hourani, p. 231). Damascus was an important learning centre of Hanbalism in the Ottoman period, and the libraries of Syrian mosques still held manuscripts of Ibn Taymiyya's works, since he lived in Syria for the greater part of his life and is buried there (Weismann, 2001). Therefore, scholars in Damascus looked to Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya in their efforts to reform and revive the nation, resulting in a movement that became Salafism. It would also likely be inaccurate to single out one individual to describe as the founding figure of modern Salafism, since the trend appears to have developed over time and through different individuals. For example, while Rida is described as favouring a more literalist approach than Abduh – and thus, closer to the current form of Salafism - the Salafist trend could still not be said to have started with him alone – although his prominent Cairo publication, *al-Manar*, did play a significant role. In fact, Rida tipped his hat to Abd al-Razzaq al-Bitar, calling him 'the renewer of the forefather's way (*madhhab al-salaf*) in Syria' (Weismann, 2001). Thus, the links with and influences among Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and others were established during this period as scholars and activists travelled and discussed their ideas with their counterparts in other Arab countries. The mistaken scholarship on Egypt is attributed to European academics encountering the works of Egyptian Abduh (who lived in exile in France for a time) and Rida after the first World War, and particularly the influence of Rida's *al-Manar* in spreading their ideas (Weismann, 2001 and Lauzière, 2010).

2.19 Abduh and Salafism: an ambiguous connection

Several questions and issues have been raised regarding considering Abduh as one of the founders of modern Salafism. For one, Abduh's reformist stance was modernist, in that he

sought to reconcile Islam with the West. While Abduh wanted to free the religion from what he saw as the chains of Islamic tradition (*taqlid*), which had made scholars rigidly follow their predecessors instead of actively participating in modern life and responding to the new needs and challenges of the era, he still did not see the revival of Islam as a return to the time of the forefathers (Hourani, 1962). He tried to find a middle road due to the schism he witnessed in Egypt between the religious and the secular trends. He advocated rationalism and Western progress to be viewed and weighed through the prism of Islam in a manner that would allow Muslims to be both religious and modern, without having to choose one at the expense of the other.

Furthermore, his use of the term *salaf* designated a longer period than the early generations of Muslims who lived until Ibn Hanbal's time, as mentioned above. For Abduh, the forefathers included the subsequent generations – to Abu Hamed al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) – who formulated the Sunni tradition and formed the Golden Age of Islam (Hourani, 1962).

Lauzière (2010) goes even further in casting doubt over Abduh's link to Salafism, arguing from a conceptual historical perspective that

[i]n 1902, three years before his death, Abduh made a very rare mention of the Salafis (*al-salafiyyin*) in the pages of *al-Manar*. Although he did not criticise them, he clearly did not claim to be one of them nor did he imply that the Salafis were his followers. Rather, he briefly presented them as Sunni Muslims who differed from the Ash'aris with respect to theology. The most striking feature of this passage, however, is that Abduh did not even expect his readers to know who the Salafis were. Evidently the word begged for an explanation, even among the subscribers of *al-Manar*, for Abduh deemed it useful to specify in parentheses that the Salafis were 'people who adhered to the creed of the forefathers' (*al-akhidhin bi-'aqidat al-salaf*).

Apart from the weight of scholarly tradition, there is little reason to consider al-Afghani and Abduh as self-proclaimed Salafis or proponents of a broad Salafiyyah movement. The fact that both men invoked the pious ancestors, as did many other Muslims before them, does not constitute a sufficient explanation and must not become a red herring. (p. 374)

In fact, Abduh is dismissed by Saudi Salafis as a ‘rationalist neo-Mu‘tazili’ (Hasan, 2005, p. 81f).

2.20 Salafism – a modern or a pre-modern movement?

Lauzière's study of the history of the terms *salaf* and *salafiyyah*, as can be seen in the above quote, led him to the conclusion that, first, Salafism as a movement cannot be associated with Abduh from an analysis of his writings and use of the term; and second, the early, medieval usage by Ibn Taymiyya and others was in reference to the *salaf* or to the *madhhab al-salaf* in a more limited form, but not to *Salafiyyah* as a full-fledged movement as it has come to be known in the 20th century, replete with theology and law. Lauzière's conclusion warrants further investigation and should, at the very least, make researchers exercise caution and closer analysis in examining the medieval use of the terms.

Haykel (2009) argues that the roots of Salafism are in the medieval works of Ibn Hanbal and, later, Ibn Taymiyya, while at the same he too cautions against confusing the latter's use of the term *salafi* with its later usage by Abduh, Afghani and Rida (in his earlier thought)⁵. The term *salafi* appears as early as in the works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1348 CE), among other pre-modern theologians, and was used in reference to Ahl al-Hadith (Haykel,

⁵ Their salafism has been labelled Enlightened Salafism, as opposed to Traditional Salafism, which Rida adopted later in his life (Haykel, 2009).

2009). Ahl al-Hadith were a group of traditionists who, from the 8th century onwards, embarked on collecting, authenticating and studying the traditions of the Prophet and his companions, and to whom Ibn Hanbal belongs (Schacht, 2012). Ibn Taymiyya describes *madhhab al-salaf*⁶ thus: ‘The way of the Salaf is to interpret literally the Qur’anic verses and *hadiths* that relate to the Divine attributes [...], and without indicating modality and without attributing to Him anthropomorphic qualities’ (quoted in Haykel, p. 38). In the above mentioned flier on Salafism, the Prophet is quoted as having told his daughter: ‘I am for you a blessed Salaf’, and several medieval authors are named who used the term or promoted the way of the *salaf*, including Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya.

2.21 Ibn Taymiyya and Salafism

Takiuddin Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya’s name has become associated with political Islamist and jihadist groups. The parallels drawn between Ibn Taymiyya’s era and modern times can be seen in ‘Akk’s argument in particular where he draws similarities between the 13th and the 20th centuries, as will be shown next.

2.21.1 A need for reform

‘With apocalypse so close and conventional ideas of the *shari’a* under such threat, conservatism was crying out for a champion. And as God, luck or cause and effect would have it, just the hero was at hand - Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).’ - Sadakat Kadri, 2012.

⁶ Note Ibn Taymiyya's use of the terms ‘*madhhab al-salaf*’ rather than ‘*al-Salafīyyah*’ - as Lauzière points out.

In a chapter titled 'Necessary reasons to call (*da'wah*) for the ways of the *salaf* in the time of Ibn Taymiyya and even in our time,' 'Akk (1995) discusses four main reasons for the need for a reformer like Ibn Taymiyya in the 13th century. These are: the proliferation of philosophical ideas; of what is considered Sufi excess (*ghuluw*); of what he describes as wrong atheistic beliefs; and of the different esoteric sects of Islam. The first two of these will be discussed next.

Philosophy

Following exposure to classical Greek thought and interaction with it, an Islamic philosophy emerged and soon after an Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalam*) followed. Debates raged around the nature of God and God's attributes, particularly stemming from the Qur'anic portrayals of God sitting on a throne, God's hands, God hearing and seeing, and being omnipotent, omnipresent, merciful, and so forth. The debate was further complicated by arguments over whether the Qur'an, as the revealed word of God, is created or eternal, and the implications of each case. These themes will be further explored in Chapter Four. According to 'Akk (1995), when the theologians adopted the same methodology and Greek terminology as the philosophers, they fell into the same errors. He describes the Mu'tazila as having committed an innovation (*bid'a*) by rejecting prophetic sayings in their quest for a rationally based belief system.

In this atmosphere of bitter and divisive disagreements, leading scholars issued *fatwas* forbidding philosophical and theological debates and urged a return to the faith of the forefathers. 'Akk thus concludes that this era demonstrated the dangers of engaging in purposeless philosophical debates that, instead of providing answers, created discord and

divisions that have persisted to modern times. Ibn Taymiyya was accused of anthropomorphism when he defended the Qur'anic descriptions of God while refusing to engage any further in a debate on the divine attributes. This has remained a point of contention between proponents of this view and their detractors among Sufis and others. Haykel (2009) describes Ibn Taymiyya's position, which is discussed in the theologian's book *Al-Fatawa al-Kubra*:

The way of the Salaf is to interpret literally the Qur'anic verses and *hadiths* that relate to the divine attributes (*ijra' ayat al-sifat wa ahadith al-sifat 'ala zahirha*), and without indicating modality and without attributing to Him anthropomorphic qualities (*ma' nafy al-kayfiyyah wal-tashbih*). So that one is not to state that the meaning of 'hand' is power or that 'hearing' is knowledge (p. 38).

The *Kalam* debates are further examined in Chapter Four.

Sufism

'Between the spiritual Muslims and the jurists there is an unceasing struggle, and battles which will not end until... the Day of Judgment.'
- Afifuddin Tilimsani (d. 1291 CE), quoted in Kadri, 2012.

By the time Ibn Taymiyya was born in 1263 CE, Sufism had evolved into a formalised practice with the establishment of the orders (*tariqas*) and the works of al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) and Ibn Arabi (d. 1240 CE). Sufism was also to prosper under the Mongol rule of the al-Khanid dynasty after its leader converted to Islam in 1295 CE and which reigned until 1336 CE (Shepard, 2009).

Ibn Taymiyya did not reject Sufism altogether; rather, he was critical of what he considered to be Sufi excess (*ghuluw*). He rejected such practices as glorifying the saints and seeking their

intercession with God, and grave visitations. Furthermore, he took confrontational actions to disprove the mystics' claims, such as the forcible destruction of a special rock or tree, or publicly challenging the Rafi'iya about using a special mixture to render them immune to fire (Kadri, 2012). In the above-mentioned chapter, 'Akk (1995) quotes several *hadiths* to criticise grave visitations and to support his claim that the Prophet dismissed the practice as Judeo-Christian in origin. In an implicit warning to contemporary Muslims, 'Akk is critical of those among medieval Muslims who imitated 'the mores and *shirk* beliefs of the Dhimmis and *Mushrikin*' (p. 83). In his exposition on the spread of 'atheistic' beliefs, 'Akk refers to monism, unionism, and antinomianism which he says crept into Sufism through the Zoroastrians along with Greek and Indian influences. Additionally, he considers the esoteric Isma'ili sects that appeared under the Fatimid rule to have been a 'grave danger to Islam' and blames the Fatimids for their proliferation, particularly in their attempts to restore their lost reign in Egypt. He also accuses the Isma'ili sects of collaborating with the Crusaders and the Mongols against the Muslims, thereby justifying Ibn Taymiyya declaring *jihad* against them.

2.21.2 Enter Ibn Taymiyya

Ibn Taymiyya was largely a product of his time, but he was more than a reactionary. His knowledge of Islam, Judaism and Christianity was profound and he became renowned for it (Kadri, 2012). He also became famous for his debates against Christians, Sufis and other esoteric sects, as well as his criticism of the Islamic establishment and schools of thought (Kadri, 2012). While he belonged to the Hanbali *madhhab*, he did not hesitate to clarify and correct some Hanbali ideas as they were being practiced by contemporary scholars (al-Matroudi, 2006). Torture and repeated imprisonment did not deter him from issuing

controversial *fatwas* nor did they force him to renounce his stances. Only evidence could do so, as is illustrated in his refutation of his earlier writing on *hajj*, which he subsequently found to have been false based on uncovering new textual proof (al-Matroudi, 2006). But did Ibn Taymiyya altogether reject the *madhhabs* and adopt individual *ijtihad* as it is encouraged by some modern Salafis?

2.21.3 Ibn Taymiyya's juristic rank

There are two opinions about the type of *mujtahid* Ibn Taymiyya was. One states that he was Hanbali to the end of his life, while another holds that he was Hanbali but later in life became an absolute independent *mujtahid*. This question is important because of the implications it has for particular Salafi groups' rejection of the imitation of the four Sunni schools of thought and in the extent to which they model their reasoning on Ibn Taymiyya - except for Wahhabis, who adhere to the Hanbali *madhhab* (Peskes and Ende, 2012).

Based on Ibn al-Qayyim's classifications of the types of *mujtahids*, Ibn Taymiyya had to have been extensively knowledgeable about the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the Shari'a, the opinions of the companions and the Arabic language (Al-Matroudi, 2006). Al-Matroudi further argues that Ibn Taymiyya could be considered either an absolute independent *mujtahid* or an absolute *mujtahid* affiliated with the jurisprudence of another scholar. While the two types of *ijtihad* are considered of equal rank in knowledge, the main difference between them is that, as an absolute independent, a *mujtahid* uses his own sources of law and does not imitate other scholars except in certain cases where others might be more knowledgeable than him. In contrast, an affiliated *mujtahid* only rarely turns to his own independent search of evidence

and bases most of his opinions on those of the scholar he is affiliated with, using the same sources of law (in this case, that of Ibn Hanbal). Therefore, the central question becomes whether the *mujtahid* chooses to use his own sources of law or whether he uses the same sources as another scholar's. Al-Matroudi is of the opinion that it would be safest to consider Ibn Taymiyya a *mujtahid* affiliated with the Hanbali school of thought.

The issue is contentious because of the different opinions, the complexity of Ibn Taymiyya's career and the absence or the conflicting statements from him or his contemporaries in relation to his status. The examples of al-Dhahabi and Schacht help illustrate the differing opinions. A student of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim wrote in a biography that for several years Ibn Taymiyya did not base his *fatwas* on any of the legal schools and instead used exclusively textual evidence that he himself found and validated (Haykel, 2009). In contrast, Schacht narrates an exchange between Ibn Taymiyya and his detractors in which the former appears to indirectly imply that he was a *muhtasib* who issued legal opinions, but did not affirm that he was a *mujtahid* (al-Matroudi, 2006). Most significant is that, while he was affiliated with Hanbali jurisprudence, Ibn Taymiyya did not reject other schools of thought, nor did he reject Hanbalism when he sought to clarify or correct some of its legal principles. However, when he found evidence in the Qur'an or Sunnah, Ibn Taymiyya favoured it to the legal schools' rulings. His hierarchy of textual authority for a legal ruling was in the following order (al-Matroudi, 2006):

- the Qur'an,
- the Sunnah (divided into categories),
- a consensus limited to the companions (*salaf*) only - since he believed that a consensus couldn't be reached thereafter,
- analogy if an issue is not in the text, such as likening *hashish* to wine for a ruling on its use,
- *Istishab* (established judgement based on the lack of new evidence to the contrary),

- *Maslahah mursalah* (benefit to public interest).

What can be asserted is that, first, textual evidence to him was the most definite and highest form of proof, even when it was at odds with the establishment, and second, that he did not reject *taqlid* (al-Matroudi, 2006).

According to Haykel (2009), Salafis possibly take their stance against imitation - termed *la-madhhabiyyah* - not from Ibn Taymiyya but from Ibn al-Qayyim. The latter 'argued that ordinary Muslims should be liberated from the *taqlid* of the four schools of law' (p. 44).

2.21.4 Historical context

Ibn Taymiyya lived during a time of change and political instability. He was directly affected by the approaching Mongols in 1269 CE when he escaped with his family from his native Harran to Damascus. The period witnessed significant changes, including demographic changes, as the Mongols defeated the Abbasids and took Baghdad in 1258 CE and were moving further west. The centres of learning along with the immigration of peoples of different customs and traditions shifted from Baghdad to Sham and Egypt. As noted above, Sufism spread under Mongol rule during Ibn Taymiyya's lifetime, and Isma'ilism had flourished under the Fatimids earlier. Both were targeted by Ibn Taymiyya for their esotericism and practices. The Mamluk sultans encouraged education, resulting in several schools and libraries being built. However, the era is also characterized by political conflict as sultans wrestled power from each other, by heavy taxation - compounded by the effects of the Mongol invasions and the Crusades - and theologically by a stagnating culture of *taqlid*, in

which the majority of scholars were repeating rulings confined to the four schools of law and not contributing anything new (al-Matroudi, 2006).

Even though the Muslim world during his time was more advanced in many ways than Byzantium, that ‘Western’ empire was perceived as a threat, embodied in the Crusades; and current times are seen as an extension of that history (‘Akk, 1995). Additionally, the creeping of certain beliefs and practices that are perceived to be un-Islamic into the Muslim nation is also echoed in modern times in the Salafis’ main aim of purifying Muslims’ practices. This is seen in the wave of attacks in recent years against Sufi shrines in various countries, from Mali and Tunisia, to Yemen and Pakistan, also mirroring Ibn Taymiyya’s actions (Kadri, 2012). In 2015, Jordan was one of a number of countries that restricted Ibn Taymiyya’s books because he is considered one of the leading scholars whose opinions the terror organisation Islamic State (in al-Sham and Iraq) draws from³⁹.

2.22 Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani’s apolitical Salafism

Born in 1914 CE to a poor, religious Albanian family, Nasiruddin al-Albani⁴⁰ moved with his parents to Damascus when he was nine years old following Albania’s post-Ottoman Western-leaning, secularist policies. In Damascus, Nasiruddin studied the Arabic language and the religion according to the Hanafi *fiqh* of his father as well as the latter’s trade as a watchmaker.

³⁹ Available in Arabic at: <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2015/6/8/الأردن-التي-مديّة-ابن-مؤلفات-علي-يت-حفظ> (Accessed: 9 June 2015).

⁴⁰ He later added Muhammad to his name to create the phrase ‘Muhammad Nasiruddin’ in praise of the Prophet.

The autodidactic young man would rise to fame to become one of contemporary Salafism's most prominent figures, after the Saudi Mufti Bin Baz and the Mufti's deputy Ibn al-Uthaymin (Lacroix, 2009). His Salafism described as pietist, cautious and quietist, al-Albani nonetheless did find himself at the centre of controversy more than once. Still, the focus of his studies and writing - the close evaluation and purification of the Sunni tradition of weak *hadiths* - gained him considerable repute and occupied his work throughout his life until his death in 1999 in Jordan at the age of 85.

2.22.1 On the self-label 'Salafi'

Al-Albani defends the ascription to Salafism as being to the correct and infallible way of the forefathers, whereas he views those who subscribe to one of the four legal schools as following those who were fallible and 'not protected from mistakes' (Salafi Publications, no date b). In a Q&A session reported in 'On Ascription to the Salaf' (Salafi Publications, no date b), al-Albani is asked about using the label 'Salafi' and engages in the following exchange. Al-Albani recounts this exchange in an audio recording uploaded to YouTube⁴¹:

al-Albani: When it is said to you, What is your *madhhab*, what is your reply?

Questioner: A Muslim.

al-Albani: This is not sufficient!

Questioner: Allaah has named us Muslims and he recited the saying of Allaah Most High, 'He is the one who has called you Muslims beforehand' (Qur'an 22:78)

⁴¹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HGOcX-mUfc> (Accessed: 3 December 2012).

al-Albani: This would be a correct answer if we were in the very first times (of Islaam) before the sects had appeared and spread. But if we were to ask, now, any Muslim from any of these sects with which we differ on account of *aqeedah*, his answer would not be any different to this word. All of them the Shi'ite Rafidi, the Khaariji, the Nusayri Alawi would say, 'I am a Muslim.' Hence, this is not sufficient in these days.

Questioner: In that case I say, I am a Muslim upon the Book and the Sunnah.

al-Albani: This is not sufficient either.

Questioner: Why?

al-Albani: Do you find any of those whom we have just mentioned by way of example saying, 'I am a Muslim who is not upon the Book and the Sunnah'? Who is the one who says, 'I am not upon the Book and the Sunnah'?

At this point [al-Albani] then explains in detail the importance of [adhering to] the Book and the Sunnah in light of the understanding of the Salaf al-Salih.

Questioner: In that case I am a Muslim upon the Book and the Sunnah with the understanding of the Salaf us-Saalih.

al-Albani: When a person asks you about your *madhhab*, is this what you will say to him?

Questioner: Yes.

al-Albani: What is your view that we shorten this phrase in the language, since the best words are those that are few but indicated the desired intent, so we say, Salafi? (Salafi Publications, no date b)

2.22.2 Purging the Sunni cannon of weak hadiths

In their stated goal of purifying Islam from innovations, Salafis scrutinise the Sunni *hadiths* to purge them of those that are considered weak and inauthentic. Al-Albani dedicated his life to *hadith* scholarship, and singled out, by one count, nearly one thousand *hadiths* that he considered to be unreliable, including ones from Muslim Ibn Hajjaj's reputable collection, *Sahih Muslim*. His methodology was to examine the *sanad* or *isnad* of the *hadith*, that is, the

chain of transmitters, in which he evaluated the reputation and reliability of the narrators, whereas his study of the *matn*, the saying itself, was limited to grammar and linguistics. In this process, reasoning was to be kept out of the investigation.

This is illustrated in Amin's critique (2004) of al-Albani's methodology. The following *hadith* was dismissed by al-Albani as being weak based on the credibility of one of the transmitters, Abu al-Zubayr: 'Sacrifice only a mature cow, unless it is difficult for you, in which case sacrifice a ram' (Amin, 2004). Amin quotes two other *hadiths* that are similar in content and which al-Albani considers to be authentic yet does not use them to authenticate the first *hadith*. Amin writes:

However, al-Albani does not treat them as confirming the *hadith* of Abu al-Zubayr in order to enhance its quality as *sahih*. Rather, instead of understanding them literally, he engages in *tawil* (interpretation) of the two reportedly authentic *hadiths* by quoting other *hadiths* that have reliable *isnads*, while continuing to regard the *hadith* of Abu al-Zubayr as weak. Al-Albani prefers to understand the *hadith* of Abu al-Zubayr literally and is reluctant to subject it to interpretation, because [it] is not authentic. Interpretation is an aspect of authentication. Therefore, there is no place for interpretation in the case of a weak tradition (p. 155).

The reason for discrediting Abu al-Zubayr is that, based on his biography, al-Albani views him as a *mudallis*, a 'person who suppressed the faults in *isnads*' (Amin, p. 154) and who's thus considered unreliable if he wasn't explicitly clear about how he heard the *hadith*.

Therefore, for example, al-Albani considers other *hadiths* transmitted through Abu al-Zubayr as being authentic because the manner of the transmission is specified⁴². Consequently, Amin counted 125 *hadiths* quoted in Muslim's collection *Sahih* that would be discredited by this

⁴² For example, whether the terms used were 'heard from' or 'on the authority of' (*an*) – al-Albani considers the latter to be less reliable.

criteria and which were transmitted by the thus-questionable Abu al-Zubayr-Jabir link. Amin concludes that while al-Albani's method falls within the framework of the traditional Sunni *hadith* authentication, his criteria for excluding weak ones is too general. He further suspects that al-Albani's methodology was more likely based on Ibn Hazm's and al-Dhahabi's opinions rather than a comprehensive study of the *hadiths*.

2.22.3 Controversy

Al-Albani found himself in the middle of controversy when he was asked about his opinion on Muslims living in non-Muslim countries who cannot openly show their religious symbols or rituals. His response, based on a *hadith*, was that they should move (make *hijrah*) to Muslim countries where they can openly practice their religion. He was then asked whether this applied to Palestinians, to which he replied in the affirmative and further gave the example of the Prophet leaving the holiest place, Mecca, and relocating to Madinah⁴³. His controversial *fatwa* demonstrated his commitment to faith before politics and land - it may also have had a personal element since his own family left Albania and settled in Syria. His stance was that religion preceded all else.

Another controversy he stirred up was his harsh attack on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Sayyid Qutb, criticising the organisation for not having religious scholars and 'forbidding' its members from attending religious classes, therefore making it more motivated by political power than faith. His stance proved to be inflammatory at a time in the 1970s

⁴³ From '*Waqafat fi Hayat al-Imam al-'Allama Mohammad Nasir al-Albani Rahimahu Allah*'. Available at: <http://saaid.net/Doat/ehsan/4.htm> (Accessed: 3 December 2012).

when the Brotherhood was at the height of its popularity. He later found himself having to soften his position on Qutb, but the damage was done.

Finally, al-Albani also angered Wahhabis when he criticised Ibn Abdul Wahhab's *taqlid* of Hanbali thought and accused him of being ignorant of the Prophetic tradition. However, his stance on *taqlid* resonated with some scholars in Saudi Arabia who had been disciples of Ahl-e-Hadith scholars in India and who as a result had differences with the Hanbali school. Bin Baz's support for al-Albani paved the way for his work in Saudi Arabia from the 1960s and his consequent significant influence in the shaping of contemporary Salafism.

2.22.4 Neo-Ahl al-Hadith and apoliticism

Al-Albani inspired the neo-Ahl al-Hadith, a movement formed by his disciples and which rejected the Wahhabi Hanbali stance and vehemently opposed any role in politics. Based on his teachings, they developed an ideology and identity distinct from both Wahhabis and *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Awakening), a product of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism in the Saudi Kingdom. A schism split the group in the 1970s on disagreement over the question of the loyalty to the ruler, the first rejecting the state and the second adopting unconditional allegiance to the ruler.

Al-Albani's famous stance on politics became his statement: 'In the present circumstances, the good policy is to stay away from politics (*min al-siyasah tark al-siyasah*)' (Lacroix, 2009, p. 69), again demonstrating his preference for prioritizing correcting religious practices over politics. Apolitical Salafism was able to make peace with Arab regimes and in return they

have embraced it for its quietism, and at times manipulated it against the political strands of Salafism. For example, in the 1990s the Saudi government supported the apolitical Madkhali movement against *Sahwa* (Hegghammer, 2009). Finally, Lacroix sees this governmental relationship as an insurance card for apolitical Salafism's continued survival in the future.

2.23 The Madkhali split – online and in Birmingham

Rabi' al-Madkhali (b. 1931 CE) is a retired Saudi university professor at the Islamic University of Madinah associated with al-Albani's quietist Salafism. Along with Sheikh Muhammad Aman al-Jami, he led a group of al-Albani's disciples in giving unconditional support to the Saudi leadership after U.S. armed forces were invited in 1990 to be based in the Kingdom following the Gulf War. This led to yet another split with al-Albani's followers who rejected the government's decision and, as a result, its legitimacy. The split became known as the Madkhali split and the movement derogatorily as Madkhalism. In Yemen, quietist Madkhali Salafi Sheikh Muqbil al-Wad'i's rapprochement with the Saudi government before his death paved the way for Madkhali influence among Yemeni Salafis (Bonney, 2009). In Saudi Arabia, Madkhali influence was permitted to grow in the Islamic University of Madinah to counter the influences of the Muslim Brotherhood and *Sahwa*. This subsequently led to the growth of Madkhalism in Europe as European students returned from the Islamic University.

Yet the ripples of the Madkhali split were not immediately felt in Britain, where most Salafis were apolitical. One group for example, Ahl-e-Hadith, with roots in India, had links to the Saudi government and therefore refrained from criticising the Kingdom's decision on US

troops. The main British youth group Jam'iyat Ihya' Minhaaj al-Sunnah (JIMAS) was founded in 1984 by Salafi autodidact Abu Muntasir Manwar Ali (b. 1959 CE) and which played an important role in the spread of Salafism among the Muslim youth in the UK. Among its notable members were Usama Hasan and Abdurraheem Green (Hamid, 2009).

Innes Bowen (2014) argues that it was Arab scholars who introduced the Madkhali split to the UK, and one such scholar was Syrian Muhammad Surur Zain al-Abidin (b. 1938 CE) whose movement was branded by critics as Sururiyyah to discredit it. One of his prominent students is the Saudi Sahwi Sheikh Salman al-Ouda (b. 1956 CE). Surur promoted Qutbian views and established several organisations in the UK, among them the Centre for Islamic Studies, London's al-Muntada al-Islami (the Islamic Forum), and in Birmingham *Markaz Dirasat al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah* (Centre for the Study of the Prophet's Example). When the schism reached Britain in 1995, it divided JIMAS between those who supported jihadism and those who opposed it. The latter were headed by quietist Abu Khadeejah Abdul Wahid who was reportedly a supporter of the Saudi government (Hamid, 2009). He along with British convert Dawud Burbank (d. 2011 CE) split from JIMAS to form the Organisation of Ahl al-Sunnah Islamic Societies (OASIS)⁴⁴. OASIS attempted to rival the Federation of Students Islamic Societies (FOSIS) (Hamid, 2009). In 1996, OASIS founded the Salafi Bookstore and Islamic Centre in Birmingham's Coventry Road, better known as Salafi Publications – headed by Abu Khadeejah – and followed by the establishment of the Salafi Mosque, also known as the Wright Street Mosque, in 2002. Abu Khadeejah and his supporters then began a campaign of discrediting other Salafis and became known as the 'Super Salafis' as a result of their intolerance (Hamid, 2009). A larger and older Salafi mosque founded in the 1979 in

⁴⁴ Abu Khadeejah has written an account of the events of 1995 with JIMAS on his blog, available at: <http://www.abukhadeejah.com/tag/abu-muntasir/>.

Birmingham is the Green Lane Mosque associated with the Ahl-e-Hadith has been denounced by Salafi Publications. The head of *da'wah* at Green Lane confirmed to me in 2014 that the mosque was Salafi and that it welcomed both men and women, as discussed in Chapter One. The mosque didn't adhere to or promote a particular school of thought. However, some mosque attendants followed Hanbalism or the *madhhab* of Pakistan's Ahl al-Hadith, with close links to Saudi Arabia – which suggests that the mosque is close to Wahhabism. In a 2011 YouTube video, Abu Junayd Yusuf Bowers of Salafi Publications accused Green Lane Mosque of being affiliated with the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (*Jam'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami*), i.e. affiliated with the movements of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Surur (Abu Abdullah UK, 2011). The 9/11 attacks and subsequent events in Britain led to a change of course by JIMAS founder Manwar Ali, who in 2005 apologised in tears for his earlier stances and began appearing in public talks with Sufi speakers and participating in inter-faith events (Hamid, 2009) and which aired weekly sermons from the Saudi Mufti (Bowen, 2014).

Among Salafi Publications' online productions is the website albani.co.uk that contains several of al-Albani's opinions. Salafi Publications is also linked to two other book publishers: the private, non-governmental Dar al-Salam Publishers UK and the Canadian TROID. A website was set up in December 2009, themadkhalis.com, to counter attacks by a Brotherhood supporter against Madkhali views. Interestingly, it appears to be linked to Salafi Publications as its layout is very similar to another affiliated website

(IslamAgainstExtremism.com) which Salafi Publications' main website links to⁴⁵. But the Madkhali website is anonymous and isn't directly endorsed by Salafi Publications.

2.24 Conclusion

This chapter introduced iERA with profiles of Green and Tzortzis, their own conversion narratives and their development of their *da'wah* approach. To contextualise iERA's work, it also briefly examined Salafism and the two scholars associated with the movement, al-Albani and Ibn Taymiyya. Salafism is deeply rooted in the legacies of the traditionists in general and of Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya in particular. It emphasizes both belief and practice and strives to emulate these as they were experienced by the righteous ancestors. Its insistence on literalism, occasional hostility or rejection of the Other (whether other-Muslim or non-Muslim) and uncompromising stances give it an absolutist streak. Its appeal lies in Salafism portraying itself as the authentic Islam, and its adherents present their proofs directly from the core texts. Salafism also better defines their identity as opposed to that Other, and gives them the reassurance that they follow in the footsteps of the companions, with beliefs and practices that are unchanging and eternal. The chapter also looked at the general Islamic view towards *da'wah* and the late Saudi Mufti's guidelines for undertaking it. Additionally, conversion to Islam was also discussed as it relates to *da'wah* efforts.

⁴⁵ One of the articles published in December 2015 on Islam Against Extremism is titled: 'Refutations of Ibn Taymiyyah against the Doctrines of al-Qaeda and ISIS'.

CHAPTER THREE

iERA'S SCIENTIFIC MIRACLES NARRATIVE

While I was teaching in Yemen in 2009, one of my students came to me one day and gave me a videotape titled *This is the Truth*⁴⁶. He politely asked me to watch it. It was a program presented by controversial Yemeni cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani on modern scientific facts found in the Qur'an, with Western scientists acknowledging this mystery and appearing to admit or confirm the divine nature of Islam's holy book.

Quite often in *da'wah*, examples are given of scientific truths that were revealed to the Prophet in the Qur'an long before they were discovered by modern science. This popular narrative is used to prove the divine nature of the Qur'an to non-Muslims. It can also be argued that a secondary purpose of this narrative is to reinforce Muslims' belief as well – not without the danger of it having an adverse effect. For instance, Ahmed Abd al-Wahab⁴⁷ told Stenberg (1996) that 'the meaning of science is to learn more about Allah's creation – a science in the service of God. Thus, science should serve to create a stronger belief among Muslims' (Stenberg, p. 236). Al-Wahab also maintains that any contradictions between science and the Qur'an are the result of poor or deficient understanding of the verses.

This chapter explores a widespread narrative in *da'wah* that claims the existence of scientific revelations in the Qur'an consistent with modern knowledge. The way in which iERA

⁴⁶ The title of the show appears to be taken from Qur'an 41:53.

⁴⁷ An Egyptian general who published works on religious topics after retiring in 1980.

constructed this narrative around the Qur'anic embryo verses and the subsequent backlash it received from both Muslims and non-Muslims are examined. This chapter examines iERA's following works:

1. A 2011 document by Tzortzis with an exegesis of Qur'an 23:12-15
2. A blog post by Tzortzis proposing a different approach
3. iERA's 2014 video with an overview of GORAP

3.1 The inimitability of the Qur'an (*I'jaz al-Qur'an*): the evolution of the concept

The Arabic term *I'jaz* literally means 'weakness or inability', from the root ('a j z) in *Lisan al-Arab*⁴⁸; however, the phrase *I'jaz al-Qur'an* is intriguingly missing in *Lisan al-Arab*. The term *I'jaz* shares the same root as the Arabic word for 'miracle', *mu'jiza*. The Encyclopaedia of Islam defines the term *I'jaz* as 'the rendering incapable, powerless' (Grunebaum, 2012). Before acquiring various other meanings, the phrase *I'jaz al-Qur'an* in the early Islamic period referred to the challenge presented in various Qur'anic verses to the sceptics of Arabia who questioned the divinity of the text and the prophethood of Muhammed. Islamic tradition states the inability (*I'jaz*) of the Arabs to produce similar verses – although this is disputed (Grunebaum, 2012). The verses that present the challenge include: Qur'an 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, and 17:88.

Say, 'If mankind and the jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants.' (Qur'an 17:88)

⁴⁸ *Lisan al-Arab* is an authoritative, rigorous, and comprehensive dictionary of the Arabic language compiled by Muhammad Ibn Manthour (d. 1311 CE). It consists of around 80 thousand entries.

Up until the time of the jurist Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) the term appears to have been limited to its linguistic uniqueness and the inability of the Arabs to imitate its verses. The period between 750 CE and 1,000 CE was the height of disputes over the question of *I'jaz* (Welch et al., 2012). This coincided with the Abbasid take-over. In an increasingly multi-ethnic empire, challenges to the claims of defenders of the faith required them to develop proofs for textual divinity – to derive doctrines and laws from – and proof for prophethood. From the end of the 9th century onwards, however, other interpretations began to appear, although a work by Muhammed bin Yazid al-Wasiti (d. 918 CE) has been lost (Grunebaum, 2012). One of the earliest surviving works that included arguments for *I'jaz* beyond the linguistic superiority is that of Ali ibn Isa al-Rummani (d. 944 CE). Both al-Rummani and Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Baqillani (d. 1013 CE) argued for the unmatched style of the Qur'an as well as its knowledge of unknown ancient events and future prophecies (Welch et al., 2012)⁴⁹. The term *I'jaz al-Qur'an* thus acquired the greater meaning of miraculous nature. Not only had God revealed and protected the Qur'an – a less popular view is that God even prevented people from imitating its style – but God also inserted knowledge into it beyond that of the inhabitants of seventh-century Arabia.

In modern times and in light of modern science, a popular book on *I'jaz al-Qur'an* was authored by 20th century poet and author Mustafa Sadek al-Raf'i (d. 1937 CE) and was reprinted at least nine times. In the preface to the second edition of this book, dated 1346 AH/ ca.1927 CE⁵⁰, M. Rashid Rida (d. 1935 CE) emphasized that the belief in *I'jaz al-Qur'an* is a

⁴⁹ One modern example given of a Qur'anic prophecy is the following verse, re-interpreted by *I'jaz 'Ilmi* proponent Marwan al-Taftanazi to predict NASA's moon-landing (Guessoum, 2012): 'And [by] the moon when it becomes full, [That] you will surely experience state after state' (Qur'an 84:18-19).

⁵⁰ The book is titled *The Inimitability of the Qur'an and Prophetic Eloquence (I'jaz al-Qur'an wal-Balagha al-Nabawiyya)*. The second edition of the book, with Rida's preface, was likely published a year before the third edition, in 1927, which overlaps with the Hijri year 1346.

religious obligation for the entire Muslim community⁵¹, by the consensus of the commentators and *'ulama* (al-Raf'i, p. 20). However, Rida does not mention the concept of the Qur'anic scientific miracles in his description of *I'jaz* in that preface. On the other hand, al-Raf'i does discuss revealed scientific truths in a chapter titled 'Secrets of the Qur'an' (*Sara'ir al-Qur'an*). He bases this chapter on a book of the same name by the Ottoman general and astro-mathematician Ahmed Muhtar Pasha (d. 1919 CE) published in Turkey around the time of the first edition of al-Raf'i's book, ca. 1912 CE⁵², and translated by Muhibaddin al-Khatib. The chapter gives a brief summary of Pasha's book on the Creation, the end of the Earth, and the Qur'anic description of the planets, which Pasha argues have been confirmed by modern science. In this chapter also, al-Raf'i refers to a book titled *Islam and Modern Medicine (al-Islam wal-Tubb al-Hadith)* by Egyptian physician Abdul Aziz Isma'il Pasha (al-Raf'i, pp. 130-133). Interestingly, al-Raf'i added a chapter on the Qur'anic description of embryo development later, in the third edition of the book, which was published in Egypt in 1346 AH/ca. 1928 CE (see al-Raf'i's footnote, p. 134). He summarizes in this chapter a commentary on verses 23:12-15 (on the embryo) by 16th century pharmacist David of Antioch/Dawud al-Antaki (d. 1599 CE).

The above clues seem to point to the fact that, in modern times, the science narrative may have begun to develop around the turn of the 20th century, following the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms of the 19th century and Muslims coming into contact with science in Europe through education and its technological and military sophistication. Abduh (d. 1905 CE), who was concerned with reconciling religion with modernity, worked on an extensive commentary of the Qur'an, that he didn't complete, in which he scientifically reinterpreted the verses on the

⁵¹ *fard kifayah*

⁵² See www.aljamaa.net/ar/document/5216.shtml (Accessed: 24 March 2015).

natural world and favoured the scientific explanation. For instance, he argued that an interpretation of *jinn* could be microbes, and the birds that dropped stones on the Avicennian troops headed towards Mecca on elephants were possibly disease-carrying flies (Guessoum, 2011, p. 149). Rotraud Wieland traces the beginning of modern scientific exegesis (*tafsir 'ilmi*) to a nineteenth-century physician, Muhammad al-Iskandarani and the Qur'anic encyclopaedia of Tantawi Jawhari, published in 1923 and detailing the scientific topics in the Qur'an (Guessoum, 2012, p. 149).

The narrative of the scientific miracles in the Qur'an, which has also evolved to include the scientific miracles in the Sunni Hadiths, has become popular in the Islamic world to the extent that it is now a part of *'Uloom al-Qur'an* (The Sciences of the Qur'an) in some school and university curricula, alongside the study of *Tafsir* and of the historical contexts of the revelations (*asbab al-nuzul*). A growing trend of considering it to be an unquestionable fundamental doctrine of faith is heavily criticised by Algerian astrophysicist Nidhal Guessoum⁵³. Guessoum argues against sacralising the science narrative and instead subscribes to the view of using scientific knowledge for a better understanding (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an. Thus the evolution of the doctrine of *I'jaz al-Qur'an* was due to two important factors: proving the divine revelation of the Qur'an, and thus deriving divine laws and doctrines from it, and proving Muhammad's prophethood (Grunebaum, 2012). It continues to be used in contemporary *da'wah* discourse, where the doctrine of *I'jaz* is used by iERA to make both of the above arguments – the divinity of the text and the prophethood of Muhammad.

⁵³ See Nidhal Guessoum's discussion in Arabic: <http://youtu.be/7eOXL83re4w> (Accessed: 23 March 2015).

3.1.1 Two Principles

The difference of opinions on the extent of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is due to two views of the text. The first, which al-Shatibi and others espouse, is that the Qur'an was addressed to seventh-century Arabia, thus it is only a guide and should not be read into excessively. The second view which motivates *I'jaz* enthusiasts is that the Qur'an is a book for all peoples and all times. Thus Allah has revealed all knowledge in his holy book, and that includes knowledge of past and future events, as well as scientific knowledge of the natural world and the universe. Qur'anic words and verses are also believed to be polysemic, that is, containing multiple meanings. Exegetes derive this interpretation from the Qur'an as well as the Hadiths. The following Qur'anic verse is an example:

It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise (*muhkamat*) - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecified (*mutashabihat*). As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecified, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding. (Qur'an 3:7)

Opinions vary on which verses are to be considered precise and clear in meaning (*muhakamat*) and which ones are unspecified (*mutashabihat*) or whose interpretation is only known by God. Most if not all exegeses on the Qur'an adopt the principle of multiple levels of meaning on the condition that those levels do not invalidate the literal meaning. The question of the interpretation of verses led to the sciences of the Qur'an, and more specifically, to two forms of exegesis: exegesis which is concrete or based on tradition (*tafsir*) and exegesis which is esoteric, abstract or from personal opinion (*ta'wil*) (Berg, no date).

Some hadiths also support and reinforce the levels of meaning, such as the dual outer, literal (*zahir*) and inner, allegorical or hidden (*batin*) meanings. The *batin* meanings were explored and adopted by Shias and Shia sub-sects as well as in the Sufi tradition.

For example, several hadiths with slight variations in details in al-Bukhari and Muslim's tomes report the following story attributed to the second caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab:

Narrated Omar bin al-Khattab:

I heard Hisham bin Hakim bin Hizam reciting Surat-al-Furqan in a way different to that of mine. Allah's Messenger (pbuh) had taught it to me (in a different way). So, I was about to quarrel with him (during the prayer) but I waited till he finished, then I tied his garment round his neck and seized him by it and brought him to Allah's Messenger (pbuh) and said, 'I have heard him reciting Surat-al-Furqan in a way different to the way you taught it to me.' The Prophet (pbuh) ordered me to release him and asked Hisham to recite it. When he recited it, Allah's Apostle said, 'It was revealed in this way.' He then asked me to recite it. When I recited it, he said, 'It was revealed in this way. The Qur'an has been revealed in seven different ways (i.e., seven dialects), so recite it in the way that is easier for you.' (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 2419)

3.2 Medieval roots of the science narrative

Exploring the works of medieval Muslim scientists would provide further insight as to how this narrative developed. The belief that the Qur'an invites people to reflect on the mysteries of the universe and the natural world around them may have spurred the strong medieval interest and achievement in science. Medieval philosophers and scholars could have been motivated by the belief that the Qur'an contains all knowledge based on verses such as the following:

And [mention] the Day when We will resurrect among every nation a witness over them from themselves. And We will bring you, [O Muhammad], as a

witness over your nation. *And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things* and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims. (Qur'an 16:89, my italics)

And there is no creature on [or within] the Earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. *We have not neglected in the Register a thing*. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered. (Qur'an 6:38, my italics)

Ahmad Dallal (2004) disputes this interpretation of 'all knowledge' in the above verses and notes that their contexts limit them to knowledge of the afterlife (Guessoum, p. 153). One of the first exegetes with Arabic proficiency to combine natural arguments with *Kalam* arguments is believed to be the Persian scholar Fakhruddin al-Razi in the 12th century (Muslim Answers, 2013). Others trace its origins to al-Ghazali. Dallal, however, argues that there didn't exist in this period a trend of interpreting the Qur'an in light of the scientific knowledge of the time, and that al-Ghazali did not attempt to link the two (Guessoum, p. 153).

Islamic tradition is at odds with Dallal, however. Prominent Muslim cleric Youssef al-Qaradawi (2014) states that the first to undertake this approach was possibly Abu Hamid Muhammed al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE). To make his case in his book *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Deen (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, al-Ghazali quotes the following *hadith* attributed to the companion Abdullah bin Mas'ud: 'Whoever among you is seeking the knowledge of the ancients and moderns let him ponder the Qur'an/let him study the Qur'an extensively.'⁵⁴

However, the source of this *hadith* is not given in both al-Ghazali's and Guessoum's books. It is not in al-Bukhari's collection. Furthermore, an online article linked to al-Zindani makes the

⁵⁴ 'Man arada' ilm al-awwaleen wal akhareen fal-yatadabbar al-Qur'an'. Qaradawi's article was available at: http://www.onislam.net/english/health-and-science/faith-and-the-sciences/462398-ghazalishatibi-debate-on-Qur'anic-scientific-signs.html?the_Sciences= (Accessed: 19 February 2015). However, this website has since been removed, but the researcher has a copy of the article. The *hadith* is also quoted in Guessoum, 2011, p.153.

same claim about al-Ghazali. According to Ghoneim (no date), in his book *The Jewels of the Qur'an (Jawahir al-Qur'an)*, al-Ghazali argued that the Qur'an contains signs and hints at all of existing human knowledge and that yet to be discovered.

Even though a few of al-Ghazali's contemporaries were also proponents of this approach, it was still not approved by all. Qaradawi (2014) gives the example of 14th century scholar Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1388 CE), who argued that the Qur'an was revealed to illiterate Arabs and therefore did not address knowledge beyond their own. Additionally, the early Muslims – the *salaf* – did not follow this approach in their exegeses; therefore, this is seen as an innovation or at least an undesirable approach to interpreting the text beyond its intended role as guidance. Al-Shatibi further disputed the interpretations of the Qur'anic verses as meaning that all knowledge can be found in the book; instead, what is meant are all the acts of worship and commandments of God. Qaradawi himself opposes the approach of the scientific miracles in the Qur'an, siding with the view that the reference to natural phenomena in the Qur'an is to be seen as divine signs for believers to contemplate and as encouragement to explore, rather than the text carrying all knowledge for all of humanity at all times. Other early figures to use this approach were al-Jahiz (d. c 869 CE) and Ibn Hazm (d. 1064 CE) (Guessoum, 2012).

3.3 Different viewpoints on this approach: 2 general categories

Therefore, attitudes differ along two main trends on this issue as follows:

1. Those who believe that all scientific truths have been revealed in the Qur'an (*I'jaz 'Ilmi*). Science is further proof of its divine nature and is consistent with revelation, but the Qur'an remains superior to science rather than subservient to it:

- Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) (Khir, 2000)
- Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1209 CE) (Khir, 2000)
- Jalal al-Din al-Siyuti (d. 1505 CE)
- Dawud al-Antaki (d. 1599 CE)
- Muhammad Abduh in *Tafsir al-Manar* (d. 1905 CE) (Shayi', 2007)⁵⁵
- M. Rashid Rida in *Tafsir al-Manar* (d. 1935 CE) (Shayi', 2007)⁵⁶
- Azharite Tantawi Jawhari (d. 1939 CE) (Shayi', 2007)
- Zaghoul al-Naggar (b. 1933 CE)
- Abdul Majid al-Zindani (b. 1942 CE)
- Maurice Bucaille (d. 1998 CE)
- Commission on Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah, Saudi Arabia
- Zakir Naik (b. 1965 CE) (Samuel and Rozario, 2010)

Among supporters of this view are those who oppose modern science as a Western secular endeavour to undermine religion. Some may argue that an Islamic science should be developed instead:

- Turkish writer Harun Yahya (pen name of Adnan Oktar) (Samuel and Rozario, 2010)

2. Those who opposed this approach and believe that the descriptions of the natural world in the Qur'an are merely signs to encourage reflection and appreciation of God and do not need to be used to prove its divine nature. Science can be pursued but the Qur'an remains superior.

⁵⁵ Shayi' refers to the work of each opponent and proponent of the narrative.

⁵⁶ There are different opinions on where Rida stands on this issue. See Khir and Shayi'.

They may support a modern exegesis of the Qur'an informed by scientific knowledge and within a specific framework (*tafsir 'ilmi*), due to the danger of exaggerating (*ghuluw*) the interpretations or misinterpreting the verses to prove consistency with science. They may also support an Islamic science:

- Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1388 CE) (Samuel and Rozario, 2010)
- M. Rashid Rida (d. 1935 CE) (Shayi, 2007)
- Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi (d. 1977 CE)
- Bint al-Shati' (d. 1998 CE) (Khir, 2000)
- Subhi al-Salih (b. 1953 CE)
- Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949 CE) (Khir, 2000)
- Azharist Mahmoud Shaltout (d. 1963 CE) (Khir, 2000, and Guessoum, 2011)
- Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad (d. 1964 CE) (Shayi, 2007)
- Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966 CE) (Khir, 2000, p. 31) – ambiguous position, no agreement between science and Qur'an (Campanini, p. 52)
- Youssef al-Qaradawi (b. 1926 CE)
- Muhammed Hussain al-Thahabi (d. 1977 CE) (Khir, 2000)
- Nidhal Guessoum (b. 1960 CE) (Guessoum, 2011)
- Project of Islam and Science, launched in 2014 – associated with Nidhal Guessoum, the American University of Sharjah and the Interdisciplinary University of Paris. (muslim-science.net)
- iERA previously supported the science narrative (in 2011-12) but later modified their position to the signs narrative.

Among supporters of this view are those who oppose modern science as a Western secular endeavour which attempts to undermine religion. Some may argue that an Islamic science should be developed instead.

Guessoum (2012) links the second trend of scientific exegesis to nineteenth-century revivalists al-Afghani (d. 1897 CE), Abduh (d. 1905 CE), and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898 CE), who tried to reconcile Islam with modern Western science. But as seen above, al-Razi may have been an earlier proponent of this approach.

3.4 Origins of the science narrative in modern *da'wah*

Pinpointing an exact period when this narrative began to appear in *da'wah* is difficult; however, in more modern times, several paths lead back to Saudi Arabia from the late 1970s, but reconciling the Qur'an with modern science began earlier in the century as seen above. Hamza Tzortzis, senior researcher at iERA, states that the 'growing movement of Muslim academics and apologists using science to establish the miraculous and divine nature of the Qur'anic discourse' began in the 1980s (Tzortzis, 2013a). The narrative's popularity in attracting converts was stressed by Egyptian geologist and Muslim televangelist Zaghoul al-Naggar, who said: 'One of the main convincing evidences to people to accept Islam is the large number of scientific facts in the Qur'an' (Golden, 2002).

3.5 French physician and Muslim convert Maurice Bucaille (d. 1998 CE)

While Maurice Bucaille's work *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (1987)⁵⁷ may not be the origin of this narrative, it is at least a pivotal landmark in its advancement. Tzortzis (2013a) points to it as one of two main events that enabled the trend – the other being a video production by Sheikh Abdul Majid al-Zindani, discussed below. In his doctoral dissertation Leif Stenberg recalls that one of Bucaille's books was recommended to him by students in Syria, and he later purchased two of Bucaille's books in a London mosque (Stenberg, p. 13).

Well-known nuclear scientist and secularist Pervez Hoodbhoy, who is critical of Bucaille's work, writes that

... Maurice Bucaille shot into prominence throughout the Islamic world with the publication of his exegesis, *The Bible, the Qur'an, and Science*. Translated into numerous languages, hundreds of thousands of copies of the book have been printed and distributed free of cost by Muslim religious organizations throughout the world. At international airports and American university campuses, it is the spearhead with which evangelical students seek to win conversion to Islam. Most Muslim intellectuals that I know of have either read the book, or at least have heard about it. As for the author, his popularity is unquestionable. One wonders how much of this arises from the fact that he is a white man; for it cannot be denied that even with the demise of colonialism the white skin still commands much authority. In any case, Monsieur Bucaille is in great demand at conferences, such as the First International Conference of Scientific Miracles of the Qur'an and Sunnah, of which he was a chairman. (1991, p. 67)

Stenberg agrees with Hoodbhoy on the fact that Bucaille being a white Frenchman who is also a medical doctor lends greater credibility and authority to his claims among Muslims, 'his

⁵⁷ The book was first published in French in 1976.

culture of arrival' (1996, p. 231). Moreover, Stenberg argues that the fact that Bucaille is also 'fiercely' critical of Western science strengthens his credibility among non-Muslim Westerners, 'his culture of departure' (1996, p. 231).

3.6 Bucailleism

The term Bucailleism describes the trend that followed the publication of Maurice Bucaille's book *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*. In it Bucaille analyses the scientific claims in both the Bible and the Qur'an, and comes to the conclusion that the Bible contains contradictions of science, whereas the Qur'an is consistent with it: 'Whereas monumental errors are to be found in the Bible, I could not find a single error in the Qur'an' (1978, p. 129). Bucaille's body of work is often cited in various texts on this topic⁵⁸.

The publication of the book and the popularity of its arguments sparked a worldwide trend – which continues in the present – of publications on the topic of science in the Qur'an and the exploration of possible scientific clues in the text ranging from the Big Bang to black holes and the speed of light. Stenberg (1996) notes that

... a considerable number of books have been published written [*sic*] by various Muslim authors [...]. It is difficult to systemize the divergent and geographically widespread genre. [...] One group of authors who seem to be close to Bucaille's ideas is composed of other converts. The most frequently quoted of these is Keith L. Moore. He is a professor of Anatomy and chairperson of the Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. At the seventh Saudi Medical meeting held at the King

⁵⁸ See for instance an online article in Arabic on the composition of the material (dirt or clay) of which God made Adam, on the website of the Commission for Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an: <http://www.eajaz.org/index.php/Scientific-Miracles/Earth-and-Marine-Sciences/418-Article-from-which-God-created-human> (Accessed: 16 February 2015).

Faisal University in Dammam 1982, Moore presented a paper entitled 'Highlights of Human Embryology in the Koran and the Hadith.'

[...] Bucaille's mode of attempting to link modern science to Qur'anic text has followers among Muslims on the Indian subcontinent. An Indian Muslim connected to the Islamic Centre in New Delhi, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, follows Bucaille's position. In his *God Arises: Evidence of God in Nature and in Science* (1991), references to Bucaille are utilized in order to support Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's own views on various subjects. (pp. 231-2)

Stenberg also notes that not all converts subscribe to Bucaille's method. One example is German convert Ahmad von Denffer, who criticises Bucaille's approach on the basis that science changes. Von Denffer further argues that the Qur'an is a book of guidance rather than a book of science (Stenberg footnote, p. 231).

Bucaille's scientific interpretations of the Qur'an also gained the approval, in addition to Saudi Arabia, of Egypt's al-Azhar as well as religious leaders in Jordan and Libya⁵⁹. Moreover, al-Azhar included a section titled 'the cosmic sciences' in its magazine in which it regularly published news related to science and technology (Stenberg, 1996). Stenberg's overview of the different scholars who have adopted or supported Bucaille's approach is worth reading.

3.7 Link to Saudi Arabia

Bucaille's interest in this topic peaked following his conversations with King Faisal on Islam and science during his time of employment as a physician to the Saudi royal family (Bucaille, 1987). In fact, he says that it was in Saudi Arabia when the Western misconceptions of Islam

⁵⁹ The World Islamic Call in Libya funded an English edition of Bucaille's book *The Bible, the Qur'an and science* (Stenberg, 1996). It has also been translated to Arabic, Turkish, Indonesian, and German.

that Bucaille had grown up with were first clarified. Bucaille expresses his 'debt of gratitude' to King Faisal:

the fact that I was given the signal honour of hearing him speak on Islam and was able to raise with him certain problems concerning the interpretation of the Qur'an in relation to modern science is a very cherished memory. It was an extremely great privilege for me to have gathered so much precious information from him personally and those around him. (p. 128)

Prominent Yemeni cleric Abdul-Majid al-Zindani, further discussed below, praised Bucaille's work and lent it credibility, as Stenberg shows:

In one cassette entitled 'Modern Science and the Wondrous Nature of the Qur'an' (*al-'Ilm al-Hadith wa I'jaz al-Qur'an*), al-Zindani comments on Bucaille's statements in *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* on the relationship between religion and science. He also sums up the content of the book. On the cassette, al-Zindani says that Bucaille studied Islam for ten years. He also stresses the results of Bucaille's research, that is, that the Bible is a product of human work, and that the conformity between modern science and the Qur'anic text shows that the latter is the word of Allah. [...] he states that the former king of Saudi Arabia, Faisal, appreciated Bucaille's books. (Stenberg, p. 234)

3.8 Bucaille's methodology and a sample of his analysis

The Bible, the Qur'an and Science is not rigorously academic. It often lacks references, and has been criticised for not being consistent in its examination of both scriptures⁶⁰. For his exploration of the Qur'an Bucaille undertook the monumental task of studying Arabic in order to approach it in its original language. He also consulted several scholarly commentaries. Bucaille establishes his objectivity by stating that he didn't have any 'preconceived ideas' of

⁶⁰ See Bigliardi, 2012.

the Qur'an⁶¹. 'In the beginning *I had no faith whatsoever in Islam. I began this examination of the texts with a completely open mind and a total objectivity*' (Bucaille, 1987, p. 128, my italics). The Qur'anic verses quoted in the book appear to be Bucaille's own translation⁶².

In order to pursue his examination of scientific truths in the Qur'an, Bucaille (1987) makes a distinction between scientific 'facts' and 'theories' as follows:

Theory is intended to explain a phenomenon or a series of phenomena not readily understandable. In many instances theory changes: it is liable to be modified or replaced by another theory when scientific progress makes it easier to analyse facts and envisage a more viable explanation. On the other hand, an observed fact checked by experimentation is not liable to modification: it becomes easier to define its characteristics, but it remains the same. It has been established that the Earth revolves around the Sun and the Moon around the Earth. (p. 131)

An example of a theory, and which Bucaille opposes, is Darwin's theory of evolution⁶³. On the other hand, he highlights the Earth's rotation around the sun and the development of an embryo, among others, as examples of established scientific facts, as mentioned above.

Bucaille's stance on theory versus fact was supported by Syrian theologian Said Ramadan al-Buti, among others:

[Al-Buti] declares in a conversation at the Faculty of *Shari'a* in Damascus that the Qur'an approves any theory that becomes true. To become true means, according to al-Buti, to become an established, real and scientific fact. On a question concerning Darwin and the theory of evolution, he says that Darwin has not proved anything yet about the creation of humankind. He

⁶¹ This statement contradicts his claim in the book of the misconceptions held in the West and which he had grown up with. It would be more accurate to say that he approached the text with negative expectations (p. 128).

⁶² On taking liberties with translation, Seyyed Hussein Nasr criticises scholars for distorting the Arabic word *ilm* to mean modern secular science (in one of its modern meanings) instead of knowledge of the divine (its earlier Qur'anic meaning). (Hoodbhoy, 1991, p. 69)

⁶³ Bucaille attacks this theory in a separate text. See Bigliardi, 2012, p. 255.

stresses that at the Damascus University, no less than 16 critical studies of the ideas of Darwin have been undertaken. He underlines his criticism of Darwin by claiming that Darwin's ideas are not accepted in the USA or in other Western countries. (Stenberg, p. 234)

Al-Buti further describes Bucaille as a friend and does not refute any of his scientific interpretations of Qur'anic verses (Stenberg, 1996).

In his book, Bucaille interprets verses in the Qur'an in the fields of embryology and human reproduction, astronomy, the creation of the universe, and topics related to the Earth and life on Earth – such as the Earth's atmosphere, animals and vegetables.

Sequencing of words in a verse

Traditionally, interpreters of the Qur'an may attach significance to the sequencing of particular words in a verse and the number of times a word is mentioned. Bucaille highlights that the Earth is mentioned before the heavens in the Qur'an fewer times than the opposite – at least twice in 2:29 and 20:4:

A revelation from He who created the Earth and highest heavens. (Qur'an 20:4)

Verses 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 50:38, 57:4, 79:27-33, 91:5-10 mention the heavens before the Earth.

And it is He who created the heavens and the Earth in six days - and His Throne had been upon water - that He might test you as to which of you is best in deed. But if you say, 'Indeed, you are resurrected after death,' those who disbelieve will surely say, 'This is not but obvious magic.' (Qur'an 11:7)

Whether or not to take the sequencing of words into account becomes important to his interpretation, as seen in the next section.

Verses on the creation of the Earth and the heavens

The creation of the Earth and heavens is not described in one comprehensive section in the Qur'an as it is in the biblical Genesis. The Qur'an rather mentions the creation in several chapters in passing and within the context of warning unbelievers or inviting them to reflect on God's creation. For example:

Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the Earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe? (Qur'an 21:30)

The fact that the creation is not confined to a section is problematic because the repeated descriptions of the creation sometimes contain inconsistencies. Consider the following verse:

It is He who created for you all of that which is on the Earth. Then He directed Himself to the heaven, [His being above all creation], and made them seven heavens, and He is Knowing of all things. (Qur'an 2:29)

In verse 2:29, the order of the creation is: God created everything on Earth – and thus the Earth as well. Then God made the heavens.

Chapter 79 contains a description of the creation which contradicts the one in verse 2:29 above. The creation is thus described as follows:

Are you a more difficult creation or is the heaven? Allah constructed it.

He raised its ceiling and proportioned it.

And He darkened its night and extracted its brightness.

And after that (*ba'da thalika*) He spread the Earth.

He extracted from it its water and its pasture,

And the mountains He set firmly

As provision for you and your grazing livestock. (Qur'an 79:27-33)

The conjunction used in verse 79:30 is 'after that' (*ba'da thalika*), which is linguistically clear on the order of listed words. Bucaille says that the Qur'an is not explicit on the sequencing of creation, except in the above verses 79:27-33 (pp. 143-5). He notes that the order of creation in those verses is as follows: heaven, night and day, the Earth, water and vegetation, and mountains.

In Chapter 41 the order of creation is again reversed and contradicts the order described above in Chapter 79:

Say, 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the Earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds.'

And He placed on the Earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask.

Then (*Thumma*) He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the Earth, 'Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion.' They said, 'We have come willingly.'

And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired in each heaven its command. And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps and as protection. That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing. (Qur'an 41:9-12)

Bucaille argues the issue of sequencing of events in the following manner:

Two groups are therefore referred to here, one of celestial phenomena, and the other of Earthly phenomena articulated in time. The reference made here implies that the Earth must necessarily have existed before being spread out and that it consequently existed when God created the heavens. The idea of a *concomitance* therefore arises from the heavenly and Earthly evolutions with the interlocking of the two phenomena. Hence, one must not look for any special significance in the reference in the Qur'anic text of the creation of the Earth before the heavens or the heavens before the Earth: the position of the words does not influence the order in which the Creation took place, unless, however, it is specifically stated. (pp. 144-145, italics in original)

Bucaille thus criticises the approach by some interpreters to attach significance to sequencing in verses, unless the order is 'specifically stated'. He, however, does not explain what is meant by 'specifically stated'. This clarification becomes crucial because he contests the meaning of the Arabic word *thumma*, which signifies sequence along with conjunctions of order such as *fa* and *ba'da thalika*.

Verses on human reproduction and embryo development

Bucaille examines several verses in the Qur'an on human reproduction and embryo development, which are again scattered across various chapters⁶⁴. For example:

And certainly did We create man from an extract (*sulalah*) of clay.

Then (*Thumma*) We placed him as a sperm-drop (*nutfah*) in a firm lodging.

Then (*Thumma*) We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot (*'alaqah*), and (*fa*) We made the clot into a lump [of flesh] (*mudghah*), and (*fa*) We made [from] the lump, bones, and (*fa*) We covered the bones with flesh; then

⁶⁴ See Appendix D for a full list of Qur'anic verses on human reproduction and development, and Bucaille's scientific classification of these verses.

(*thumma*) We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.

Then (*Thumma*) indeed, after that you are to die. (Qur'an 23:12-15)

Verse 23:14 above is popular in *da'wah* discourse and is often used by iERA⁶⁵ and others as proof of embryo development described accurately and consistently with modern science.

Therefore, it will be more closely examined in the section on the comparative study of various interpretations later in this chapter and includes Bucaille's and iERA's exegeses.

3.9 The First International Conference of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah

Bucaille chaired this conference, which was held in Islamabad in 1987 and inaugurated by then-president of Pakistan General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq. The conference was a joint effort between the Saudi Commission of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah and Pakistan's International Islamic University.

The outcome of the conference was as follows:

- Affirmation of the existence of scientific miracles [in the Qur'an],
- Proving that all known scientific facts can be traced to either the Qur'an or Sunnah,
- New conjectures related to physical phenomena, ostensibly based on the holy texts,
- A condemnation of secular 'Western' science (Hoodbhoy, 1991, p. 46).

Among the topics discussed was Darwinism, which was perceived as a threat to Islam. The first Muslim figure to vehemently oppose Darwinism was Jamaluddin al-Afghani (Hoodbhoy, p. 47).

⁶⁵ Hamza Tzortzis' essay on embryology and the resulting backlash is further discussed below.

The conference is significant because it propelled a new movement and a new narrative. The Saudi Commission of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah has since organized several such conferences with hundreds of delegates participating in each. Further, it has resulted in thousands of individuals ranging from clerics to *du'at* (callers to Islam) being trained in the delivery of this narrative. For example, the Commission's website reported that 1,000 imams, *du'at* and preachers were trained in Egypt on the scientific miracles in the Qur'an⁶⁶.

3.10 Yemeni cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani

The Commission of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah was established in Mecca in 1985 and headed by Yemeni cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani until 1993. One of the Commission's objectives as stated on its website is to develop the scientific miracles programs to become one of the tools of *da'wah*⁶⁷. The red-bearded cleric is a prominent Islamic figure who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen as well as the religious (and controversial) al-Iman University, which boasted of having developed an herbal cure for AIDS in 2008. Al-Zindani is better known internationally as Osama Bin Laden's 'spiritual leader', as he was described in 2004 when he was listed as a Specially Designated Global

⁶⁶ Available (in Arabic, undated) at: <http://www.eajaz.org/index.php/The-news/11401-cairo-kateeb> (Accessed: 16 February 2015).

⁶⁷ See <http://www.eajaz.org/index.php/Authority/Establishment-and-development-body> (Arabic). (Accessed: 16 February 2015).

Terrorist by the United States⁶⁸. He played an important role in legitimizing the *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and in the recruitment of *mujahidin* to fight.

In the 1980s, al-Zindani presented the controversial program *This is the Truth* in which he featured several Western scholars, who had participated in the Miracles conference, to testify that they couldn't explain how modern scientific facts could be found in the Qur'an (the scientists themselves did not read Arabic nor the original text in Arabic), and they were portrayed to be saying that the Qur'an thus had to have been divine. More recently, a YouTube user who goes by the name The Rationalizer⁶⁹ interviewed several scientists featured in al-Zindani's video⁷⁰. They claimed that their words had been taken out of context or that they had been manipulated to make that assertion.

Al-Zindani worked at Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz University for three years where he developed interpretations of Qur'anic verses referring to embryo development (Stenberg, p. 233). Al-Zindani's work on scientific miracles is extensively referred to by two authors: Suleiman Qush in his book *Scientific Discoveries to the Glorious Qur'an* (1988), which was published by the Islamic *Da'wah* Council of the Philippines; and Keith L. Moore in his book *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology with Islamic Additions* (1983)⁷¹. Al-Zindani appended Moore's text with verses from the Qur'an as well as excerpts from the Hadiths. Al-Zindani also wrote the 'Islamic Epilogue' to Moore's text in which he surveys

⁶⁸ See

<http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://web.archive.org/web/20100314033922/http://www.treasury.gov/press/releases/js1190.htm&date=2013-04-10>. (Accessed: 18 February 2015).

⁶⁹ His YouTube channel is: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheRationalizer>.

⁷⁰ See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZrSWJYRiYU&list=PLC0D4187BE2661850>

⁷¹ Moore appears to have been affiliated with or was commissioned by al-Zindani's Commission of the Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an, along with Bucaille (Stenberg, 1996, p. 236, and Islam Papers, 2012). He declined to be interviewed by the Wall Street Journal in 2002 on his work on Islamic embryology (Golden, 2002).

scientific themes in the Qur'an and provides modern scientific meanings to a compilation of specific Qur'anic terms. Notably, the book was funded by, among others, al-Zindani's professor, Zaghoul al-Naggar, and Usama bin Laden, who was reportedly fascinated by Bucaillism (Golden, 2002). In addition, in one of his articles on the topic, Moore relies on al-Zindani's translation of the Qur'anic verses (Guessoum, 2011, p. 155). In a filmed lecture in 1988, Moore admitted his lack of knowledge of the Arabic language and that he and other scientists analysed the verses as they were translated to them in order to help scholars in Mecca interpret them from a scientific perspective (Islam Papers, 2012).

Al-Zindani proposed two methods within his theoretical framework for *I'jaz*. First, when a truth about the universe is discovered which has already been revealed in the Qur'an, it can be adopted in place of all other interpretations as long as it does not contradict the meaning of the verse. Second, the Qur'an should be the foundation upon which Muslim scientists draw their hypotheses for new research to make discoveries that further corroborate the holy book (Guessoum, 2011, p. 159).

The Arabic website *The Collection of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'an and Sunnah*, as its name implies, has articles on various topics related to *I'jaz* and lists Zindani and Zaghoul al-Naggar among its researchers⁷².

⁷² *Mawsuat al-I'jaz al-Ilmi fil Qur'an wal-Sunnah*. Available at: <http://Qur'an-m.com/>. (Accessed: 4 April 2016).

3.11 iERA's embarrassing use of the science narrative

An online video (iERA, 2011a) filmed by iERA reports that prominent atheist and evolutionary biologist Myers had not responded to Tzortzis' requests to debate, and thus Tzortzis and Adnan Rashid, who was still with iERA at the time, cornered him outside the venue of the 2011 World Atheist Convention in Ireland. During the conversation Myers brought up the embryo narrative and described Keith L. Moore's book on the topic as 'nonsense' (iERA, 2011a). He elaborated that the embryonic verses did not reflect modern scientific knowledge and said that the development stages described in *Surah 23* are too similar to Aristotle's observations.

During the conversation, Tzortzis (iERA, 2011a) notes the use of the Arabic conjunction *thumma* in the description of the stages of embryo development in the Qur'an, as follows:

Myers: We have stages of very well described, very thoroughly analysed steps in the development of the embryo, and if you go to any embryology text, they will lay them out for you. You cannot substitute the Qur'an for that. When you look at what the Qur'an says about it, it is vague, it is ambiguous. It's just, it's the kind of stuff that a desert nomad might guess about what's going on.

Tzortzis: I mean, I would disagree, I mean he wouldn't be able to guess the formation of the bone in the seventh week straight after – the word is *thumma* in Arabic, straight after...

Rashid: (agreeing with Tzortzis)...immediately after.

As a side note, it is helpful to highlight that while the Qur'an describes the embryo stages in general terms, it doesn't specify the corresponding weeks. The conversation with Myers continues, branching out to various arguments, then returns to the subject of the similarity

between Aristotle's observations and the Qur'anic description as Rashid presses Myers on this point:

Rashid: Does Aristotle say the bones come first, and then the flesh, the muscles? Does he say that? Are you sure? I'll let you think about this.

Myers: Well, is that... Wait, is that what the Qur'an specifically says?

Rashid: Absolutely, this is exactly what the Qur'an says, Chapter 23.

Myers: ... then... because you've just demonstrated that the Qur'an is wrong, because that's not what happens. (iERA, 2011a)

Rashid cites Moore for the sequence of development of the bones then muscles. At this point Rashid appears not to have heard Myers earlier describe himself as a developmental biologist and expresses his surprise at this discovery. When Myers explains the simultaneous development of bone and muscle in the embryo, Rashid comes back with an interesting response that contradicts what he and Tzortzis had confirmed earlier about the meaning of *thumma* as "straight after that" or "immediately after":

Rashid: Keith Moore is wrong? He's an embryologist; this is his field.

Myers: It's my field too.

Rashid: You're an embryologist?

Myers: Yes!

(group laughter)

Rashid: Great. Wow. This is news to me.

Myers: Ok, so that's wrong because what happens is you have different stages of mesoderm, that within the mesoderm you have segregation into embryonic mesenchyme, and then you have these cartilaginous centres will form bone [sic]. And these are forming simultaneously with each other.

Rashid: Simultaneously?

Myers: Yes.

Rashid: If that's the case, the Qur'an is right (laughs). Because *thumma*... Even if that's the case, even if that's the case [sic], linguistically the Qur'an is right. *Thumma* literally can in Arabic language [sic] mean things happening simultaneously. Yes. Yes. (iERA, 2011a)

In the same vein, this alternative meaning of simultaneity has also been attributed to *thumma* by Bucaille. Bucaille contests the meaning of *thumma* not in the verses on embryonic development, where he doesn't comment on the conjunction, but rather in his analysis of the various verses on the creation of the universe. Specifically, he is critical of some traditional exegeses which read too much into the sequencing of words in a verse, such as if "the Earth" is mentioned before or after "the heavens", as clues to deduce in which order they were created.

After iERA posted the conversation with Myers on YouTube, it resulted in a 'huge intellectual backlash' (Tzortzis, 2013a). Evaluating this approach on his blog, Tzortzis (2013a) wrote:

We received innumerable amounts of emails by Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslims were confused and had doubts, and the non-Muslims were bemused by the whole approach. Consequently, I decided to compile and write an extensive piece on the Qur'an and embryology, with the intention to respond to popular and academic contentions. During the process of writing I relied on students and scholars of Islamic thought to verify references and to provide feedback in areas where I had to rely on secondary and tertiary sources. Unfortunately they were not thorough and they seemed to have also relied on trusting other Muslim apologists. When the paper was published it was placed under a microscope by atheist activists. Although they misrepresented some of the points, they raised some significant contentions.

The conversation with Myers therefore was the impetus for Tzortzis to write the controversial scientific reinterpretation of the Qur'anic Chapter 23. He subsequently posted three more

versions of the document before finally removing it from his website, but they can be downloaded from the website RationalSkepticism.org. Later that year, Myers (2011) published a scathing blog post lambasting Tzortzis' document on embryology in the Qur'an. In his essay, Tzortzis (2013a) warned against using the science narrative. He admits that not only did it caused him and other apologists 'intellectual embarrassment' and that it did more harm than good, but, more importantly, that it resulted in a 'significant number' of individuals who were persuaded to convert by this narrative to subsequently leave Islam after scrutinizing the counter-arguments (Tzortzis, 2013a). In the new approach, he advocates for 'more people from the Muslim community [to speak] out against this problematic approach to verifying the Divine nature of the Qur'an' (Tzortzis, 2013a).

iERA has come to use this approach tentatively, but it has not completely abandoned the narrative. iERA also published through its publishing arm One Reason the *da'wah* booklet *Science in the Qur'an* (c 2012) in which several verses are highlighted that purportedly contain miraculous scientific revelations (see Appendix F). Interestingly, it includes a section on the origin of life (water) but not on the creation of Adam or embryo development, which are further discussed in Chapter Six. And in one of iERA's *da'wah* training videos posted on their website titled 'How to give *da'wah* with Hamza Tzortzis', Tzortzis still mentions that embryonic development is described in the Qur'an. He brings it up in the third step of the GORAP⁷³ method, under the topic of the revelation, that is, the Qur'an. Tzortzis gives examples of arguments for the divine nature of the text from three general arguments: its 'linguistic miracle'; the 'historical argument' that facts from history are mentioned in it that

⁷³ GORAP is a simplified step-by-step blueprint to *dawah* developed by iERA to help Muslims proselytize. It stands for the four steps of argumentation in order: God's existence, Oneness (of God), Revelation and Prophethood.

were unknown to Muhammed and the Arabs of the time; and the science argument. Tzortzis is careful not to call the last argument the 'scientific miracles' argument, as he does with the linguistic one.

He begins his discussion on science in the following way (see Appendix E):

The final argument I wanna talk about (...) is the fact that when you engage with the Qur'an (...) you see that it's so fascinating *it addresses different peoples at different times*. It's *multi-layered*, especially when it talks about verses that God wants you to think about, like man, life and the universe. (iERA, 2014, my italics)

Tzortzis says the Qur'an 'addresses different peoples at different times' and is 'multi-layered'. His careful choice of words becomes clearer in his essay, where Tzortzis (2013a) proposes an alternative approach to the 'scientific miracles' narrative which would allow *du'at* to continue to highlight the natural descriptions in the Qur'an as agreeing with modern scientific knowledge, but without emphasising the claim that scientific facts have been revealed in the Qur'an (although this is implied). In this new approach, Tzortzis adopts principles advocated by some scholars, such as Guessoum, who outlines them in his book *Islam's Quantum Question*. Guessoum's premises are that the Qur'an isn't erroneous, it is multi-layered, and human knowledge can change over time.

In December 2015, iERA launched the new workshop 'Failed Hypothesis? Islam, the Qur'an and Science' in London and then in Manchester the following month. The workshop's choice of title refers to American physicist and sceptic Victor J. Stenger's book *God, the Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God does not Exist*. To promote the workshop online, iERA released a teaser video in which Tzortzis holds up iERA's *Science in the Qur'an* booklet

and announces that 'it deserves to go in the recycling bin'. He then tears it in half and adds, 'because there are no "scientific miracles" in the Qur'an' (Tzortzis, 2015). iERA also posted a promotional announcement for the event with a quote that again criticises the science miracles narrative and argues that the verses 'are not there to provide details on science' (Mission Dawah, 2015). At the same time that iERA has been distancing itself from this narrative, it is still challenging the perceived certainties of science and scientism, as seen in a session presented by Tzortzis in this workshop titled 'Revisable: The Limitations and Problems of Science' (Mission Dawah, 2016). This is not to say, however, that iERA altogether rejects modern science, but it is attempting to undermine its certainty in areas where it conflicts with absolute theistic assertions in its attempt to demonstrate that the Islamic religion and science are compatible.

Finally, the narrative of *I'jaz 'Ilmi* is completely absent from *The Eternal Challenge* (2015), a book published by iERA's One Reason, although it does retain *I'jaz al-Qur'an* as related to the arguments for the text's unmatched style and prophecies. The book, which is available to download for free, contributes little to the Islamic apologist themes and is merely a repetition of many of the tired *da'wah* ideas used by proselytisers in general and iERA in particular, and which are pervasive online. The identity of its author, named only as Abu Zakariya, is not revealed nor does the book provide any biographical information about him, except for a dedication to his children, Zakariya, Eesa, and Maryam. What is noteworthy in this book, however, is a discussion on the scientific method. Similarly to the influence of al-Ghazali's adoption of Aristotelian logic upon Islamic theology (Watt, 2012), the impact of modern scientific methodology can be seen in *The Eternal Challenge*. The author argues that the Qur'an encourages observation, reflection, testing ideas, and presenting witnesses to 'validate

our conclusions' (Abu Zakariya, 2015, p. 98). Therefore, he concludes, the Qur'an 'resembles' the scientific method, which he explains as follows: 'It involves observing a natural phenomenon, making a hypothesis based on the observations and verifying the hypothesis by carrying out experiments' (p. 98). The author fails to note the main difference between his proposition and the scientific method is that 'presenting witnesses to validate our conclusions' departs significantly from scientific experimentation. He then discusses Ibn al-Haytham as the founder of the scientific method and that his motivation for the pursuit of knowledge was the Qur'an itself. This helps to increase Muslims' confidence in their faith and their holy text and improve their certainty in the face of challenges to them, whether they be from atheist rational argumentation or scientific knowledge. Additionally, on his rejection of the claim that Muhammad was the author of the Qur'an, Abu Zakariya asks in a scientific language: 'then why does the Qur'an contain an abundance of *falsification tests* [that could have proved it is not divine]?' (p. 110) Two examples he provides of these tests are in verses 4:82 and 17:88.

3.12 Criticism of this approach

The Eternal Challenge, then, adopts Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328 CE) assertion – as well as Thomas Aquinas's – that reason would not contradict scripture, and if it does, then the reasoning is wrong, not the text, and consequently the latter must override the former. This can be seen in modern times in resolving contradictions between scripture and science. For example, in the *da'wah* training video featuring Tzortzis⁷⁴, he says in conclusion to his explanation of the possible meanings of the word 'clot' in the Qur'an: 'We may not have any meaning that we can find in science or in today's reality. But that's fine, science will catch up

⁷⁴ See Appendix E.

because that's the whole point of science' (iERA, 2014b). Therefore, the Qur'an being a text for all people and all times, when a modern explanation of its meanings isn't consistent with science, it does not undermine the text. This approach emphasises the elevation of the Qur'an over science, rather than its reliance on science. However, there is a contradiction and selectivity in this approach, as it simultaneously uses science to validate Qur'anic claims while at the same time dismissing science when it doesn't serve this purpose.

The danger of this relationship between scripture and science is its extreme form, in the complete rejection or undermining of modern scientific knowledge. This can be seen in the belief in a stationary Earth that the sun orbits, which was promoted by the late Saudi Mufti Abdul Aziz Bin Baz – at one point at the risk of excommunication⁷⁵ - because it is derived from the Qur'an. The Mufti's highly regarded opinions naturally carry a lot of weight and authority among his followers. For example, Saudi preacher Bandar al-Khaybari's response to a question about the Earth's orbit was that the sun revolves around the stationary Earth⁷⁶. The preacher attributed this belief to the opinions of Mufti Bin Baz and Sheikh Saleh al-Fawzan of Saudi Arabia. As a consequence al-Khaybari also discredited claims of NASA's moon-landing, propagating the common conspiracy theory that it was a scenario filmed in Hollywood. By contrast, as discussed above, Bucaille asserts the rotation of the Earth and is slightly more nuanced in his exposition on science.

An interesting criticism of the *I'jaz* approach is from Saud bin Abdelaziz al-Arefe, a popular scholar from within the Saudi religious establishment. Al-Arefe criticised of the objectives of

⁷⁵ Later removed. See Hoodbhoy (1991).

⁷⁶ Subtitles by MEMRI: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9Jp_XCvVto (Accessed: 19 February 2015).

I'jaz to prove the divinity of the Qur'an and subsequently the prophethood of Muhammad. He argues that *I'jaz* proponents are wrong to claim that the ancients didn't have any knowledge of the natural world; modern science only increased our understanding (Guessoum, pp. 159-160).

Criticism of this approach by Nidhal Guessoum and proponents of scientific exegesis

Guessoum (2011) contends that science is 'true' and religion is 'true'. This leads to the fact that any inconsistencies between the two is due to our understanding of one or the other or both. Therefore, if statements in the Qur'an appear to be in conflict with our scientific knowledge, then it is our understanding or interpretation of them which is wrong. Therefore, one of two approaches should be taken: either a new literal meaning should be assigned to words (such as iERA, Bucaille and others in stretching or overloading Qur'anic terms with modern meanings); or a metaphorical understanding of the terms should be used – such as not taking the description of God laying down the Earth to mean that the Earth is flat. For a careful exegete, this distinction could be achieved; but couldn't the less meticulous exegete, or a more enthusiastic exegete, be tempted to cross the lines between the two, as is so often the case in *I'jaz 'Ilmi*? Since Guessoum is opposed to the first approach of scientific miraculousness, he would prefer the second. This approach is possible from the perspective of a personal reading of the Qur'an; however, it requires a methodology to ensure that this process isn't abused.

3.12.1 Criticism of iERA by atheists: RationalSkepticism.org

To search for criticisms of Tzortzis' work, an internet search for 'Hamza Andreas Tzortzis and scientific miracles' yielded an interesting link from amongst around 14,000 results on Google. The link was to a blog post on the website RationalSkepticism.org that described how Tzortzis' claims on embryology in the Qur'an had been criticised and refuted, and it provided downloads of the archived versions of Tzortzis' essay that were no longer available otherwise⁷⁷. The first version of Tzortzis' work is a 40-page academic document with references, dated October 2011, and originally titled *Embryology in the Qur'an: a Scientific-Linguistic Analysis of Chapter 23*. The Rational Scepticism website reported that Tzortzis had to amend the essay four times following repeated rebuttals of his arguments on Qur'anic embryology. It further links to a substantial 149-page document titled *Embryology in the Qur'an: Much Ado about Nothing* (hereafter referred to as *Much Ado*) which debunks Tzortzis' claims. The authors of this work are two bloggers who used the pen names CaptainDisguise and Martin Taverille, and three anonymous contributors from Saudi Arabia: AtheistGhost, GodlessSaudi and AntiGoebbels. Their stated objective is as follows:

The purpose of *Embryology in the Qur'an: Much Ado About Nothing* is to analyse the claims and arguments found in a booklet titled *Embryology in the Qur'an: A Scientific-Linguistic Analysis of Chapter 23* Version 2.1b authored by Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Islamic Education and Research Academy. Many other Muslim apologists

⁷⁷ See the blog post 'Hamza Tzortzis renounces "scientific miracles" in the Qur'an': <http://www.rationalskepticism.org/islam/hamza-tzortzis-renounces-scientific-miracles-in-the-Qur'an-t41106-20.html> (Accessed: 30 March 2015). An earlier post 'Hamza Tzortzis "research" exposed in all its ignomy [sic]', dated 9 October 2012, is also available on the same site at: <http://www.rationalskepticism.org/islam/hamza-tzortzis-research-exposed-in-all-its-ignomy-t35103.html> (Accessed: 30 March 2015).

and websites make similar claims and arguments and thus much of this analysis will have wider applicability. The content of this paper has been researched and developed with much diligence and integrity. Any errors on the part of the author's research will be duly noted and immediately rectified.

The document *Much Ado* is undated but is linked to in a blog post dated 9 October 2012. It lists online links to the Qur'an, Hadiths, dictionaries, and various exegeses including that of Ibn Kathir. It begins with an extensive list of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths mentioning embryo development, as well as 'any Islamic scriptural sources that contain any information that may provide an insight into the state of knowledge of ancient Arabia' (CaptainDisguise et al., p. vii). The authors note that the Qur'an translation by Saheeh International, as in other modern translations, tend to reinterpret Qur'anic terms with modern meanings. They give the example of the words *nutfah*, now translated as 'sperm', and *'alaqah*, now translated as 'clinging clot'. Early interpretations of those two terms were, respectively, 'small amount of semen' and 'blood clot' (CaptainDisguise et al., p. vii). The section on the various Hadiths not only lists a narration but also cross-references it with other Hadith books that have repeated the same or a similar narration.

3.12.2 Criticism of iERA by other Muslims: AsharisAssemble.com

The website Asharis: Assemble (AsharisAssemble.com) published a scathing critique of Tzortzis by Muslim theoretical physicist Sheikh Hafiz Mahmut titled 'Muslim Scientists (and Scholars) not Impressed with iERA'S 'New' Approach to Quran & Science' (2013).

Mahmut's biography on Asharis: Assemble describes him as a scholar of various Islamic fields, including jurisprudence, logic and theology. In his article, Mahmut stresses the importance of religious knowledge in *da'wah* work and raises many questions even after iERA proposed a new approach as an alternative to the exegesis of scientific miracles.

Mahmut writes:

when I see people like Abdurrahman [sic] Green, Zakir Naik, Yusuf Estes, Bilal Philips, Khaalid Yaaseen and Hamza Tzortsis [sic], I ask one question only: “Are they qualified enough to be the leaders of Muslims?” How can someone like Bilal Philips talk about Einstein’s equation and call it Shirk? How come Zakir Naik quotes verses from the Qur’an stating that these verses talk about the Earth being round and yet these verses have nothing to do with the shape of the Earth? (Mahmut, 2013)

He raises several questions related to the rules of exegesis and criticises *du'at* liberally undertaking exegesis without knowledge of its methodology. To make his point, he contrasts them with the example of Abu Bakr who refused to explain a term in a Qur'anic verse for fear of 'saying something which Allah did not intend to say' (Mahmut, 2013). He demonstrates how Aristotelian syllogism can lead to the fallacy of the undistributed middle. For example:

Premise 1: Matt needs water to survive.
 Premise 2: My cat needs water to survive.
 Therefore, Matt is my cat.

Here the middle, what is common to both, is water. However, it does not follow from the middle that Matt is necessarily my cat. Mahmut argues that the scientific miracles exegeses uses the same type of fallacy. He illustrates it in this manner:

1. A description of a scientific fact A uses C.
 2. A description in the Qur’an B uses C.
 3. Therefore, the description in the Qur'an B is the description of A
- The following are some specific examples:
1. The scientific fact in embryology is the implantation of the blastocyst in the uterine wall. Implantation can be attributed as a safe place.

2. The Qur'an uses the words *qararin makin*, which can mean a safe place.
3. Therefore, the Qur'an is describing the scientific fact of the implantation of the blastocyst. (Mahmut, 2013)

A linguistic understanding of *qararin makin* as a description of a woman's safe womb does not have to extend to a scientific miracle to be appreciated for its poetic description. One drawback of Mahmut's critique is that, at the same time as he reproaches Tzortzis, he himself adopts an interpretation that is problematic as well. He gives the example of the verse:

And We made the sky a protected ceiling [*saqfan mahfuthan*], but they, from its signs, are turning away. (Qur'an 21:32)

According to Mahmut, Ibn Kathir explained the Qur'anic descriptions of the sky as a 'dome over the Earth' (Mahmut, 2013). While Mahmut rejects the verse's scientific interpretation as a description of the function of the Earth's atmosphere, he asserts that as a scientist he understands the atmosphere as a 'physical roof' and questions if anything exists besides God that is not physical. Thus he restricts his reading of the text to the literal linguistic meanings devoid of scientific exaggerations. However, this linguistic literalism is still problematic as it does not correspond to modern knowledge about the world. The example of the cognitive dissonance and doubt that Abdullah Sameer experienced as a result of this disconnect is highlighted in the Discussion in Chapter Five. Moreover, Mahmut favours the classical interpretations due to the scholars' linguistic and religious knowledge to a more modern one. Much of the article consists of polemics against Wahhabism and Ibn Taymiyya's anthropomorphism, as well as the inadequate knowledge of Tzortzis and other scholars.

3.13 Conclusion

The narrative of the scientific miracles in the Qur'an is very popular in various Muslim-majority countries and communities, such as in Yemen and Pakistan, among others. It was popularised in the Middle East by TV figures such as Zaghoul al-Naggar in Egypt and Abdul Majid al-Zindani in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Zakir Naik has widely propagated it in India and Pakistan through his publications, TV channel and the Internet. Additionally, belief in *I'jaz* as the Qur'an's miraculous nature – beyond just the inimitability of its discourse – is an obligation in the Sunni tradition. Therefore, iERA members were aware of this trend. If they weren't already including it in their *da'wah* talks and literature, their conversation with Myers in 2011 can be pinpointed as the push in that direction, as it was followed by Tzortzis publishing his lengthy exegesis on the embryo verses. An evolution in iERA's narrative can be seen between that document in 2011 and Tzortzis' GORAP video in 2014, which is analysed in detail in Chapter Five. In 2015, a significant, almost sensationalist, move by iERA completely sealed their position on *I'jaz 'Ilmi* narrative by tearing up their earlier booklet on the topic. Still, iERA uses the Qur'anic observations on the natural world with restraint, considering them as signs to contemplate. The next chapter will investigate a second narrative that was problematic for iERA, though its impact was not as serious as the embryo one: It is William Lane Craig's *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.

CHAPTER FOUR

iERA'S *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

‘There is no god except God. Muhammad is the messenger of God. The Qur'an is the Word of God, and is not created.’

This anti-Mu'tazili affirmation 'not created' is inscribed into the book known as the Palermo Qur'an, dated to around 982 or 983 CE. The inscription is intriguing since Sicily was under the Shi'i Fatimid rule from its Cairo capital at this time. However, as the island's Muslim population was predominantly Sunni and it was independently governed by the Kalbid dynasty, the Qur'an may have belonged to a wealthy Sunni citizen (Booms and Higgs, 2016). It is likely that iERA holds this now prevalent belief about the Qur'an, and possibly in line with Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328 CE) own view that the holy book is neither created nor eternal.

This chapter looks at the historical development of the Cosmological Argument since Plato. It then outlines how Craig constructed the argument, follow by its adoption by iERA. It also examines a critique of Tzortzis' use of *Kalam* by a Salafi Muslim as well as atheist (former Muslim) detractors. The works analysed in this chapter are:

1. An undated essay (after 2011) posted on Tzortzis' blog
2. A GORAP video featuring Green, posted in 2012
3. A talk by Tzortzis filmed and published in 2013
4. A GORAP video by Tzortzis from 2014

4.1 The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument in brief

The Argument in Craig's formulation (2010) is as follows:

Premise 1: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Premise 2: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Craig then goes on to prove that this cause is an eternal, personal deity.

4.2 The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument: the evolution of the concept

For illustrative purposes, the following online demonstrate the online scale of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. Searching online for 'The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument' pulls up a snippet of Christian apologist William Lane Craig's argument from Wikipedia, along with approximately 141,000 results on Google. By contrast, the same terms searched with 'criticism' and 'debunked' return only around 13,900 and 3,200 results, respectively⁷⁸. The numbers serve to show the contemporary popularity of the argument, along with a smaller but not insignificant number of critics. Craig revived the argument for God's existence after he published his doctoral research in 1979 and christened it the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument to credit its Muslim roots and, particularly, al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE)⁷⁹. Craig (2010) attributes the origin of the argument to Christian philosophers who argued against Aristotle's view that the universe is eternal. Muslims later developed the argument, and Jews in Islamic Spain transmitted it to Western Christians (p. 75). Arguments for the impossibility of an infinite

⁷⁸ Last accessed 8 August 2016.

⁷⁹ From his lecture at the University of Birmingham in March 2015.

regress of events can be traced to Christian theologian John Philoponus (d. c.570 CE) (Hoover, 2004).

The argument for a creator of the universe has its seeds in the form of a First Cause or Prime Mover in Plato (d. c.348 BCE) and Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), respectively. In his book *Laws*, Plato wanted to give authority to the political system that he was advocating in order for everyone to commit to this system. To do so, he wanted to prove the existence of a deity because he believed that atheists usually break the laws for three reasons: They don't believe that any gods exist; or that prayers and sacrifice can sway the gods; or they believe that if gods do exist then they do not intervene in the affairs of humans (Craig, 1980). Unlike its modern version, Plato's argument was for a 'plurality of souls' (Craig, 1980, p. 4) – that is, multiple gods, rather than only one. In his argument, Plato divides motion into two types: communicated motion and self-motion, then goes on to prove that communicated motion is caused by self-motion because motion needs a starting point, otherwise all things would remain at rest (see Appendix I for an outline of Plato's argument). This is effectively the argument from the infinite regress of events. He calls the self-motion 'soul'. Aristotle further developed Plato's argument because he thought that Plato's self-mover still needs a cause. What is needed is an unmoved mover, and Aristotle called that entity God (Craig, 1980, p. 20). In his argument, Aristotle introduced the distinction between potential being and actual being. He argued against the idea of a self-mover but rather that all motion is caused by something. Similarly to the infinite regress argument, for Aristotle a chain of caused motion cannot continue infinitely and thus must have a finite time, leading to a first mover which is unmoved and eternal (see Appendix I for Aristotle's argument). Craig (1980) writes, 'For Aristotle, causation occurs when an actual being actualizes from potency' (p. 50).

The Aristotelian view of an eternal world set in motion by a Prime Mover caught on as the Muslims encountered Greek philosophy, and their philosophers subscribed to the belief that the world is eternal with God. Muslim philosophers are usually divided into two: the Eastern group and the Western group. Eastern philosophy was in what are now Middle Eastern countries, and it thrived between the 9th and 12th centuries. Its luminaries included al-Kindi, al-Razi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina. The 10th century saw the beginning of the era of Western philosophy in Andalusia, led by Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd, and it lasted until the 12th century. The *Kalam* school of thought developed the cosmological argument from the impossibility of an infinite regress of events, while the philosophers' school developed it from contingency. The argument from contingency holds that since the world did not have to exist, it is contingent upon something that caused it to exist. Craig (1980) gives credit to Arab philosophers for significantly developing the contingency version of the cosmological argument. In it, they distinguished between possible and necessary being based on the distinction between essence and existence (Craig, 1980, p. 61).

The term *kalam* literally means 'speech' or 'word' in Arabic. The reason for why *Kalam* theologians acquired this name is disputed, since it is uncertain whether the word referred to disagreements over the nature of God's word or to theological argumentation (Gardet, 2012a). The 'word of God' (*kalam allah*) can be found in varying forms in several verses in the Qur'an (see 2:75, 9:6, 48:15) (Gardet, 2012b). The term *kalam* was also used for the Greek *logos*, meaning 'argument' or 'reason' (Wolfson, 1976). Fakhry (2003) translates it as Systematic Theology. *Kalam* is linked to the ninth-century Mu'tazila movement, but Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE) reported that a form of pre-Mu'tazili *Kalam* existed in the 8th century as a result of

disagreements over the human lack of free will and the anthropomorphic attributes of God in the Qur'an. The Mu'tazila argued that God's justice must give humans free will, and thus they rejected a literal understanding of the Qur'anic depictions of God, in contrast to the traditionalists who advocated determinism and literalism without questioning the 'how'. Here the term 'traditionalist' is used to refer to scholars who favoured the Qur'an and hadiths (Prophetic traditions) over reason, and they became known as Ahl al-Hadith or Atharis (from *athar*, signs or proofs, but also used for the authentic prophetic narrations). Reflecting their familiarity with Greek philosophy, the Mu'tazila thus argued that God could be known through reason (*'aql*) alone and without the help of revelation (*naql*). The purpose of revelation was for guidance only. While both the Mu'tazila and the Ash'aris elevated *'aql* and based their arguments on rationalism, the main difference between them was that, for the Ash'aris, reason is delimited by revelation (Gardet, 2012a).

Initially, three Qur'anic attributes of God were debated: the Living (*al-hayy*), the Knowing (*al-'alim*), and the Powerful (*al-qadir*). Two more attributes were added to the list after that, God's word or speech (*kalam*) and God's will (*iradah*), then later still others, all used in the Qur'an. What sparked this problem of the attributes may have been disputes with Christians after the Muslims arrived in Syria in the 7th century (Wolfson, pp.127-131). Wolfson (1976) argues that the particular choice of the first controversial attributes, Living, Knowing, and Powerful, is that they correspond to Christian descriptions of two components of the Trinity, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the *Kalam* theologians and the philosophers, there were ontological and semantic questions about the attributes. Denial of the attributes may have first appeared in the 8th century and is associated with the founder of the Mu'tazila, Wasil Ibn 'Ata' (d. 748/9 CE). Thus, God's attributes were not real and eternal, but were rather merely created

divine names. This was on the basis of two premises: a strict view that anything eternal is divine, and a strict interpretation of divine unity not allowing a plurality within God. If the attributes are eternal with God, it would result in a multiplicity of gods. Opponents of this belief criticised its rigidity in defining eternity and God's unity. They retorted that if the attributes are created, then there was a time when God did not have them, resulting in His imperfection, which contradicts His perfect nature. On the other hand, Jahm ibn Safwan (d. c. 745 CE), whose movement was called Jahmiyya⁸⁰ and whom Ibn Taymiyya often refutes in his works, used the Qur'an against itself. Despite their use in the Qur'an, Jahm denied the attributes by elevating the Qur'anic injunction that the Creator should not be described in the same terms as His creation. He was accused of heresy and apostasy (*kufir*) and executed in c. 745 CE⁸¹ (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). For the Mu'tazila, the only exception, meaning the only real attribute is God's Word (*Kalam*), i.e. the Qur'an.

The Qur'an originally existed in the form of the Preserved Slate (Qur'an 85:22), thus pre-existing its revelation, recitation and recording. This is similar to the Torah, which Jewish tradition says pre-existed the world. But while the Torah is believed to have been created (Wolfson, 1976), questioning the nature of the Qur'an remains controversial. Moreover, the Qur'an like Jewish scripture also describes itself as the word or speech of God (*kalam allah*). Wolfson argues that due to the similarities between the two scriptures, early Muslim belief may have also been that the Qur'an was created. An excerpt from a *hadith* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* clearly states that the Qur'an was written in a heavenly record before God created the world:

⁸⁰ The term 'Jahmi' was used pejoratively by Hanbalis to refer to the Hanafis and Mu'tazila who argued that the Qur'an was created, as followers of Jahm ibn Safwan.

⁸¹ See Wolfson (1976) pp. 220-222 for more on Jahm ibn Safwan's views.

'We have come to ask you about this matter (i.e. the start of creations).' He said, 'First of all, there was nothing but Allah, and (then He created His Throne). His [T]hrone was over the water, and He wrote everything in the Book [*al-dhikr*] (in the Heaven) and created the Heavens and the Earth' (al-Bukhari, no date).

The question of the Qur'an's creation arose with the disputes over two divine attributes, namely God's speech and will. These may also have been due to encounters with Christians in Syria and Neo-platonic influences, since Plato and Aristotle both argued that action (*fi'l*) and will (*iradah*) were created and real (Wolfson, p.142). Some Mu'tazila theologians resolved the question of the nature of divine will through equating it with God's command and creativity. Similarly, God's speech is a created accident, therefore not eternal (Fakhry, 2003). Thus the belief in the createdness of the Qur'an became widespread, and was officially imposed by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun, and violently in what became known as *al-Mihnah* (The Ordeal, The Inquisition) in 827 and 833 CE. The first to have adopted this belief is thought to have been Ibn 'Abbas (d. 687 CE).

A staunch opponent of this was the Athari Ibn Hanbal, who was jailed by al-Ma'mun for his belief that the Qur'an was eternal. The traditionalist scholar wrote,

It has been transmitted from more than one of our ancestors (*salafina*) that they said 'the Qur'an is the speech of God and is uncreated,' and this is what I endorse. I do not engage in speculative theology (*Kalam*) and I hold that there is nothing to be said other than what is in God's Book (Qur'an), the traditions of His messenger or those of his companions and their followers... (Haykel, 2009, p. 38).

Ibn Taymiyya, who believed that the Qur'an was neither created nor eternal, claimed that this too was what Ibn Hanbal believed.

Mu'tazili theology dominated until Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 861 CE) came to power and violently repressed the *Kalam* theologians in favour of the traditionalists (*Atharis*), the most famous of whom was Ibn Hanbal. But *Kalam* survived and transformed in the movement of Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Ash'ari (d. 935 CE), who moved away from the Mu'tazila and positioned himself between them and the traditionalists. For example, Ash'aris recognise some of the divine attributes. Thus the significance becomes clear of the proclamation on the 10th century Palermo Qur'an that it is not created. Ash'ariyya subsequently became the official school of *Kalam* for 900 years until the 19th century (Gardet, 2012a). The widespread view within Sunni Islam remains Ash'ari in orientation on the uncreatedness of the Qur'an. The Mu'tazili or Jahmi belief that the Qur'an is created rather than eternal is considered to be heretic (*kufri*), based on Ibn Taymiyya and the consensus of the scholars⁸². Both Maimonides (d. 1204 CE) and Ibn Khaldun list six main problems addressed by *Kalam*: Creation, the Qur'an, God's attributes, predestination and free will, atomism, and causality. They are discussed briefly below.

4.2.1 Creation

For *Kalam* theologians creation is *ex nihilo*, out of nothing or 'not from something' (*la min shay*) (Wolfson, 1979, p. 354). Wolfson argues that since the term *ex nihilo* is not found in the Qur'an, it may have come into *Kalam* from the Second Book of Maccabees (7:28) in which God created heaven and Earth 'not from things existent', i.e. nothing (Wolfson, p. 355).

Wolfson traces the first mention of creation 'out of nothing' in Latin to Tertullian's *Adversus*

⁸² See various *fatwas*, including *Fatwa* 42856, on the website Islamweb.net that is produced by the Department of *Dawah* and Guidance in the Qatari Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs: <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&lang=A&Id=42856>. (Accessed: 23 April 2016).

Marcionem (c. 207 CE) and in Greek to Hippolytus' *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (c. 222 CE). He rightly notes that the Qur'an negates the *Kalam* argument of creation *ex nihilo* as it mentions the creation of the heavens from smoke: 'Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke' (Qur'an 41:11). He also points to al-Zamakhshari's explanation that the smoke was also created, since it came from the water beneath God's throne, which existed before the Earth and the heavens. Ibn Rushd/Averroes, on the other hand, interprets this verse to mean that the heavens were created from something which he believes to be eternal. Bucaille (pp. 145-156) uses the following verse to argue that the Earth and heavens were a single mass: 'Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the Earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing?' (Qur'an 21:30).

The issue of creation *ex nihilo* appears to have arisen when the Mu'tazila debated the question of whether non-existents (*al-ma'dumat*) were something or nothing. While the source of this question is unknown, Wolfson (p. 363) proposes that it may have been transmitted to Muslims by Syrian Christians, who may have translated the Christian term 'non-existent' (*al-ma'dum*) as 'nothing' (*la shay'*). This preceded the encounter with Greek philosophy and Plato's 'the non-existent'. The Mu'tazila subsequently adopted Plato's creation from pre-existent eternal matter, although whether they thought of this matter as consisting of atoms is unknown. However, both the Basra and Baghdad schools of the Mu'tazila believed that atoms were created.

4.2.2 *Creation, the infinite and God's will*

The *Kalam* theologians argued that God created the world from nothing from the two premises: (a) accidents have a temporal beginning (*huduth*), and (b) an infinite regress of events is impossible (Hoover, 2004). In contrast, philosophers such as al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) and Ibn Sina (d. 1037 CE) argued in the Neo-platonic tradition that the world is eternal because God is perfect and God creates the world eternally, whereas temporal creation would signify God's imperfection (Hoover, 2004). On the other hand, Platonic philosopher Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Razi (d. 925 CE) posed several questions about the creation of the world: was it created as the Neoplatonic 'natural necessity' or was it created in time? Creation as a necessity means that the Creator does not have free will, and if in time then the Creator must also be subject to time. If, however, the Creator does have free will, the question remains as to the reason He chose a particular point in time to create the world (Fakhry, 2003, p. 31).

4.2.3 *The Qur'an*

The Mu'tazili argumentation that the only real and created attribute is God's speech led to the belief that the Qur'an is created and that He will not be seen in the afterlife. Their conclusions therefore conflicted with revelation. The philosophers, on the other hand, maintained that the Qur'an is eternal with God.

Mu'tazili theologian Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 911 CE) rejected the notions of prophethood and revelation in favour of reason, which he saw as sufficient to distinguish between right and

wrong. He argued against *I'jaz*, the Qur'an's literary miraculousness, which he was sceptical about:

one Arab tribe [i.e. Quraysh] should excel all other tribes in eloquence, that a group of this tribe should be more eloquent than all the rest and that finally one member of that group [i.e. Muhammad] should surpass all the others in eloquence. However, even if we grant that he exceeds all Arabs in eloquence, what compelling force will this have where Persians [*al-a'jam*], who do not understand the [Arabic] tongue are concerned, and what probative evidence can he advance? (quoted in Fakhry, 2003, p. 34-5)⁸³

Ibn al-Rawandi was at one point a Mu'tazili but later became an atheist (al-Rafi, 1973). In his book *The Unique (Al-Farid)*, al-Rawandi also wrote: 'The Muslims use the prophethood of their Prophet in the Qur'an, with which he challenged [his opponents]... They [the Muslims] are told: (...) If one of the old philosophers made the same claim... as you do with the Qur'an, and they said that the proof is [on the word] of Ptolemy or Euclid, that Euclid claimed that people are unable to produce anything like his book, would his prophethood be proven?' (al-Rafi, p. 181).

4.2.4 Ibn Taymiyya's argument

Ibn Taymiyya was critical of both the philosophers and the *Kalam* theologians, the philosophers for not using revelation as their starting point and being influenced by Greek philosophy, and the theologians for their conclusions that contradicted revelation. On Creation, the philosophers argued for the eternity of the world, while the *Kalam* theologians argued for a temporal beginning of the act of creation. Because he agreed with neither, his arguments are complex as he sought to refute them both. In some instances, his positions

⁸³ Source: Al-Asam, *Tarikh Ibn al-Rawandi*, p. 128.

agreed with either side, but his principle was that reason (*'aql*) has to agree with revelation (*naql*), otherwise the reasoning is wrong. On the question of creation, Ibn Taymiyya's position is that God's act of creating is eternal and without beginning, because the alternative is that there was a time when God did not create, meaning that He lacked creativity and power, which would contradict God's attributes and perfection. However, everything created has a beginning in time and is not co-eternal with God. Thus, God's creativity is perpetual, and there was never a time before the creation of the world when God was not creating or acting, or wasn't able to do so. Thus, God by His own will chooses when to act without a prior cause. Additionally, creation for Ibn Taymiyya was not *ex nihilo*, because the Qur'an never mentions this nor does it say that originated events (*hawadith*) had a beginning. On the contrary, the Qur'an describes the existence of matter such as water on which God's throne stood and the smoke from which the heavens were made. For Ibn Taymiyya, time also existed before creation in a different form, based on a *hadith* that describes God's decree to be fifty thousand years before creation. Ibn Taymiyya further censures the philosophers for contradicting tradition and reason (Hoover, 2004).

Next, Ibn Taymiyya criticises the *Kalam* theologians' argument from the impossibility of an infinite regress of events. In their argumentation, they came up with the concept of the origination of objects (*huduth*), and that every originated thing has a beginning and a cause. While Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges that created objects having a beginning is rational and instinctive (known by *fitrah*), he sees that the problem of the argument is with the infinite regression. Alternatively, Ibn Taymiyya offered the solution that while every created thing had a beginning before which it did not exist, the series of created objects doesn't have a beginning or an end. In other words, the genus of created things (*qidm naw' al-hawadith*) is

infinite. He thus accuses the *Kalam* theologians of denying God's attributes related to perfection. To support his argument, Ibn Taymiyya quotes the Qur'anic verse 'Is He who creates like one who does not create?' (Qur'an 16:17). Thus, his view of God is one of perpetual dynamism.

Hoover (2004) argues that Ibn Taymiyya's position on creation is similar to Ibn Rushd's, whom the former considered to be 'the nearest of the philosophers to Islam' (p. 295).

Commenting on one of Ibn Taymiyya's later works, Hoover places him within the camp of the philosophers instead of that of the *Kalam* theologians because his method is one of philosophical theology or philosophical apologetics (Hoover, p. 295).

4.2.5 *The Qur'an as God's speech*

Ibn Taymiyya argued that God's speech is part of his essence and the genus (*naw'*) of His speech is eternal with it. God has the will and power to speak, but his 'concretized speech' (Hoover, p. 296) is not eternal. Subsequently, the Qur'an is neither eternal nor created (*makhluq*). Ibn Taymiyya explains the *Salaf*'s belief that the Qur'an is not created (*ghayr makhluq*) by arguing that everything that is created is distinct from God.

4.2.6 *A personal God*

Like al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya argued that God is perpetually active and personal because 'He speaks by His will to other beings' (Hoover, p. 298).

4.2.7 The endless chain (*Tasalsul*)

In an article posted on the website Asharis.com, written by Abu.Iyaad, the same writer of the articles critical of Tzortzis and which are discussed at length at the end of this chapter, the principle of causation (or determination) for the existence of God, known in Arabic as *al-tasalsul*, is discussed in more detail than the Tzortzis articles. Several variations on this argument exist, but in this article the writer (Abu.Iyaad, no date) details four main categories and Ibn Taymiyya's view on each one. They are as follows:

1. The endless chain of dependent causative agents [creators] (*al-tasalsul fi al-mu'atherin wal-fa'ilin*): cannot be infinite otherwise it would be impossible for an agent to create.
2. The endless chain of dependent causes (*al-tasalsul fil-'ilal al-fa'ilah*): cannot be infinite otherwise it would be impossible for a cause to have an effect.
3. The endless chain of actions [including God's actions] (*al-tasalsul fil-af'al*): can be (*mumkin*) or, in the case of divine action, is necessarily (*wajib*) infinite.
4. The endless chain of events, effects (*al-tasalsul fil athar*)⁸⁴: can be (*mumkin*) and is permissible (*ja'iz*) to be infinite; however, each individual created action or event is temporal and finite.

⁸⁴ The English terms are the translation used by the writer.

4.3 Origins of the *Kalam* Argument in modern *da'wah*

4.3.1 Al-Ghazali's argument

In his famed book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifah)*, Muhammed al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) argues against the philosophers' stance that the universe is eternal. Al-Ghazali uses *Kalam* in this book to prove that the universe had a beginning (al-Ghazali uses the term 'world'). For al-Ghazali, the philosophers deny God's existence by arguing for the eternity of the world, because an eternal world doesn't have an Agent. Furthermore, God chooses the time for the creation of the world because God has a free will (Hoover, 2004).

Al-Ghazali's first premise is the principle of determination, first laid out in his book *Kitab al-Iqtisad fil-I'tiqad* as follows:

1. Everything temporal (*hadith*) must have a cause for its beginning;
2. The world is a being which begins;
3. Therefore, the world possesses a cause (determinant) for its beginning (Craig, 1979).

Al-Ghazali defines *hadith* as something that did not exist and then began to exist. Before starting to exist, the temporal world was *mumkin*, that is, 'could equally exist or not exist' (Craig 1979, p. 59). In order to exist, it requires a *murajjih*, a determinant, for its existence. Al-Ghazali further defines 'world' as every being except God. His argument for a cause is that since things begin to exist at a moment in time, all temporal moments before that are the same; therefore, there must necessarily be a determinant that selects the time for its beginning.

In arguing against the philosophers' position of the eternity of the world, al-Ghazali points out that they fail to show that a temporal being can come from an eternal one, and that it's possible to demonstrate that the universe had a beginning. He proves this by arguing that an infinite temporal regress of events is impossible, as follows (Craig, 1979, p. 45):

1. There are temporal phenomena in the world;
2. They are caused by other temporal phenomena (principle of second causation);
3. The series of temporal phenomena cannot regress infinitely;
4. Therefore, the series must stop at the eternal (must have a beginning).

Here al-Ghazali argues that there can't be an actual⁸⁵ infinite number of events. He further argues that time had a beginning and was therefore created. But al-Ghazali's argument is based on temporal phenomena instead of time's finitude, which was the basis of al-Kindi's argument.

Craig (1979, p. 48-9) summarizes al-Ghazali's argument as follows:

1. Everything that begins to exist requires a cause for its origin.
2. The world began to exist.
 - a. There are temporal phenomena in the world.
 - b. These are preceded by other temporal phenomena.
 - c. The series of temporal phenomena cannot regress infinitely.
 - i. An actually existing infinite series involves various absurdities.
 - d. Therefore, the series of temporal phenomena must have had a beginning.
3. Therefore, the world has a cause for its origin: its Creator.

Craig (p. 49) adds that al-Ghazali's causal principle argues for a determinant cause rather than the causal relation between phenomena.

⁸⁵ Al-Ghazali allowed for the possibility of a potential infinite rather than an actual infinite (Craig, 2010).

4.3.2 How Craig developed the Kalam Cosmological Argument

On Guard is a training manual authored by Craig whose purpose is to train Christian apologists to present arguments for faith in Christianity. Craig develops his version of *Kalam* from the arguments of al-Ghazali (for a first cause) and Leibniz (for that cause to be God).

Based on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716 CE), Craig constructs his first argument that the cause of the universe is God, as follows.

Premise 1: Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence.

Premise 2: If the universe has an explanation for its existence, that explanation is God.

Premise 3: The universe exists.

Conclusion: Therefore, God is the explanation of the universe.

Next, Craig uses Ghazali's argument to show that the universe had a caused beginning, as follows. He uses Aristotelian syllogism, which contains 2 premises and a conclusion.

Premise 1: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Premise 2: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Craig (2010) supports the first premise with three arguments. First, something can't come into existence from nothing. Second, if something is able to come from nothing, then it is incomprehensible how not anything or everything can come from nothing as well. And finally, the first premise is further supported by common experience and science (pp. 75-78).

Craig goes on to support the second premise with arguments from the potential versus actual infinite, based on al-Ghazali's impossibility of an infinite regress of temporal phenomena. His second proof is the fact that it's impossible to go through an infinite series of events one at a time, based on al-Ghazali's argument that adding one thing to another in a series doesn't result in an actual infinite. Craig additionally uses two scientific arguments to support his

second premise. The first is the Big Bang and the expansion of the universe, which confirm that the universe had a beginning, and the second is the universe's second law of thermodynamics.

The second law of thermodynamics was developed by German physicist Rudolf Clausius (d. 1888 CE). It states that in a closed system, the state of disorder (entropy) tends to increase until equilibrium is reached. If the universe is infinite, then equilibrium should have been reached by now. The fact that it hasn't and that there's still energy in the universe is taken as proof that the universe is finite and has a beginning (Craig, 2010). Next Craig goes on to argue about the nature of the cause of the universe. He refutes atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett's argument that the universe is self-caused and argues for a transcendent, uncaused first cause instead; that is, a personal creator. Craig again bases this argument on al-Ghazali. This is in addressing the question, if the cause is eternal, why isn't the effect eternal as well? That is, if the creator of the universe is eternal, why isn't the universe eternal also? Al-Ghazali's solution was that the creator is a personal God who has free will and is independent of any pre-conditions. Craig then argues:

[God's] free act of creation is simultaneous with the universe coming into being. Therefore, God enters into time when He creates the universe. God is timeless without the universe and in time with the universe (p. 49).

4.4 How iERA uses Craig's *Kalam* Argument

For the purpose of examining how iERA developed an argument for God's existence to be used in their *da'wah* training program, several online resources were examined: an undated blog post written by Tzortzis, a GORAP training video featuring Green in 2012, a filmed talk

of Tzortzis published online in 2013, and another GORAP training video in 2014 featuring Tzortzis. The choice of this selection is due to inter-textuality – an analysis of various outputs by the same organisation – and to examine any development of the narrative over time. Each is also dissimilar in interesting ways to warrant a closer examination. They are discussed below.

4.4.1 *Da'wah training video by Abdurraheem Green*

Abdurraheem Green makes the argument for God's existence in GORAP in another video (iERA, 2012d) from the Design and Causality arguments, with a passing mention of Fine Tuning as well. For his argument from Design, Green says:

If we have an ordered universe, surely there must be something that ordered it, because that's our *common human experience*, where we see things working according to laws, according to patterns (...), our common sense, *our common human experience* tells us (...) that something must have designed it, must have organized it. (iERA, 2012d, my italics)

Green's comment on experience echoes Craig's (2010): '*Common experience* and scientific evidence confirm the truth of premise 1 (p. 78, my italics)'. Next, for his second argument from Causality, Green uses Craig's premises developed from al-Ghazali without referencing the source of the argument:

The second argument is very simple. *Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist; therefore, it has a cause.* It's very simple. Very, very simple. (...) because ... it goes against... common sense and reason, that things just spontaneously come into existence. (iERA, 2012d, my italics)

It is possible again to see a similarity with Craig (2010) who writes:

Once again, we can summarize Ghazali's reasoning in three simple steps:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

This argument is so marvellously simple that it's easy to memorize and share with another person. It's also a logically airtight argument (p. 74).

To argue that the universe's beginning had a cause, Green says, ' One of those things we can conclude reasonably is that the cause of the universe, the nature of the cause of the universe must be different from the universe' (iERA, 2012d). He uses a modern version of the Watchmaker analogy, popularized by William Paley in the 19th century. Paley's analogy is related to the natural laws in the universe which raise the question of whether there is an intelligent designer behind them, just as one would be inclined to ask and deduce about a watch found on a heath, that it was made by someone. Green does not make any references to Ibn Taymiyya or al-Ghazali in this video. Also notably absent from Green's argument are any reference to Qur'anic verses. This is significant due to the contrast with Tzortzis later who, though not excessively, quotes a few Qur'anic verses to demonstrate that GORAP is based on or derived from the Islamic text.

4.4.2 *'The Qur'anic Argument for God's Existence' by Hamza Tzortzis*

An essay⁸⁶ posted on Hamza Tzortzis' blog titled 'The Qur'anic Argument for God's Existence' opens with the following editorial note:

⁸⁶ Also referenced on Aqidah.com in August 2013.

Some of the written work [sic] are compilations of various thinkers and philosophers such as the Philosopher William Lane Craig, Dr. Jafaar Idris and others. In the next few months the articles will be updated and changed to move away from compilations and a blog style, to a more academic tone with sound referencing (Tzortzis, no date).

This post was written in or after 2011, judging from the reference list. Even though the post has a structure, parts of it read, as Tzortzis acknowledges, more like a compilation of arguments and quotations. The essay contains some similarities to Craig's *Does God Exist?* (no date) which is available on his website Reasonable Faith. For example, he uses the same quotations as Craig does by the mathematician David Hilbert and cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin (who is also quotes by Craig in *On Guard*, as previously mentioned).

Tzortzis (no date) begins the essay by offering four explanations for 'Things that began to exist': they were created from nothing, created themselves, were created by other things with a beginning, or were created by an uncaused cause or uncreated entity. Even though there's a philosophical distinction between the terms 'uncaused cause', which relates to the Platonic First Cause, and the 'uncreated creator' which is theological, Tzortzis blends the two by using the phrase 'non-created or un-caused entity' (Tzortzis, no date). He derives the explanations from the Qur'anic verse:

Or were they created by nothing? Or were they the creators (of themselves)?
Or did they create heavens and Earth? Rather, they are not certain. (Qur'an
52:35-36)

Tzortzis (no date) first gives three arguments for the premise that the universe had a beginning. They are: the second law of thermodynamics, the absurdity of an infinite history of past events, and astrophysical evidence, which is the Big Bang theory. Tzortzis thus borrows

Craig's template for the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, including the second law of thermodynamics, discussed above. He begins by asking a variation on Leibniz's question: 'Why is there anything rather than nothing?' In his book *On Guard*, Craig examines Leibniz's stance in the third chapter titled 'Why does anything at all exist?' In several cases, it seems that Tzortzis also borrowed bibliographic information as well as quotations from Craig. For example, the same quote by cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin can be found in Craig's *On Guard* (2010) on page 92. It may not have been copied from this book explicitly but possibly from other Craig publications, since a large number of versions of his *Kalam* Cosmological Argument can be found in print and online. Interestingly here, Tzortzis in one instance adopts the position on the impossibility of a regress of past events that contradicts Ibn Taymiyya's, but is more consistent with him. As discussed in this chapter, Ibn Taymiyya's stance was that an infinite regress of events is possible whereas an infinite regress of dependent causes is not. The likely explanation for Tzortzis' error is that he was at this point still unfamiliar with Ibn Taymiyya's arguments. This is further confirmed when Tzortzis refers indirectly to Ibn Taymiyya in the essay, in a quote by scholar Jaafar Idris, citing a now-obsolete link to a page on Idris' website⁸⁷. In this quote, Idris explains the argument as follows: If an infinite chain of past causes was possible, '[t]here would be no series of actual causes, but only a series of non-existents, as Ibn Taymiyya explained. The fact, however, is that there are existents around us; therefore, their ultimate cause must be something other than temporal causes (cited in Tzortzis, no date).' Additionally, by plagiarising Craig in this essay (whether intentionally or unintentionally) Tzortzis unwittingly adopted Craig's (and al-Ghazali's) argument that a regress of past *events* (not causes) is impossible, contradicting Ibn Taymiyya.

⁸⁷ Tzortzis links to: <http://www.jaafaridris.com/English/Books/physicists.htm>. (Accessed: 14 August 2016).

In the last section, Tzortzis links the arguments to several Qur'anic verses related to an uncreated creator ('He neither begets nor is born', Qur'an 112-3) and a monotheistic conception of God that transcends material laws ('independent of all creatures', Qur'an 3:97). He further uses Qur'anic verses (42:11, 2:20, and 2:213) to show that God is eternal and has the power and will to create the universe. He deduces what 'the Qur'an concluded over 1,400 years ago', that the universe has a creator that 'is one, has a will, is powerful, uncaused, immaterial and eternal' (Tzortzis, no date). Tzortzis then goes on to rebut the challenge of quantum physics to causality, as Craig does in his Cosmological Argument.

4.4.3 Video of Tzortzis' talk 'How to Prove the Existence of God'

The video of the talk was published on YouTube on 3 February 2013, around 16 months before the introductory GORAP video featuring Tzortzis titled 'How to Give Da'wah – Hamza Tzortzis'. It was also published after the six episodes of the GORAP training videos featuring Green,

Chronology of iERA videos discussed:

- 2012 6 GORAP videos featuring Green.
- 2013 Tzortzis' talk in a university using the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.
- 2014 Additional GORAP overview video featuring Tzortzis.

which was posted on 11 July 2012. Green uses the *Kalam* argument in the GORAP training videos, but Tzortzis expands on it in the 2013 talk and adds more to it in the 2014 GORAP video. In this 2013 video filmed in an educational hall, Tzortzis begins by saying that his talk will be on how to provide 'good reasons' and how to 'articulate a positive, strong case for the existence of Allah.' He describes Islam as 'the last remaining rational religion' but explains

that his use of the term 'rational is not materialist', but rather in the meaning of Ibn Taymiyya's view that there's no contradiction between '*aql* (mind/intellect) and '*naql* (the Qur'an/revelation). However, Tzortzis adds, the condition for this is that the intellect has to be 'sound' and 'in tune with reality' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). He is of the opinion that Muslims must counter 'neo-atheists' like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. He adds: 'And say, Hold on a second, we have a tradition that is very strong. Not only does it revive people's hearts, but it elevates the intellect of man, and it shows very good reasons that the divine exists (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).'

He further argues that atheism is not a by-product of philosophy or science, but of psychology. He says that the Qur'an 'rarely' mentions atheism, and he takes the opportunity to highlight that the holy book instead talks about *tawhid* (the oneness of God). He mentions in passing the three aspects of *tawhid*: the oneness of God's names and attributes (*tawhid al-asma' wal-sifat*), the oneness of lordship (*tawhid al-rububiyyah*), and the oneness of Godship (*tawhid al-uluhiyyah*).

Tzortzis then asks the audience how people can claim to be free when humans are 'cosmic orphans' and are enslaved by the chance of their birth into 'sociobiological contexts' not of their choosing. Having a choice also doesn't signify freedom, Tzortzis argues, because that is another form of slavery to one's own choices. Therefore, the only way to achieve 'true freedom' is to be enslaved to God (*'ubudiyyah*). He is critical of what he terms the 'atheist point-of-view' that humans are essentially only molecules and asks, 'does it really matter?' He then puts forward two questions to be posed when considering the existence of God: without God, what is the value and the meaning of our existence?

Before presenting his arguments for God's existence, Tzortzis emphasizes that these arguments are based on the Qur'an and Sunnah (*hadiths*), otherwise the discussion may slip into 'blameworthy *Kalam*' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). For Tzortzis, *Kalam* is the use of arguments or premises that are not found in the Islamic core texts.

His arguments in this video are:

1. God's existence explains the beginning of the universe: the universe is not eternal, as atheists like Bertrand Russell believed. Tzortzis says that the Qur'an states that 'the universe had a point and had a beginning in time', but he does not identify a specific verse to support this. He adds, 'Now this is exactly what the scientists say, because they talk about the Big Bang' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). He explains the Big Bang briefly to argue that there is a scientific consensus that the universe had a beginning. Here he quotes Alexander Vilenkin, whom he describes as 'one of the best, if not the best, theoretical cosmologists on the planet,' saying that the Big Bang is undeniable proof that the universe had a beginning. Tzortzis appears to be referring to Vilenkin's BGV Theorem, used by William Lane Craig. If the universe doesn't have a beginning, then its past is infinite. Tzortzis asks the audience whether the infinite exists in the material world. His answer is, it doesn't. This leads to the impossibility of an infinite past history of the universe (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).
2. Tzortzis then posits possible explanations for the universe's beginning, which he derives from the Qur'an. He says that even though the Qur'an talks about the creation of humans, this

can also be applied to ‘any type of creation, including the whole universe’, according to the *tafsirs*, but he doesn’t specify which *tafsirs*. He gives these possible explanations as follows:

- the universe was created from nothing,
- the universe created itself,
- or the universe was created.

For his first possibility, he argues for the principle that nothing can come out of nothing. He says that this is a principle that people can agree on as well, and uses P. J. Zwart as an example, whom he describes as a non-Muslim thinker. He quotes him as saying that it’s inconceivable that something can arise from nothing, in his book *About Time* (1975). He also refutes the second explanation by asking, can your mother give birth to herself? This leads him to confirm that the third explanation is the best one, by eliminating the first two. Even though in this video Hamza doesn’t include a fourth possibility which he mentions in the 2014 GORAP video, that the universe was created by something else that was created, he does discuss this point here by saying that it would lead to an infinite regress of creators, resulting in the impossibility for creation to occur. This part is consistent with Ibn Taymiyya’s argument against the endless chain of dependent causative agents.

After refuting these possibilities, Tzortzis concludes that because the universe was created, then it had to have a creator. And he presents this conclusion as *'aql* agreeing with *naql* in the following short *surah*:

Say, 'He is Allah , [who is] One,
Allah , the Eternal Refuge.
He neither begets nor is born,
Nor is there to Him any equivalent. (Qur'an 112:1-4)

However, Tzortzis does not explain how this chapter is relevant or illustrates this point. The verses only emphasise the existence of one, eternal deity that is unborn and does not have any children, and which is distinct from anything else. Similarly, Tzortzis doesn't show how the logic of the Qur'an leads to the Cosmological Argument when he then goes on to say:

Very simple argument. And *wallahi* [by God] brothers and sisters, you pose this to an atheist, and the majority of them won't have a way out. It's a simple argument based upon the logic of the Qur'an (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).

3. The argument from design: Here Tzortzis uses the Watchmaker Argument used by Green as well in his book *The Man in the Red Underpants*. Tzortzis asks the audience to imagine that they were walking in the Sahara desert and found a mobile phone. He gives two possible explanations for this: it was either made by design, or it could have come into existence by the hypothesis that it was by chance and through a random chain of events: the desert oil became the plastic casing and the sand turned into glass and silicon. Then he asks, which is the best explanation? He describes the second hypothesis as 'not rational' because its probability is very 'improbable' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).

He then continues,

You can say to an atheist: 'You know what Mr Atheist, I don't believe my mother's my mother anymore. I believe that she's a pink elephant, and she was born on Pluto, and she flew here on a Mustang'. Now he may say to me: 'Mr. Tzortzis, you're crazy!' And I may reply: 'But there's a chance! [shrugs]'

That's how silly chance is. These types of probabilities are so mind reeling, so crazy, that to use them as a justification for anything, just means you can't have a conversation anymore (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).

Tzortzis concludes that intelligent design is the best explanation. He refers to Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*, specifically (but erroneously) to pages 157 and 158. He says that Dawkins acknowledges that the design argument is 'strong' but asks the question of who designed the designer. Tzortzis offers two ways to reply: the first one, he says, is that 'even in science the best explanation doesn't require an explanation' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). Through the impossibility of the regress problem mentioned earlier, Tzortzis argues that asking this question 'who designed the designer' is the equivalent of saying 'there is no universe'. Therefore, there must be an undesigned designer (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).

However, Tzortzis misrepresents Dawkins here. The correct pages in Dawkins' book (Dawkins, 2006) are pp. 137-139. His argument is important to quote here at length:

The argument from improbability is the big one. In the traditional guise of the argument from design, it is easily today's most popular argument offered in favour of the existence of God and it is seen, by an amazingly large number of theists, as completely and utterly convincing. It is indeed *a very strong* (my italics) and, I suspect, unanswerable argument – *but in precisely the opposite direction* from the theist's intention (my italics). The argument from improbability, properly deployed, comes close to proving that God does *not* exist (italics in original). (p. 137)

[...] However statistically improbable the entity you seek to explain by invoking a designer, the designer himself has got to be at least as improbable. (p. 138)

Dawkins here is criticizing the lack of understanding of Darwinian evolution. For Dawkins, the smartphone example discussed by Tzortzis is akin to saying a hurricane tore through a scrapyard and assembled a Boeing 747 by pure luck. It only serves to show, he says, that those misrepresenting evolution in this way do

not understand the theory. Dawkins is critical of both the chance and the design arguments, and is critical of apologists presenting design as the only alternative explanation to chance. He offers a third, better explanation: 'slowly increasing complexity' (p. 139). He writes:

(...) Creationist 'logic' is always the same. Some natural phenomenon is too statistically improbable, too complex, too beautiful, too awe-inspiring to have come into existence by chance. Design is the only alternative to chance that the authors can imagine. Therefore a designer must have done it. And science's answer to this faulty logic is also always the same. Design is not the only alternative to chance. *Natural selection is a better alternative*. Indeed, design is not a real alternative at all because it raises an even bigger problem than it solves: *who designed the designer?* Chance and design both fail as solutions to the problem of statistical improbability, because one of them is the problem, and the other one regresses to it. (pp. 146-7, my italics)

This raises the question, why does the argument have to stop at one designer? One can go on questioning the origins of the designer as well, which the monotheistic religions do not offer explanations for, but simply describe a deity in absolute terms such as 'eternal'. Tzortzis, like Craig, has in fact tackled this question in his talks by using Ibn Taymiyya and Occam's Razor. Ibn Taymiyya argued that having an endless chain of causes would lead to the effect never taking place; therefore, the chain must begin with an uncaused cause. Secondly, if this raises the question, why can't there be two uncaused causes, or another finite number of them. Tzortzis responds that Occam's Razor, also used in science, encourages arriving at the simplest, most comprehensive explanation (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). But Tzortzis doesn't mention a *hadith* pertaining to the query of who created the creator. This is further discussed in Chapter Five.

4. The argument from the Qur'an: Tzortzis says he believes that the Qur'an is from God and is proof of God's existence. He argues that if it can be proved that it couldn't have been written

by a man or that a ‘natural reason’ for this book cannot be found, then the best explanation is that it has a divine origin. The Qur'an, for Tzortzis, is the only religious book that engages a person’s heart, soul, intellect (*'aql*), psychology and *fitrah*. He brings up the Qur'an’s challenge and recites verse 2:23 in Arabic:

And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant,
then produce a *surah* the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than
Allah, if you should be truthful. (Qur'an 2:23)

Tzortzis says this verse is addressing the following: the doubters, sceptics, atheists, humanists, philosophers, scientists, and thinkers. He says that there is a consensus among scholars on the eloquence and uniqueness of the Qur'anic language. Referring to orientalists and the historian Ibn Rashiq, Tzortzis says that 7th century Arabs celebrated two things: the birth of a boy and a new poet, to show the importance of poetry at this time and the Arabs’ poetic skills. He further gives the example of the poet Ibn al-Mughirah, who claimed that the Qur'an was from God. Tzortzis also quotes Ibn Rashiq in a later essay titled ‘God’s Testimony: The Inimitability and Divine Authorship of the Qur'an’ (Tzortzis, 2014). Tzortzis’ point is that the skilled Arabs, who were most able to evaluate the legitimacy of the Prophet’s claim, concurred that it was divine rather than man-made.

An anecdote at this point in Tzortzis’ filmed talk illustrates his speaking skills: He asks the audience if they’ve heard of Shakespeare, ‘also known as Sheikh Zuboor’ he jokes (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). He recites Juliet's famous words: ‘O Romeo, O Romeo, Wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father, deny [‘refuse’ in original] thy name’. Tzortzis then jokes about reciting this verse more Islamically as: ‘O Abdullah, O Abdullah, deny thy mother, deny thy tribe,’ to the laughter of the audience. His point is that the uniqueness of the

Qur'an is not only its poetic eloquence but its unique combining of poetry and prose. He cites orientalist A. J. Arberry and David J. Stewart on the Qur'an's uniqueness.

Tzortzis argues that it's not necessary to know Arabic to believe in the Qur'an's uniqueness, as it is possible to take others' testimony (*tawatur*). Here he quotes the author of *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Australian philosopher C.A. (J.) Coady, on believing that the Earth is a spheroid based on trusting the experts or that a country named Greece exists. Consequently, Tzortzis equates rejecting the Qur'an to rejecting that Greece exists.

4.4.4 GORAP da'wah training video by Hamza Tzortzis

The *da'wah* training video (iERA, 2014b) posted on iERA's Mission Dawah page was developed at a later date than the above talk given by Tzortzis. In this training video, Tzortzis argues for a First Cause and a creator deity by using inference to the best explanation⁸⁸. He subscribes to the view that the universe has a beginning, and uses the Qur'an and Islamic terminology as a source of his argument. He says,

...we know that this whole universe began (...). Well there are four possible explanations, and by the way, the Qur'an gives us the logic of these explanations in Chapter 52 verses 35 to 36. (iERA, 2014b)

⁸⁸ This argument is also sometimes called Abductive Reasoning or Eliminative Induction. An example of this type of argumentation is the observation of wet grass. The best explanation for grass being wet is rain. However, there could be other possible explanations, such as the use of sprinklers or other human forms of watering. Therefore, more information is needed to conclude whether it's caused by rain or sprinklers, such as observing the area around the grass to see whether it's also wet.

The Qur'anic reference is the following:

Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?
Or did they create the heavens and the Earth? Rather, they are not certain⁸⁹.
(Qur'an 52:35-6)

They follow verses of the Qur'an's challenge to produce *surahs* similar to it:

Or do they say, 'He has made it up'? Rather, they do not believe.
Then let them produce a statement like it, if they should be truthful. (Qur'an
52:33-4)

Hamza again acknowledges that verses 35-6 are about the creation of human beings but that they can be used for anything that is *muhdath*, i.e. that has 'come into being' in Tzortzis' words (iERA, 2014b), including the universe.

Unlike his earlier talk discussed above, Tzortzis proposes four instead of three possible explanations for the universe's existence and lists them with numbers 1 to 4. He does this by expanding the third explanation, the universe was created, into two separate explanations, as follows:

1. It came from nothing.
2. It created itself.
3. It was created by something else that was created.
4. It was created by something that [was] uncreated.

It's useful here to pause to discuss briefly how Tzortzis used this same argument in his debate with American cosmologist and theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss in iERA's The Big Debates in 2013 (iERA, 2013). The debate was chaired by Yusuf Chambers and was titled:

⁸⁹ Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) explains in his commentary on the Qur'an that these verses confirm lordship (*rububiyya*) and divine oneness (*tawhid al-uluhiyya*).

‘Islam or Atheism: which makes more sense?’ Krauss initially walked out of the debate hall when he saw that the audience was gender-segregated and only returned after people were allowed to sit unsegregated. Tzortzis points out that Krauss subscribes to the notion that the universe had a beginning. He then quotes Ibn Taymiyya from his book *As-Safadiyyah* on all that is created (*makhluq*): ‘So whatever is besides God, it is all *makhluq*’ (iERA, 2013). He then goes on to give the same four arguments listed above. He doesn't argue his points with supporting premises as Craig does, but simply by making brief statements. For example, his only argument for the last explanation is to quote the philosopher Abraham Varghese, in an appendix in Anthony Flew's book *There is a God*:

Now clearly theists and atheists can agree on one thing: if anything at all exists, there must be something preceding it that always existed. How did this eternally existing reality come to be? The answer is that it never came to be. It always existed. Take your pick: God or the universe. Something always existed. (iERA, 2013)

iERA posted this quote on its Facebook page as well. Tzortzis then says that since he argued deductively that the universe began, the conclusion is that the something which existed before the universe is God. Tzortzis here concedes that this line of arguing does not prove that Allah, Yahweh or any other gods exist. He says, in rather a *da'wah* approach, that using rational argumentation, or '*aql*', as in the Qur'anic verses⁹⁰, he can then argue that this something is eternal – by definition – as well as transcendent, referring to Ibn Taymiyya's argument again, must have a will, be powerful, perpetually knowing or intelligent, and one. Using Occam's Razor, he argues that the simplest and most comprehensive explanation is that there is only one deity.

⁹⁰ '*Afala ta'qilun?*' This question appears in different forms at the end of various Qur'anic verses.

Returning to his GORAP training video, after Tzortzis lists the four explanations for the universe's beginning, he suggests that proselytisers adopt a dialogic approach rather than preach (iERA, 2014b). He tells them to ask questions and seek agreement on certain points along the way. For example, he suggests asking the question: 'Do you think the universe could have come from nothing or via nothing?' His answer is that it must have come from something. For the second explanation, he repeats a question that he often uses in his talks to argue that objects or beings that create themselves both exist and do not exist at the same time: 'Could your mother give birth to herself?' For the third explanation, Tzortzis uses Ibn Taymiyya's argument of the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes because the effect would never materialise. He says: '[Ibn Taymiyya] said you can't have an infinite regress of causes, because you can't have one cause after another cause... going on forever, otherwise you wouldn't have the effect which is the universe itself' (iERA, 2014b). As discussed above, this argument is also used by Green in another GORAP training video. Both Tzortzis and Green give the example of a marine that has to get permission to shoot a bird from their superiors in a long, endless chain that results in the order never being issued. Tzortzis then reaches the conclusion that the fourth explanation is the best one through a process of elimination rather than by giving supporting arguments for it (see Appendix E), as Craig does (see Appendix H for a chart comparing the two arguments).

Next, in the second step of GORAP, Tzortzis goes on to give arguments for the existence of only one true creator God instead of many. They are:

1. Because He is uncreated, God is eternal.
2. God is powerful.
3. God is all-knowing.
4. God is distinct from his creation.

Tzortzis doesn't establish how these qualities lead to the conclusion that there is only one God. This deity is eternal 'simply' because He is uncreated (iERA, 2014b). God is also powerful, and Tzortzis argues this by pointing out that the universe contains 'around 10^{80} atoms' (iERA, 2014b, my italics), and energy is released if only one of them is split. Again here Tzortzis is mistaken. In his book *On Guard*, Craig (2010) writes in his argument of a fine-tuned universe: 'The number of *subatomic* particles (not atoms as Tzortzis says) in the entire known universe is said to be around 10^{80} ' (p. 109, my italics). Therefore, a deity that created this universe would have to be more powerful. To prove that God is all-knowing, Tzortzis argues that the law of gravity signifies a lawgiver, and subsequently, a lawgiver is a being that knows. Tzortzis then emphasizes the following, perhaps in a nod to Salafism and to distinguish its notion of the divine from forms of Sufism, Christianity and Hinduism:

What's important though is that this uncreated creator is different, disjoined and distinct from us. Just like the famous scholar [Ibn Taymiyya?] said, that creation is distinct and disjoined from creation. Why? If I made this card, do I become the card? (iERA, 2014b).

His monologue then goes on to talk about love. He starts it by adopting al-Ghazali's argument that loving oneself as people naturally do should lead to not only loving but also worshipping the creator of love and humans, and who is the source of love. Tzortzis notes one of God's names, the loving (*al-wadud*). Again in reference to the Salafi emphasis on not worshipping other than God (*shirk*), Tzortzis says:

... why are you worshipping other things? And also you don't worship other things. Even atheists worship other things. You obey your boss, you obey your parents, you obey your wife, your siblings, the culture, materialism, the system that we live in.(...) We all have these enslavements. (...) But if God created me, I wanna enslave myself to Him; that would truly free me from the worldliness, from the *emptiness of the world*. (iERA, 2014b, my italics)

This is the first of two times that Tzortzis talks about the emptiness of the world in this video. In the second instance, he says that worshipping God is the reason given in the Qur'an for the existence of humans, and this worship frees them from 'the shackles of the empty world, the ephemeral world' (iERA, 2014b). Also in this quote, Tzortzis reiterates the view he presented in the 2013 video that humans are slaves to this world due to the circumstances of their birth that they did not and could not choose, and the only way to free themselves is through worship.

Tzortzis moves on to the third step of GORAP, which is the argument that the Qur'an is from the divine source. The question here is, how do people know about God? He says, 'We all wanna hear the voice of God as they say, but where is it?' (iERA, 2014b) Tzortzis proposes that there are two ways to know: internally and externally. He's critical of the first, when people say that they know God in their hearts. This again appears to be criticism of other faith systems. He comments, 'If we all had that approach, we'd have 6 billion different versions of God' (iERA, 2014b). Consequently, knowing the divine must be external, and in the form of a book. If the proselytisers are countered with a response that revelation isn't needed to know God, Tzortzis recommends not pursuing the argument and instead giving good reasons why Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of God. His argument is as follows:

1. The Qur'an is the most logical, rational, natural and reasonable portrayal of God.
2. The Qur'an makes people think, without forcing people to believe.
3. The Qur'an challenges humanity about its authorship:
 - i. its linguistic miracle:

- a. its linguistic uniqueness couldn't be matched by the best Arabs of the time;
- b. the authentic testimony of experts on its linguistic superiority;
- ii. its historical miracle:
 - a. it contains very specific historical information, e.g. the use of the title of Pharaoh in Moses' time versus King in Joseph's time.
- iii. it speaks to people of different centuries and different intellectual abilities⁹¹
 - a. The example of the word clot (*'alaqah*) in the description of the embryonic stages. It could mean:
 - blood in the general sense
 - blood clot
 - clay that sticks to the hand
 - leech or worm
 - something that clings.

For the first argument, Tzortzis says:

[God] is one. He is unique. He is eternal. He doesn't give birth. He wasn't born. There is nothing like him. *Very simple*. This is a God you can worship. Use what I've just said, which is from the Qur'an. (...) The point is when you use this from the Qur'an as criteria to understand what makes sense of a God, the Qur'an always comes on top. (iERA, 2014b, my italics)

Here he reiterates oneness (*tawhid*) as opposed to the Trinity, distinction from creation as opposed to Sufi and Hindu pantheism, and that God isn't begotten nor does he beget sons as opposed to the Christian view. 'There is nothing like [Him]' is the Salafi and anti-Kalam emphasis on the attributes as they are described in the Qur'an but without anthropomorphism, which the Mu'tazila accused the traditionalists (Atharis) of. This is based on Ibn Taymiyya's literal understanding of the divine attributes (*ijra' ayat al-sifat wa ahadith al-sifat 'ala*

⁹¹ Tzortzis carefully words this section in this manner instead of calling it 'its scientific miracle' as he does the previous two or claiming that the Qur'an contains modern scientific knowledge.

zahirha) but without expounding on how this is and without anthropomorphism (*ma' nafy al-kayfiyyah wal-tashbih*) (Haykel, 2009, p. 38). The statement itself 'There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing' is in *surah* 42:11.

The final step of GORAP that Tzortzis offers arguments for is the prophethood of Muhammad. In order to assess Muhammad's claim, he gives the following four possibilities:

1. Muhammad was lying.
2. He was deluded.
3. He was both lying and deluded.
4. He was telling the truth.

To support his argument for the linguistic miraculousness of the Qur'an and its challenge, Tzortzis quotes the orientalist Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot (d. 1901): 'That's why [Arbuthnot] said [that] although several attempts have been made to challenge the Qur'an, none have yet succeeded. So he's echoing what many of the other *ulama* have said' (iERA, 2014b). In fact, Tzortzis often uses the same quote by Arbuthnot in his essays and talks, which is also commonly repeated in various other Islamic *da'wah* websites:

'...and that though several attempts have been made to produce a work equal to it as far as elegant writing is concerned, none has as yet succeeded.'⁹²

The quote appears to show Arbuthnot himself asserting that no one has been able to match the Qur'an's linguistic style. To find out whether this quote's source may have been online, an Internet search for 'F. F. Arbuthnot, The Construction of the Bible and the Koran, London 1885' returned results on Google only from Islamic websites. Narrowing down the search to

⁹² See Tzortzis' essays 'A Philosophical Perspective on the Uniqueness of the Qur'an', 'The Qur'an's Challenge: A Literary and Linguistic Miracle', and 'A Response to Channel 4's 'Islam: The Untold Story'.'

the year 2005 returned only one result from Answering-Christianity.com of a post titled ‘Rebuttal to Farooq Ibrahim’s Article: Is the Injeel [Bible] Less or More Trustworthy than the Qur'an?’ (Umar, no date). The article uses a different quote of Arbuthnot – on the writing down of the Qur'an – than the above. The post references IslamOnline.net as the source of the quotes, but the page has been deleted⁹³. Searching further back to the year 2000 gives three more results. Arbuthnot’s quote can be found on a website in an article titled ‘The Challenge’ (no date). The second result links to the online text of ‘The Life of Richard Burton’, which discusses Arbuthnot but does not use this specific quote. The third link is the most interesting as it contains the complete paragraph of Arbuthnot's quote. It is from a PDF document titled ‘T'jaz al-Qur'an’ on the website LawTeacher.net. It reveals that, knowingly or unknowingly, Tzortzis used a truncated quote, because Arbuthnot actually wrote:

From the literary point of view, the Koran is regarded as a specimen of the purest Arabic, written in half poetry and half prose. *It has been said* that in some cases grammarians have adopted their rules to agree with certain phrases and expressions used in it, and that (Tufal, 1994, my italics)⁹⁴

A search of the years 1990 to 2000 gives no more results, therefore it is very likely that this document is the online source of the quote. The full quote clearly undermines how it is used by Tzortzis. Instead of presenting his own evaluation, Arbuthnot is only recording common Islamic views about the Qur'an.

Tzortzis then deals with the issue of those who do not speak Arabic, who are iERA’s target in English-speaking and other non-Arab countries. He says, ‘The person you’re talking to may

⁹³ The post gives this now-defunct link:

www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503545420&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar%2FFatwaE%2FFatwaE. The entire English version of IslamOnline.net is no longer available.

⁹⁴ The source is F.F. Arbuthnot (1885) *The Construction of the Bible and the Koran*, London, p. 5.

not know nothing about Arabic. This is fair enough. All you have to get them to understand is that they have to accept something called testimony', with the condition that the testimony is valid and authentic (iERA, 2014b). He argues about the importance of testimony in general knowledge, such as knowing that China exists. This is similar to the arguments Tzortzis has made elsewhere, discussed in other sections of this chapter, based on Coady's expose that much human knowledge comes from experts. Tzortzis then offers 4 possible explanations for the Qur'an's linguistic style with his rebuttal of each:

1. The Qur'an was produced by an Arab.

Rebuttal: The Arabs of the time denied that it could have been produced by a human being. E.g. Walid ibn al-Mughirah.

2. It was produced by a non-Arab.

Rebuttal: Impossible. The Qur'an says that the language is clear, pure Arabic (*'arabiyun mubin'*).

3. It was produced by Muhammad.

Rebuttal: Various reasons that Tzortzis does not specify as his audience may know the arguments already. One reason he gives is: Muhammad was an Arab, and all the Arabs failed the Qur'an's challenge. Another reason he gives: all human works of art or expression can be replicated as long as a blueprint is available, except in the case of the Qur'an, where this hasn't been done.

His conclusion: The Qur'an was revealed by God.

For his discussion of the historical miraculousness of the Qur'an, Tzortzis repeats the same sentiment expressed by Green in his talk on his conversion to Islam. For Green it related to

the recurrent themes in the Qur'an of powerful past civilizations that were destroyed by God and reduced to ruins for their arrogance. Tzortzis, like Green, talks about the self (*nafs*) and the spiritual element of Islam: the humbler a person is and the more they let go of their ego, the closer they can get to God. A specific example of a historical miracle that Tzortzis focuses on are the use of the titles Pharaoh (*Fir'on*) and King (*Malik*) to refer to the rulers of Egypt in the Qur'an: he says that, unlike the Torah, the Bible or the historians of the time, the Qur'an consistently uses 'King' to refer to the ruler during Joseph's time and 'Pharaoh' during Moses' time. He notes that the hieroglyphics weren't known then. It was only the 1799 discovery of the Rosetta Stone that confirmed what the Qur'an already knew. Here Tzortzis describes two ancient Egyptian kingdoms:

... and we find that actually, at the time of Youssef (Joseph) (*alayhi assalam*), which is the *Old Middle Kingdom* in Egyptian history, they were calling the... leader of the Egyptians *Malik*, King. And in the *New Middle Kingdom* – the *New Kingdom* rather – at the time of Moses, they started to call him Pharaoh. What a slight minute detail in the Qur'an is [sic] absolutely accurate... (iERA, 2014b, my italics)

Tzortzis confuses the kingdoms in this section. The kingdoms are: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom, with intermediate periods between them.

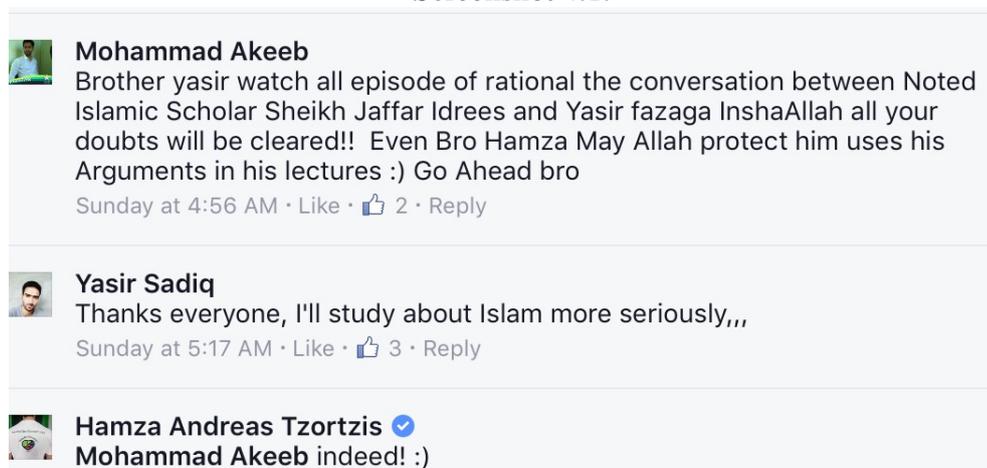
The final argument Tzortzis makes for the Qur'an's divine source is in reference to the development of the embryo, where he highlights the meanings of the word clot (*'alaqah*) as mentioned above. This argument is discussed at length in the chapter on the Qur'an's scientific miraculousness (*I'jaz*) and therefore will not be discussed in detail here except to highlight that Tzortzis in this video does not refer to it as a scientific revelation, as he does with the linguistic and historical features.

Jaafar Sheikh Idris

Another source of iERA's arguments is Sudanese scholar Dr. Jaafar Sheikh Idris (b. 1931CE).

Tzortzis confirmed this on his Facebook page:

Screenshot 4.1.



Source: www.Facebook.com/HamzaAndreasTzortzis. (Accessed: 30 March 2016).

Idris' doctoral thesis at the University of London was on Causality in Islam. Idris is supportive of Wahhabism and defends a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an. This is evident from his website, where he articulates his beliefs in two noteworthy articles. In a positive essay on Wahhabism published on his website, Idris describes Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as a revivalist and a renewer (*mujaddid*) of the faith. He defends the Wahhabi movement's literalist approach because literalism is the way in which people understand all discourses. Only when the words are used in an unusual way do humans then have to interpret them in other, non-literalist ways. For Idris (1995),

[so]-called liberal interpretation is thus no more than self-deception, because the liberal starts by interpreting the statements of the Scripture in this normal

way that he calls literalist, but when he finds the meaning of a statement unacceptable to him or to his contemporary culture, he reinterprets it so as to make it more in tune with the requirements of his personal prejudices or the prejudices of his contemporary culture.

The second article published on his website is more recent and is titled 'A Reinterpreted Islam is No Islam'⁹⁵, Idris (2005) blames the American Neo-Cons for turning Islam into the new enemy after the defeat of Communism, and for pressuring Muslims to adapt their interpretations of their religion to the more palatable values of Western countries.

Idris is featured as a guest on the English-language Sudanese television programme *The Rational*, where he talks about various topics related to *da'wah*, including arguments for the existence of God. In one episode posted on YouTube, Idris explains Ibn Taymiyya's argument on the infinite regression as follows (DigitalMimbar, 2013): Temporal objects have a beginning and cannot be self-caused; therefore, they must have an external cause. Moreover, the external cause cannot also be temporal, otherwise the same question would be applied to it: what caused it? This argument's detractors contend that a series of temporal objects can be infinite and does not need an external cause. They also refute that the cosmological argument proves the existence of an eternal creator. Ibn Taymiyya's response was that an endless chain of causes results in the effect not materialising, and thus the existence of temporal objects is itself evidence that something eternal exists. Ibn Taymiyya's view was that an endless chain can continue infinitely only if each temporal object or event was caused by an eternal entity which is external to the series. However, Idris says that Ibn Taymiyya thought that the cosmological argument doesn't go far enough, because it only

⁹⁵ Posted on his website in January 2016 but authored in 2005.

proves the existence of an eternal entity. He doesn't elaborate on how Ibn Taymiyya resolved this issue.

In the third GORAP training video, Green presents a similar approach to the above. He says,

[The cause of the universe] must be different because if its nature was the same as the universe, [the cause] would be the same as the universe. In other words, it would be more of the same, and then we would have to quite rationally ask, well what brought that into existence? What caused that? (iERA, 2012d).

4.5 Criticism of iERA's *Kalam* approach

4.5.1 Criticism of iERA by other Muslims: *Aqidah.com*

In August 2013 the Salafi-oriented website *Aqidah.com* published a five-part series of rebuttals titled 'Advice regarding Hamza Tzortzis and company (iERA),' criticizing him for using the *Kalam* approach (Abu.Iyaad, 2013e).

Who is Aqidah.com?

Textual clues lead to the conclusion that the website is Salafi, such as the following: 'A person of *kalam* can never be a person of the Sunnah as the Salaf have said' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013e). In fact, the term 'Salaf' is used over 40 times in the series, while 'Salafi *aqidah* [creed]' is mentioned four times. Additionally, the article is critical of non-Islamic accretions into Muslim practices, tracing their origins to six 'nations': Christians, Jews, Persians, Greeks, Hindus and 'Sabeans' [sic] (Abu.Iyaad, 2013e). The articles are written by the user Abu.Iyaad

(Arabic pronunciation: Abu 'Ayath) and are circular in style, containing several looping repetitions of the same ideas.

The first article in the series begins with this introduction:

A few days ago Hamza Tzortzis published a paper in relation to the Qur'an and 'scientific miracles' in which he makes a fairly significant turn from the prior direction taken by him (and his da'wah organization). This was after a long history of debates and wranglings with certain atheists who dedicated their time and effort to refute him. We certainly do not side with these atheists. However, the reality is that Hamza Tzortzis opened the door for these atheists to attack the integrity of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (asaw) by speaking without knowledge and generally exceeding the bounds in the course and direction of debate and da'wah. Furthermore, he is not upon and *has never been upon* the way of the Salaf as his da'wah is largely a combination of falsafah and kalam [sic] and involves a type of debating that clashes with the manhaj of the salaf. A person of kalam can never be a person of Sunnah as the Salaf have said. (Abu.Iyaad, 2013e, italics in original)

Like the AsharisAssemble article discussed in the previous chapter, the author emphasises the importance of knowledge in *da'wah*. he goes on to associate Tzortzis' use of *Kalam* with his former membership with Hizb ut-Tahrir, and traces the origin of this form of '*da'wah* bandwagon not founded and rooted upon the methodologies of the Ahl al-Sunnah' (2013e) to 'Jama'at at-Tabligh' [Tablighi Jama'at], which delivers a crash course on *da'wah* before sending trainees out to proselytize. Tzortzis is further accused of 'ignorance' of the Islamic creed and methodology, and criticised for his use of William Lane Craig's arguments. Abu.Iyaad claims being told that Muslims attending iERA's debates became 'confused and bewildered' and began having doubts. Tzortzis is warned of falling into the trap of eventually denying the divine attributes, as did the Jahmis and Mu'tazila, according to Abu.Iyaad. The

writer also includes several quotes against *Kalam*, such as: 'Whoever sought kalam [sic], his final affair will be heresy (*zandaqah*).'⁹⁶

How Hamza Tzortzis confused Ibn Taymiyya and Jahm ibn Safwan's arguments

The second article in the series sets out to show how Tzortzis employs both Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) reasoning and Jahm Ibn Safwan's arguments without realizing in his selectivity that Ibn Taymiyya's aim was in fact to counter *Kalam* (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). Al-Jahm Ibn Safwan is described as being misguided in his argument for the impossibility of an infinite series of events. However, the article stops short of delving into the reasoning of the *Kalam* arguments or of Ibn Taymiyya's rebuttal. The article refers to Tzortzis' talk in 2013 in which he begins by adopting Ibn Taymiyya's premise that there isn't any contradiction between reasoning (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*) (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). The writer says that Tzortzis then goes on to use *Kalam* arguments, thus demonstrating that he is unfamiliar with both *Kalam* and Ibn Taymiyya's book, *Repelling the Conflict Between Reason and Revelation (Dar' ta'arud al-'aql wal-naql)*. Abu.Iyaad writes that in this book Ibn Taymiyya's aim was to refute the conclusions of *Kalam*, that the arguments for God's creation of the universe negate or contradict His attributes that were revealed in the Qur'an. In various debates, for example with *Philosophy Now* editor Rick Lewis (2009), President of American Atheists Ed Buckner (2010), and Emeritus Professor of Physics Graham Thompson (2013)⁹⁷, Tzortzis responds to the view that the universe is eternal, adopted by Bertrand Russell, by reiterating the statement that an 'infinite history of past events' is 'absurd' and 'untenable' (audio links in Abu.Iyaad,

⁹⁶ The quote is attributed to Abd al-Rahman bin Mahdi in the book *Dhamm ul-Kalam wa Ahlihi (Disparaging Kalam and its Proponents)*, by Abu Isma'il al-Harawi.

⁹⁷ This video is not available on iERA's YouTube channel.

2013d). The Aqidah.com article is critical of Tzortzis' premise because *Kalam* theologians based their conclusions on it, and Ibn Taymiyya refuted it, as will be discussed further below.

After scathingly remarking on Tzortzis' ignorance of Ibn Taymiyya, the writer warns him and others in *da'wah* of the risks of going down the path of *Kalam*, which led the Mutakallimun to *kufr*. He challenges Tzortzis when he claims that talking and using philosophy is allowed and is not 'blameworthy *Kalam*', and asks him which of the Salaf supported this approach. He is further accused of offering Muslims honey-coated poison. The writer notes that the four Sunni Imams condemned *Kalam* absolutely and offers several quotes to support this from various scholars, including by Ibn Hanbal, Ibn al-Jawzi, and al-Barbahari. The reasons given for this condemnation are that *Kalam* makes claims about God that are unknown to the *Kalam* theologians and not found in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In addition, the methodology of *Kalam* is different from that of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The scholars feared it would result in discord (*fitnah*) and in confusion and doubt among Muslims.

The writer also opposes iERA's organizing of debates with atheists, based on the fact that the Salaf rejected this approach. Ibn Hanbal is quoted in *Usool al-Sunnah* as saying: 'and abandoning disputation, wrangling and (controversial) arguments pertaining to the *deen* (faith)' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). The writer further questions what the outcomes of such debates are expected to be. He writes: 'Atheists rarely become convinced. Muslims are subjected to *shubuhah* (confusion) and *shukook* (doubts)' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). The article concludes by remarking that the history of *Kalam* is being repeated. It condemns Tzortzis, a Muslim adopting this approach, by arguing that God tests Muslims not through the 'enemies of Islam'

but rather through the 'flagbearers and defenders of Islam who have with them much truth' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d).

Ibn Taymiyya is quoted as saying:

Then they (the Mutakallimeen) made it obligatory upon the servant after he reached maturity as a believer in Allaah and His Messenger to [start off from a position of] doubt (*al-shakk*), or to intend [to study this proof] (*al-qasd*) or to make an investigation (*al-nadhar*) which (assumes) negation of (prior) knowledge (of a creator) (quoted in Abu.Iyaad, 2013d).

The author then explains that belief in God is a matter of instinct (*fitrah*) which does not need intellect or reasoning (*'aql*), and that a person is instead required to simply believe.

It is useful here to list the following Islamic beliefs based on the scholarly opinions of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim that the Aqidah.com writer claims Tzortzis contradicted with the *Kalam* arguments:

The essence and nature of God

God is eternal, God created time, and God acts according to His will and power without being confined by time (Abu.Iyaad, 2013b). Tzortzis argues, like Craig, that God is immaterial, which Abu.Iyaad (2013b) equates to Jahm Ibn Safwan's argument 'Allah is not a *jism* (a body).' The writer attributes the origin of this argument to Aristotle and says that it was inherited by 'Hellenized Jews, Christians and Sabeans [sic]' (2013b).

Tzortzis adopts Craig's argument for a personal God, which the Christian apologist himself adopted from al-Ghazali as previously discussed. Below are samples of Tzortzis and Craig's arguments, which they have both repeated in various lectures:

Tzortzis: 'This cause is eternal – no beginning, no end. But it brang [sic] into existence a finite effect: the universe. So the only way it could do this is if it chose to bring into existence a finite effect. And choice means what? It means it has a will. And if it has a will, it means it has a personality. Also, if this cause is immaterial, the only thing we can think about that's immaterial are [sic] two things: one, abstract objects like numbers; or two, minds. But things like numbers don't cause anything, but raise your right hand, just to show that your mind actually does have an effect in nature. So this thing must be like a mind, not a human mind, but rather with cognition, intellect and knowledge, which indicates a personality' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013).

Craig: 'It follows that if the universe has a cause of its existence, that cause must be a nonphysical, immaterial being beyond space and time. Amazing! Now there are only two sorts of things that could fit that description: either an abstract object like a number or else an unembodied mind. But abstract objects can't cause anything. That's part of what it means to be abstract. The number 7, for example, can't cause any effects. So the cause of the existence of the universe must be a transcendent Mind, which is what believers understand God to be' (Craig, 2010, p. 59).

The Aqidah.com writer not only criticises that the source of Tzortzis argument is Craig but also rightly notes that it was Greek philosophers who originally described the First Cause as the Intellect. Aristotle concluded that the First Cause was divine intelligence (Craig, 2010). The Aqidah.com writer (2013b) rejects this characterization and asserts that Islamic scholars agree that God has an essence 'the reality of which is not known.' This fourth article in the series concludes with a warning against *da'wah* 'edutainment', interestingly arguing that it is more dangerous than atheists:

Further, Muslims should not buy the propoganda that Lawrence Krauss, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins are more dangerous to the Muslims than the likes of Abu Yusuf Riyadh al-Baatil (Sufi Ash'ari), Afroz Ali (Sufi Ash'ari), Imran Hosein and other innovators and deviants alongside whom

Hamza Tzortzis or his associates from iERA are sometimes invited to speak in the same conference, seminar or platform (Abu.Iyaad, 2013b).

The reason given is that the debates organized by iERA give atheists a platform from which to reach out to Muslims which they wouldn't have had otherwise, since, the writer claims, Muslims would not otherwise listen to atheists like Dawkins or Harris.

Time and matter existed before the creation of the universe

Time is defined as the measurement of motion or, according to Ibn al-Qayyim, as the interval between two events (Abu.Iyaad, 2013b). Abu.Iyaad (2013a) is critical of Tzortzis, Zakir Naik and other Muslim apologists who base their arguments on accepting scientific 'claims' such as the Big Bang instead of on the Qur'an as a starting point. Time is believed to have existed in a different form before God created the universe. The claim that space, time and matter were created along with the universe is attributed to Craig as well as to the Jahmis. They are considered to be in contradiction with the Qur'an and Sunnah and therefore are '*batil*' (false). Abu.Iyaad writes based on Ibn Taymiyya's view: 'Allah made the decrees of creation 50,000 years (of another measure) before creating the heavens and Earth.' And the six days of creation are not 24-hour days. The writer believes that matter also existed prior to the creation, as the Qur'an mentions God's throne, water and the pen, based on Ibn Taymiyya and verses such as:

Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke. (Qur'an 41:11)

And it is He who created the heavens and the Earth in six days - and His Throne had been upon water - that He might test you as to which of you is best in deed. But if you say, 'Indeed, you are resurrected after death,' those who disbelieve will surely say, 'This is not but obvious magic'. (Qur'an 11:7)

Bucaille (1987) interprets the word 'smoke' in this verse as a 'gaseous mass with fine articles' (pp. 145-6). He also (pp. 140-3) questions the literal interpretation of the Arabic word 'day' and reinterprets it as 'period'. He quotes Qur'an 32:5 and 70:4 as examples of 'day' being described as thousands of years. In addition, in Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an, he interprets the word as 'periods or ages or aeons.'

'Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the Earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?' (Qur'an 21:30)

The Infinite

The Aqidah.com author criticises Tzortzis for categorically denying the existence of an infinite. Tzortzis does this when saying that an infinite cannot be actual and that it is absurd to speak of an infinite, such as an infinite chain of events, as if it were real. The author claims that such reasoning led the Jahmis, Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1210 CE) and others to deny the actions of God and the divine Throne. The Aqidah.com writer is critical of the logical consequence of the argument that God is not confined by time, which is that the Qur'an is, thus, created. That is because it results in denying God's actions, His sitting on the Throne (*'uluw*) and His choice to act (*af' al ikhtiyariyyah*) (Abu.Iyaad, 2013a). The writer goes on to quote Ibn Taymiyya on the scholarly consensus of pre-existing matter:

I say: Not one of the *salaf* (predecessors) of this nation and [sic] nor any of its leading scholars said that these heavens and the Earth were created and brought about without any created entity preceding them. (...) Rather, that which is

mutawaatir (reported through widescale transmission) is that they were created from prior matter and in a time period⁹⁸ (quoted in Abu.Iyaad, 2013a).

The attributes of God

The second Aqidah.com article outlines the core beliefs: God is eternal along with his essence and his attributes, which also have no beginning. This responds to the question: If God is eternal, then is the act of creation eternal? If cause is eternal, is effect eternal? His attributes are linked to His will and choice. Consequently, God's actions are necessarily (*wujub*) eternal in both the past and the future together. Therefore, an infinite chain of events is permissible (*jawaz*) and possible (*imkan*) in both the past and the future. The author continues: 'This is referred to as (*qidm naw' al-hawadith*), [the] eternity of the genus of events (without any specific one being eternal). (...) The texts of the Book and the Sunnah indicate the permissibility of an endless chain of events in the past, and this is what the Salaf⁹⁹ were upon as is clear in their refutations against the Jahmiyyah on the issue of kalaam (Allaah's speech)' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013d). The writer (2013d) quotes Tzortzis in several debates repeating the following idea, which was also shown above in his blog post:

[If the world is eternal], that would mean that the universe has an infinite history of past events.... I think this is absurd, [it's] untenable. It's philosophically incoherent.

Heaven and Hell are eternal and Seeing God in the afterlife

⁹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyyah* (2, pp. 459-461).

⁹⁹ The author gives the examples of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abbas.

Abu.Iyaad denounces *Kalam* arguments based on the impossibility of an infinite regression of events, that all originated things have a beginning and an end. This led Jahm to argue that since Heaven and Hell are created they must end as well, except for the eternal Face of God as stated in *surah* 55:27. Ibn Taymiyya endorsed the Salaf's *takfir* of this belief in *The Clarification of the Deception of the Jahmis and the Establishment of their Kalam Innovations (Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyyah, vol. 2, p. 473):*

Likewise the saying of the Jahmites or whoever says amongst them: 'The heavens and the Earth were created without matter and without time and that they will perish or be annihilated, or that Paradise will also expire.' All of that is in opposition to the texts of the Qur'an, and it is for this reason that the *Salaf* made *takfir* (excommunication) of these (Jahmites).' (quoted in Abu.Iyaad, 2013a)

Naming and denouncing iERA's scholars

In the fourth article of the series, the writer lists the names of scholars who advised iERA as follows: Haitham al-Haddad, Bilal Philips, Abu Abdissalam¹⁰⁰. The Aqidah.com writer also blames Green and Yasir Qadhi for signing the pledge of mutual understanding because, for the author, it shows their lack of commitment to the doctrine of the companions (Abu.Iyaad, 2013b).

¹⁰⁰ Haddad and Philips have since left iERA. Another source that also records this claim is Stand for Peace; however, the page they refer to on iERA's website has been removed and is not accessible from the web archive: http://standforpeace.org.uk/islamic-education-and-research-academy-iera/#_edn29

Aqidah.com returns briefly in 2015

In August and September 2015, Aqidah.com published three new articles after nearly two years without new publications on the website. They are titled:

1. 'Sheikh Ibn al-Uthaymin and Ibn Taymiyya on the Hadiths Relating to the First Creation'
2. 'The Permanent Committee of Scholars on Ibn Taymiyya, Ahl al-Kalam and Tasalsul (Endless Chain of Events)'
3. 'Big Bang Cosmology and the Qur'an: A Response to Muslim Apologists Using Scientific Conjectures to Explain the Qur'an'

4.5.2 Criticism of iERA by non-Muslims

As discussed above, there are numerous websites and videos on the Internet that provide refutations of the various versions of the Cosmological Argument and of Craig's version. But a search for 'Tzortzis cosmological argument' on Google returned just over 9,000 results, and adding the term 'refuted' reduces them to over 2,000. One reason could be that this argument has been addressed various times in the past when used by Christian apologists, and some counter-apologists have only recently been turning their attention to Muslim apologists. The first three results from the above search were posts from Hamza Tzortzis' personal blog HamzaTzortzis.com. The fourth result was titled: 'The (Cosmological) Qur'anic Argument for God,' by Jeremy Styron on his website Our Daily Train. Styron is an American journalist and former Christian who became atheist, and he uses this website to refute religious apologetic

arguments by Christians. In the article, Styron (2015) briefly analyses a short video with Arabic subtitles in which Hamza Tzortzis explains the cosmological argument for God¹⁰¹. Like other critics, Styron comments on the similarities with William Lane Craig's arguments.

After giving the same four possible explanations previously discussed for the existence of the universe, Tzortzis reaches the conclusion that the universe was created by something uncreated as the best explanation. He then concedes that this does not lead to the conclusion that the universe was created by God, but then using the Qur'anic question '*afala ta'qilun?*' – do you not discern or understand? – he goes on to describe the qualities of such a creator. As Styron rightly notes, this is a leap that he does not provide arguments for. Styron is also critical of the conclusion that the natural laws must signify the existence of a Law Giver. He writes: 'Attributing laws to the various attributes we observe in nature is just our way, as humans, to describe our world in a scientific way' (Styron, 2015). Finally, he is critical that Tzortzis uses the principle of Occam's Razor to indirectly argue against the Trinity:

Interestingly and ironically, Tzortzis says this concept is 'irrational because it creates far more questions than it solves,' which would, on the surface, seem like a tip of the hat to Occam's [R]azor, if he hadn't just spent the last five minutes making arguments about God that, themselves, raise more questions than they answer (Styron, 2015).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter traced the evolution of *Kalam* and of the Cosmological Argument from Plato's First Cause, passing through the divine attributes and the endless series, to Craig's modern reincarnation supported with scientific arguments. Besides the accretion of concepts over

¹⁰¹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh8EK7UHYs8&feature=youtu.be>. (Accessed 14 February 2016).

time, this process helps us to observe the evolution of thought and the various motivations of each period and each participant. Plato wanted to imbue state laws with a higher authority, while Philoponus' goal was to prove the universe was created; the *Kalam* theologians were concerned with questions of free will and divine justice, while Ibn Taymiyya stressed the superiority of revelation. It also looked at Craig's treatment of the argument through the works of al-Ghazali and Leibniz, as well as the use of scientific theories to support it. Finally, the chapter gave an overview of how iERA adopted this argument and modified it, and the criticisms it received from both Muslim and atheist sources. The next chapter will discuss the data collected in Chapters Three and Four and analyse how iERA constructed both narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The individual and society are locked in an on-going dialectical relationship. This is how knowledge, meaning, and discourse are produced, adopted, modified, taught, even sacralised, through interaction. Because it is man-made, knowledge can change as new information is revealed. The human story is nothing if not an embodiment of evolving, growing knowledge. But that also brings with it the challenge of re-establishing a system of knowledge or meaning when new developments occur and new generations emerge (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Established faith systems have had to contend with significant advances in knowledge of the cosmos and the human journey such as Heliocentrism in the 16th century and the Theory of Evolution in the 19th century, at times initially resisting then adopting them. Similarly, readers are engaged in a dialectic with the text – any text, and the religious text in particular. The text is a fixed linguistic object with its own rules; however, readers approach the text with their own historical, psychological and ideological presuppositions. And the resulting interpretation is a very personal one (Gadamer 1986, cited in Campanini, 2005).

The previous two chapters explored the themes of the Qur'anic *I'jaz* and the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument and their adaptation by iERA. This chapter will attempt to apply Berger's theory of social constructionism to analyse how iERA developed those narratives and how they in turn impacted on the charity.

5.1 Context

iERA operates in a changing United Kingdom: Britain has an evolving religious landscape where, between 2001 and 2011, self-identification with Christianity has declined (by 12%) and is being relegated to the cultural and private spheres, while religious scepticism and identification with other religions is on the rise. Those with no religion grew to a quarter of the English and Welsh population, while Muslim communities grew from 3% to 4.8% (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Alongside these trends, atheist, secular and humanist organisations have been attempting to organise and have increased their activism: for example, between 1995 and 2009, the Atheist Alliance International held only one annual event, except for two events in 2006. Between 2010 and 2012, however, it organized 4 to 5 events per year, including the World Atheist Convention in Ireland in 2011 which saw the alliance's restructuring – although the number of events dropped back to one annual event after that. The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science was founded in 2006, the same year as Dawkins' best-selling book *The God Delusion* was published, but is more active in the United States than in Dawkins' British homeland. Instead, the British Humanist Association has expanded its reach locally, and has organized conferences since 2009, with its largest attendance of 500 participants in Birmingham in 2016. According to its website, the association has around 40,000 members and supporters, and trains celebrants for more than 800 and an average of 750 humanist funerals and weddings annually, respectively. It also launched the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies in 2009, the year after iERA was established. Atheists' reluctance to organise is likely because they view atheism as a lack of belief in a proposition (God) rather than a belief in something, and

therefore they are not compelled to actively engage with theist arguments, constructed on theist terms, in order to try to disprove them.

These emerging trends are not far behind outside the UK: Arab countries have been engaged in a social struggle between secularism and Islamism. The rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq in 2014, and the growing popularity of Salafi groups and political parties after the Arab uprisings of 2011, has put secularism on the retreat in countries such as Turkey and Egypt. Elsewhere, secular liberal voices have been silenced, such as the imprisonment in Saudi Arabia of the blogger Ra'if Badawi in 2012 over his writings on his website 'Free Saudi Liberals'. Soon after, the Saudi government further criminalised atheism, listing it as a terror threat alongside the Muslim Brotherhood and religious militants. Terrorism was defined in the new Saudi law as 'calling for atheist thought in any form, or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based' (Withnall, 2014). These measures point to a palpable growth in scepticism and weakening of faith. Although official statistical information does not exist, British journalist Brian Whittaker's book *Arabs without God* (2014) examines this trend in the Middle East. Whittaker found that modern atheism in Arab countries was not a result of the debate between science and religion that is raging on both sides of the Atlantic (but more so in the U.S.). Instead, it is closer to the Mu'tazili debates of over 1,000 years ago: Arab and Muslim atheists have become disenchanted with puzzling questions over 'divine fairness' (El-Gizuli, 2014). A review of the book in Muftah.org¹⁰², republished by the *Yemen Times*, downplays Whittaker's enthusiasm that this could be the start of the equivalent of the European Enlightenment. Still, the apparent contradictory worldviews of faith systems and science, which are not new to the Muslim

¹⁰² An English-language website that aims to provide a platform for diverse voices on the Middle East and North Africa beyond the topics covered in the Western media.

nations, have made new waves there. Unofficial translations of *The God Delusion* can be downloaded in Bengali and Arabic, in spite of being banned in Muslim-majority countries. The Arabic translation, undertaken by an Iraqi immigrant to Sweden, was downloaded 10 million times by May 2016, with 3 million downloads in Saudi Arabia alone (El Ghazzali, 2016). The concern over the growing lack of faith prompted this headline in the Saudi Gazette: 'Why are there so many Atheists in the Arab World?' The article's lead is that the number of Arab atheists is rising 'at an alarming rate,' but its author is stumped for explanations (Al-Amoudi, 2016).

Back in the U.S., a small study of around 9,000 participants found a correlation between time spent online and growing atheism in America between 1990 and 2010. While college education was a contributing factor to loss of faith (5%), the most significant statistic was found to be Internet use: an increase of 78% of users spending two hours or more than 7 hours online weekly corresponded with a 25% decline in religious affiliation (Emerging Technology from the arXiv, 2014). Of course, the increase in Internet time does not necessarily have to impact on faith since more and more people, whether they are believers or not, use the Internet and spend more time on it as it increasingly becomes an integral tool, and technology more accessible, rather than a pastime for the privileged few. However, the correlation is worth further investigation. Consider the following comment, which captures sentiments more often than not echoed by faith-leavers from all religious traditions:

I've really changed and been challenged by what I've read on the internet. I've . . . really had my faith rattled by some of the science articles . . . and the associated comments. It seemed that most thought Christians (or anyone who believed in God) was a fool. I remember one comment to the effect that 'one day all our religions will look as stupid as believing in Zeus or Thor does to us today.' . . .

Being a life long believer . . . I started to question . . . was pretty miserable for a while. You could say I lost my faith (Gilson, 2013).

The Internet has a wealth of not only international atheist and humanist websites and videos, but also of scientific websites engaging with the public. Two such popular pages on Facebook are Hashem al-Ghaili's science page¹⁰³ (5.4 million followers) and I F*cking Love Science (25 million followers). While atheist and humanist organisations may struggle in 'the real world' to attract large crowds, their online following is much more 'faithful' and significant on social media. However, despite the popularity of outspoken figures of the so-called New Atheist movement such as Dawkins, Harris and Krauss, the numbers tilt much more heavily towards the less politically outspoken, more science-de-mystifying public figures, as seen in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1.

Science, Atheism Pages/Public Figures	Facebook	Twitter
I F*cking Love Science	25 million	195,000
NASA	16.9 million	18.2 million
Hashem al-Ghaili	5.4 million	390
Bill Nye 'The Science Guy'	4.6 million	3.4 million
Stephen Hawking	3.5 million	--
Neil DeGrasse Tyson	3.46 million	5.4 million
ASAPScience	2.36 million	176,000
Richard Dawkins (Fdn)	1.5 million	1.4 million
Sam Harris	407,000	466,000
Lawrence Krauss	254,000	231,000
British Humanist Association	197,000	63,800
Religious figures		
Muslim:		
Zakir Naik (English)	14 million	128,000
Bilal Philips	5.3 million	309,800

¹⁰³ Al-Ghaili's Facebook posts focus on science, and the page's popularity was boosted by his infographics, such as the regular 'This Week in Science' brief update on scientific discoveries. Al-Ghaili is a Yemeni scientist based in Germany and posts only in English.

Mission Dawah	1.16 million	17,300
Abdurraheem Green	868,750	71,700
Hamza Yusuf	631,000	128,200
Green Lane Masjid	600,340	4,580
Yusuf (Tim) Chambers	296,500	14,600
iERA	141,000	25,100
Hamza Andreas Tzortzis	110,500	52,600
Abu Khadeejah	8,860	17,600
	(unofficial)	
Salafi Publications	1,260	26,000
Christian:		
Ken Ham (Creationist)	257,000	40,000
William Lane Craig (Baptist)	16,200	--

Table 5.1: Social media following, in decreasing order of Facebook followers and with rounded figures (25 August 2016).

Along with atheist trends online, another emerging trend is several new groups of former Muslims networking online in order to bring their voices to the public. The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain was founded in 2007 by British-Iranian Maryam Namazie.

Table 5.2.

Ex-Muslim networks	Facebook	Twitter
Ex-Muslims of North America	18,390	7,270
Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (Forum)	16,150	26,500

Table 5.2: Social media following of two British and American Ex-Muslim groups.

Secular and atheist pages and groups have also appeared in the Middle East following the Arab uprisings of 2011, and have a growing following, particularly in Egypt. However, conservative religious figures remain more popular, such as Al-Arefe (see Table 5.3 below).

Table 5.3.

Arabic Pages/ Public Figures	Facebook	Twitter
Religious figures:		
Amr Khaled	23 million	7.27 million
Muhammad al-Arefe	22.3 million	15.6 million
Zaghloul al-Naggar	356,360	7,950
Science:		
Syrian Researchers	2 million	70,500
Scientific Researchers	324,190	110
Nidhal Guessoum	20,950	36,100
Muslim Researchers	214,480	3,100
Atheist, Secular or Humanist*:		
Defects and Traditions¹⁰⁴ (<i>'Ahat wa Taqalid</i>)	2.3 million	--
I Adore Information (<i>Ana A'shaq al-Ma'lumat</i>)	1 million	--
Zeitgeist Arabic	795,790	--
Yes to the Intellectual Revolution¹⁰⁵	528,000	--
Did you know? (<i>Dakhlak Bta'rif?</i>) - Beirut	475,360	630
Raseef22.org	354,280	37,700
The Voice of Reason (NGO)	184,765	--
Kacem El Ghazzali (Engl.)	55,000	4,140
Ra'if Badawi	43,990	52,400

Table 5.3: Social media following of Arabic atheist or secular pages (25 August 2016). *It is not always explicit whether pages or figures are atheist because they do not declare themselves as such.

The Arab atheist trend, even if small, has been accompanied by wider and more prominent Salafi activism, whose voice became louder after the Arab uprisings. This is a continuation of Salafism's public coming out, so to speak, when it emerged on the international stage in the 1990s. In Syria and Iraq, Salafi militancy has been politically locked in a war with the older regimes. In Egypt, following being democratically elected, the government of the Muslim

¹⁰⁴ The title of this Egyptian magazine is a play on the Arabic phrase: *'Adat wa Taqalid* (Customs and Traditions).

¹⁰⁵ Title in Arabic: Na'am lil-Thawrah al-Fikriyyah.

Brotherhood was overthrown by a military coup, and the struggle between Islamist and secular groups continues (Shehata, 2010). Secularist parties often voice their suspicions and concerns of the ruling Islamist party in Turkey (Çandar, 2016).

5.2 iERA doesn't publicly use sectarian labels

It is unclear how Green, Tzortzis and other members of iERA self-identify, as they avoid using the labels Salafi or Wahhabi on their social media pages. However, scholars associated with iERA in the past have been at the centre of controversies: Bilal Philips, Haitham al-Haddad, and Zakir Naik. Tzortzis is a fan of Wahhabi supporter Jaafar Idris as seen in Chapter Three, and iERA appears to have links to the Saudi-based Muslim World League as seen in Chapter Two. Briefly in 2015, iERA proposed that the 'only' solution to radicalisation is 'Orthodox Islam', without elaborating in great detail on what orthodoxy signifies beyond adherence to the core texts and classical scholarship. As seen above, Tzortzis adopts Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328 CE) position that there does not exist a conflict between reason and revelation, as long as revelation is upheld when reason contradicts it. He also promotes the three forms of *tawhid* delineated by Ibn Taymiyya and associated with Salafis.

There could be several reasons why iERA doesn't use the label Salafi. It can be inferred from its work that iERA aims to appeal to a wide audience. Publicly they don't show any associations with Naik, al-Arefe and al-Haddad – although they have shared platforms with al-Haddad. In 2015 they also announced a collaboration with Bilal Philip's online college to provide a *da'wah* diploma course. However, if iERA is trying to present itself as inclusive and

tolerant of different views and beliefs, it raises the question as to why they disregarded al-Ghazali's arguments, except to briefly quote him on love, and favour Ibn Taymiyya's¹⁰⁶.

5.3 iERA aims to counter atheist narratives

Two evaluations of iERA's *da'wah* approach are important to highlight from positive feedback on their annual GORAP training sessions in Madinah (see Chapter Two).

First, trainees praised the *da'wah* approach for being practical, in contrast to the theoretical methodology of the university, and second, that it was tailored specifically towards Christians and atheists. This evaluation is in contrast to the more vague guidelines proposed by Bin Baz as seen in Chapter One and warrants further research to explore the appeal of GORAP.

Green recounts briefly in the first GORAP training video why he chose this approach as was seen in Chapter Two (iERA, 2012f). In it, he asserts that 'there is a narrative out there amongst the public – an atheist narrative – that has to be countered, and the GORAP makes an attempt to counter some of that narrative as well' (iERA, 2012f). In fact, the importance of countering atheist narratives in iERA's mission can be seen in various instances. In his talk (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013), Tzortzis is frequently critical of atheists. Interestingly, he blames atheism on psychology rather than the influence of philosophy or science, because

¹⁰⁶ A development in this area is worth noting: on 15 September 2016, Tzortzis 'highly' recommended on Instagram al-Ghazali's book *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, translated by Eric Ormsby. A user commented on this post: 'Nice to see you embrace the classical Islamic scholars bro!', to which Tzortzis responded: 'The more I read and study Al-Ghazali, the more my admiration and love for him increases' (Tzortzis, 2016a). Furthermore, an example of the dialectic relationship between iERA and its audience is a commenter on Facebook who asked Tzortzis: 'hazrat are you sharing these stuff under the supervision of ulema or sharing by yourself' (Tzortzis, 2016c, edited for spelling mistakes).

GORAP makes use of both. He tells the audience that Muslims must counter 'neo-atheists' like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens, and his training session is on how to respond to 'atheist contentions' with the 'strong' case that Islam makes for the existence of a deity, as well as how to respond to atheist questions put to Muslims. He repeats Ibn Taymiyya's adage that there doesn't exist a contradiction between reason and revelation.

Tzortzis also points out that Bertrand Russell was wrong in his claim that the universe is eternal. In fact, Tzortzis often refers to the atheist thinker. In his ill-fated document on embryology, Tzortzis selects Russell's definition of science to show that science and the Qur'an are compatible: 'the attempt to discover, by means of observation and reasoning based upon it... particular facts about the world, and the laws connecting facts with one another' (cited in Tzortzis, 2011, p. 8). Tzortzis then ambiguously concludes: '[It] seems that Russell's definition applied to the Qur'an offers an array of verses pointing to scientific study' (p.8). One of the verses that he then proceeds to use to illustrate this point is the following truncated verse from M. Abdel Haleem's translation:

And who created all things and made them to an exact measure. (Qur'an 25:2)

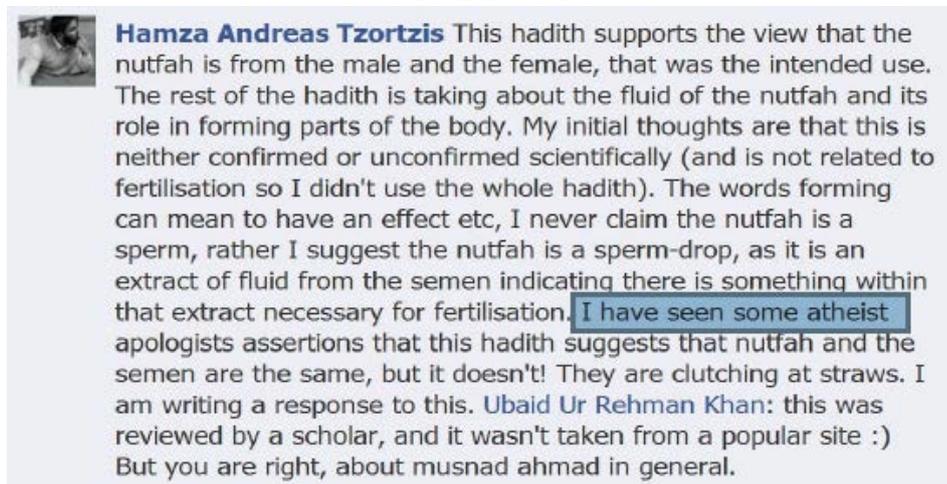
The complete verse as translated by Saheeh International is as follows:

He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the Earth and who has not taken a son and has not had a partner in dominion and has created each thing and determined it with [precise] determination. (Qur'an 25:2)

More recently, in a press release on a *da'wah* training session that Tzortzis delivered in Madinah, he remarks: 'These *du'at* (proselytisers) will be an intellectual force against atheism

and all other 'isms' that attempt to challenge the Deen of Allah' (iERA, 2015d). Therefore, iERA has often made it clear that its aim is to challenge atheist arguments. Furthermore, Tzortzis has also attempted to undermine atheist critics on social media. In responding to 'Shorts' (2012a) accusation of plagiarising Craig, Tzortzis replied: 'Atheists have now lost the argument & [sic] are now attacking personalities'. In one of his posts, Tzortzis lashes out at atheists, as seen in Screenshot 5.1 below.

Screenshot 5.1.



Source: CaptainDisguise et al., no date.

Tzortzis has also had similar online feuds with users The Rationalizer and Essence of Thought, who have a small following online compared to iERA. However, iERA hasn't limited its anti-atheist activism to online exchanges alone. Tzortzis cornered Dawkins and Myers at the 2011 Atheist Convention in an attempt to directly 'engage' with them, which resulted in an embarrassing discussion on embryology in the Qur'an, as was shown in Chapter Three. He has debated various atheists as well, including theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss and Cambridge philosopher Dr. Arif Ahmad.

Therefore, this raises the question, if iERA's main objective is to attract converts to Islam, why does it seek to counter atheist narratives that 'attempt to challenge' the religion, as quoted above? It points to an important aspect of its *da'wah* training, which is to bring Muslims who have doubts back into the religion, to give them certainty and a sense of purpose through *da'wah* in order to deepen their commitment. This can be seen in Tzortzis' curious passing explanations about *tawhid* (see for example Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). One would assume that an audience of Muslims whom he is giving *da'wah* training to would be familiar with the concept of *tawhid* in Islam. In various instances, iERA's stance is that science does not contradict the Qur'an, Islam is not opposed to science, and that belief in Islam can be achieved through rational thinking because the Qur'an encourages believers to reflect. Consequently, these views help to explain why iERA has adopted the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument (reasoning) and the scientific miracles (using science to confirm the Qur'an's divinity).

To examine how iERA constructed the two narratives to achieve their goals, a constructionist approach was employed in this thesis. First, as constructs are historically contingent, the historical development of the *Kalam* and *I'jaz* narratives were surveyed briefly, then their (re)construction by iERA was explored. The method for each narrative varied slightly due to iERA's different approaches to them. In the case of the embryo verses, iERA undertook a scientific exegesis to try to demonstrate that the Qur'an contains revelations. In order to trace how Tzortzis constructed the narrative, the four revisions of the document he produced were analysed. This then raised questions over how Tzortzis interpreted the key terms in the verses, and it was useful to compare his work to classical exegetes as well as Bucaille's. And it helped show how, while his initial definitions tended to be closer to the classical meanings, he

stretched the concepts to include scientific information. Along with his critics' comments, a picture emerged of the dialectic between Tzortzis and the audience, which shaped this narrative between 2011 and 2012 and led to its subsequent retraction. Through inter-textuality – examining other works by iERA – the 2014 GORAP video revealed that while iERA was no longer promoting the scientific miracles narrative, it had been kept in the video but without describing it as miraculous. The *Kalam* Argument required a different approach, as it was not based on Qur'anic exegesis. While Tzortzis attempted to inject verses into this narrative, he largely adopted Craig's approach perhaps before realising that it was from the controversial *Kalam* tradition. Again here it was possible to re-trace some of the dialectic between Tzortzis and the audience that impacted on the argument over time. However, unlike the embryo debacle, iERA did not abandon this narrative. Instead, Tzortzis adjusted it by adding Ibn Taymiyya's argument and some Qur'anic verses to it. For this narrative, inter-textuality played an important role in following the argument's development in a timeframe of two years to 2014. These processes are explained in greater depth next.

5.4 iERA's construction of the scientific miracles narrative

To unpack iERA's narrative on embryology in the Qur'an, it is useful to compare and contrast its work on the subject with classical exegetes as well as to Bucaille's analysis. This approach allows us to examine the evolution of the discourse from earlier commentaries to modern *da'wah*, where the verse has been portrayed to contain scientific facts, how Tzortzis constructed it and whether he followed the tradition of the classical exegetes or broke from it. This analysis will examine the exegeses related to four key words in the verse: *sulalah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah* and *mudghah*. Three commonly used English translations of the Qur'an are

used for comparative purposes: Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Saheeh International. The authoritative exegeses of al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) and al-Jalalayn (1459 and 1505 CE) are also surveyed, with highlights of additional comments from the works of al-Zamakhshari (d. 1143 CE), al-Baidawi (d. 1260 CE) and al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE). The classical commentaries are contrasted with the scientific interpretations of Bucaille (d. 1998 CE) and Tzortzis. To avoid repetition, because often the exegeses rely on *taqlid* and are repetitive, similar interpretations are combined and any differences between them is highlighted. The Lexicon of Ibn Manthour (d. 1311 CE), *Lisan al-Arab*, is also used as a linguistic reference, with the citation of scanned copies of specific volumes and an online source for others. iERA's methodology for this endeavour is to use the Qur'an, the prophetic traditions, the companions' narrations and Arabic linguistic references (Tzortzis, 2011). One of the sources that informs its methodology is the book *An Approach to the Qur'anic Sciences* (2000) which can be downloaded from the Internet.

The following are three translations of the verses in question:

I. Saheeh International (2013)

And certainly did We create man from an *extract (sulalah) of clay*,

Then (*Thumma*) We placed him as a *sperm-drop (nutfah)* in a firm lodging,

Then We made the sperm-drop into a *clinging clot ('alaqah)*, and We made the clot into a *lump [of flesh] (mudghah)*, and We made [from] the lump, bones, and (*fa*) We covered (*kasawna*) the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.

Then indeed, after that you are to die. (Qur'an 23:12-15, my italics)

II. Yusuf Ali (d. 1953)

Man We did create from a *quintessence (sulalah)* (of clay);

Then We placed him as (*a drop of sperm (nutfah)*) in a place of rest, firmly fixed.

Then We made the sperm into a clot of *congealed blood ('alaqah)*, then of that clot We made a (*foetus*) *lump (mudghah)*, then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the best to create!

After that, at length ye will die.

III. Marmaduke Pickthall (d. 1936)

Verily We created man from a *product of wet Earth (sulalah)*;

Then placed him as a *drop (of seed) (nutfah)* in a safe lodging.

Then fashioned We the drop a *clot ('alaqah)*, then fashioned We the clot a little lump (*mudghah*), then fashioned We the little lump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators!

Then lo! after that ye surely die.

5.4.1 Extract of clay (sulalah)

Saheeh International

And certainly did We create man (*al-insana*) from an *extract of clay (sulalatin min tin)*.

Yusuf Ali

Man We did create from a *quintessence* (of clay).

Pickthall

Verily We created man from a *product of wet Earth*.

Classical commentaries on *sulalah*

The three commentaries interpret the verse as describing the creation of Adam ('man') out of clay in the monotheistic tradition; however, al-Zamakhshari does not specify what is meant by it. Both Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari show the consensus of various exegetes on this interpretation. Al-Tabari also describes it as Adam's creation from dirt taken from the surface (*adeem*¹⁰⁷) of the Earth. *Lisan al-Arab* defines *sulalah* as the gentle extraction of something from another, such as pulling a hair out of dough or unsheathing a sword (Ibn Manthour, vol. 11, pp. 338-9). Some sources in this lexicon also emphasise that it's an extract of water, because Adam was made of clay (*tin*), and in verse 32:8 humans are made from an extract of despised water (*ma'in mahin*)¹⁰⁸. *Lisan al-Arab* further explains that the derivative word *salil* is the path of water in a valley.

The synonym *khulasah* first appears in the definition of *sulalah* in the exegesis of al-Zamakhshari, then al-Baidawi and al-Jalalayn. Interestingly, the word *khulasah* is not mentioned in either Ibn Kathir's nor al-Tabari's commentaries. Instead, both refer to only one tradition first narrated by Ibn 'Abbas that *sulalatin min tin* signifies 'the purity of water' (*safwat al-ma'*). Therefore, classical explanations of *sulalah* are centred on extraction, purity and water. The modern Lane's Lexicon, which Tzortzis uses, explains *khulasah* as what

¹⁰⁷ Definition from *Lisan al-Arab*. The term *adeem al-'ard* was also used in the same meaning, the surface of the Earth that we walk on, in the poem '*Dajat al-Mawt Raqda*' by the renowned Arab poet Abu al-Alaa al-Maari (d. 1057 CE).

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, the three English translations use the terms 'liquid' or 'fluid' instead of 'water' in this verse.

remains clear after something (e.g. butter) is cooked. Its secondary meaning, 'what is clear or pure', is derived from this Qur'anic verse (Lane, 1968)¹⁰⁹.

Maurice Bucaille on *sulalah*

Bucaille does not include this verse in his scientific discussion. However, he does interpret the word *sulalatin* as it appears in verse 32:8. Without providing a source for his definition, Bucaille interprets *sulalah* as 'something which is extracted, the issue of something else, the best part of a thing' (p. 216). He thus translates it as 'quintessence', as did Yusuf Ali:

Yusuf Ali

And made his progeny from a *quintessence* of the nature of a fluid despised
(*main mahin*).

Bucaille

(God) made his progeny from the *quintessence* (*sulalatin*) of a despised liquid.

Bucaille interprets the verse with the following scientific explanation:

In normal conditions, only one single cell among several tens of millions produced by a man will actually penetrate the ovule; a large number of them are left behind and never complete the journey which leads from the vagina to the ovule, passing through the uterus and Fallopian tubes. It is therefore an infinitesimally small part of the extract from a liquid whose composition is highly complex which actually fulfils its function.

In consequence, it is difficult not to be struck by the agreement between the text of the Qur'an and the scientific knowledge we possess today of these phenomena (p. 216).

¹⁰⁹ Lane provides several meanings for *khulasah* including 'juice' (Lane, p. 786). It translates *sulalah* as an extract, but also interprets it in verse 23:12 as: 'from a pure, or choice, or most excellent, sort of Earth or clay' (Lane, p. 1397).

It's curious why Bucaille translated the word as 'quintessence' but interpreted sperm as a small part of an extract. Even though an extract of clay can be the purest form it, extracting can also mean just the action, such as pulling a hair out of dough. Bucaille thus departs from the classical exegeses on *sulalah* as purity and water to focus on the extraction, in order to then equate it to the single successful sperm out of many. Furthermore, even linguistically Bucaille's interpretation fails, because the sperm that fertilises the egg is not 'extracted' as such, but rather, penetrates the egg.

Hamza Tzortzis on *sulalah*

Tzortzis uses the following translation by M. Abdel Haleem (2005):

We created man from an *essence (sulalatin)* of clay (The Qur'an 23:12-4).

Tzortzis acknowledges that classical exegetes view this description as the creation of Adam. However, he contends that '[s]ignificantly, other exegetes suggest these words refer to the essential elements of the human body, which consist of various chemical components found in clay. Both meanings are intelligible and therefore either can be adopted' (Tzortzis, 2011, p. 11). Tzortzis does not name or reference who the other exegetes are, but then goes on to use this second opinion for his scientific explanation, which he attributes to the Deobandi exegete Shafi' Usmani (d. 1976). Tzortzis writes:

By applying a scientific analysis to this verse it becomes clear that this stage appertains to certain essential chemical components. It is significant that these chemical components *are found in clay*. They include: Oxygen, Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Calcium, Phosphorus, Potassium, Sulfur, Chlorine, Sodium,

Magnesium and Silicon; all of which are required for human functioning and development.

This is explained by the jurist and exegete Shafi' Usmani in his eight volume exegesis of the Qur'an. He writes:

'The words *sulaalah* [sic] means "extract" and *tin* means "wet Earth" or "clay" and the verse means that man was created from some *special elements* extracted from Earth.' (Tzortzis, 2011, p. 11, my italics)

Usmani thus added 'special elements' to the interpretation of *sulalah*. Tzortzis then takes it a step further and specifies the 'special elements' as being chemical elements, by consulting *The Chemistry of Life: The Human Body* (Schirber, 2009). Responding to critics that humans could not have been made of clay due to the difference in chemical compositions between the two, Tzortzis (p. 12) retorts that the Qur'an describes creation from an extract of clay rather than clay itself. In the above quote he is careful to write that the human body consists of various chemical components 'found in clay', to argue that the elements of the human body are only an extract of the elements of clay, without specifying which ones are in the human body.

The critical document *Much Ado* (CaptainDisguise et al., no date) rightly refutes Tzortzis as follows. Besides not referring to any other exegetes, Tzortzis fails to mention that Usmani is a 20th century scholar who, therefore, was likely providing a modern and scientific reinterpretation of the verse¹¹⁰. The document also disputes Tzortzis on the emphasis on the extract of clay instead of clay; *Much Ado*, significantly, highlights other Qur'anic verses which describe the creation of Adam from 'clay' instead of 'an extract of clay'. They are: 7:12;

¹¹⁰ An example of a *hadith* translation with modern reinterpretation: <http://sunnah.com/muslim/3/32>: 'the resemblance comes from *the one whose genes* [whichever] prevail or dominate' (my italics). The English translation of Sahih Muslim Book 3 Hadith 608 uses the term 'genes', but the word or its equivalent do not appear in the Arabic original. Instead, the term used in Arabic is 'whichever'.

15:26, 28, 33; 17:61; 32:7; 38:71, 76; and 55:14 (p. 10). The document also refutes Tzortzis' claim that the human body is made of elements which are also found in clay. Tzortzis does not describe the chemical composition of clay to support his argument, which is 'hydrated silicates of aluminium mixed with various impurities', that is, aluminium, silicon, oxygen and hydrogen (*The Chambers Dictionary of Science and Technology*, quoted in CaptainDisguise et al., p. 12). Therefore, if humans were created from clay, or even an extract of clay, it would be expected that aluminium would be found in higher concentrations in the human body, instead of being toxic to it (CaptainDisguise et al., p. 12). Tzortzis therefore departs from the classical exegeses, basing his analysis only on the term 'extract' to describe the common chemical elements between the human body, clay, and many other physical and living things: water.

5.4.2 Sperm-drop (*Nutfah*) in a firm lodging

Saheeh International

Then We placed him as a sperm-drop (*nutfah*) in a firm lodging.

Yusuf Ali

Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed¹¹¹.

Pickthall

Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging.

Classical commentaries on *nutfah*

In Al-Tabari, this verse refers to the man's *nutfah* that lodges in the woman's womb (*rahm*) without further explaining the meaning of *nutfah*. Ibn Kathir defines *nutfah* as the man's 'water poured out' (*ma' dafiq*). *Lisan al-Arab* defines *nutfah* as a small amount of liquid or a

¹¹¹ It is noteworthy here that Yusuf Ali, and Saheeh International later, translated *nutfah* as 'sperm'.

small quantity of water which remains in a bucket¹¹², which is why English translations use the word 'drop'. Here again the association with water can be seen, as *Lisan al-Arab* also quotes a *hadith* in which *nutfah* signifies a sea (in a reference to a place between two seas). Al-Baidawi does not explain its meaning but describes its colour as white. And in al-Jalalayn, *nutfah* is given the synonym *maniy*¹¹³ (ejaculate or semen). It is therefore interesting that in modern times the word *nutfah* is translated as 'sperm' with its dual meaning as the fluid and as the microscopic and scientific sperm cell, for example in the translations of Saheeh International and Ali. Pickthall, on the other hand, refrains from using 'sperm' and instead uses only 'drop' or adds 'seed' for clarification, which is the Greek meaning of sperm.

There is a consensus among the exegetes on the second part of the verse that describes the firm lodging as being the woman's womb. Therefore, the interpretation of the verse is that of a drop placed in the womb. This is significant because the Qur'anic description does not refer to a woman's egg but as the woman providing a safe and fixed place for the drop to attach itself to.

Bucaille on *nutfah*

Bucaille (p. 213) emphasizes the small amount of sperm needed for fertilization, and therefore he translates *nutfah* in 16:4 as a 'small quantity of sperm' because he cross-references it with verse 75:37 as follows (my italics):

¹¹² See <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?term=النطفة> (Accessed: 1 April 2015).

¹¹³ Appears in the Qur'an in 75:37.

Saheeh International

He created man from a *sperm-drop (nutfah)*; then at once, he is a clear adversary. (Qur'an 16:4)

Bucaille

(God) fashioned man from a *small quantity of sperm*. (Qur'an 16:4)

Saheeh International

Does man think that he will be left neglected?

Had he not been a *sperm (nutfah) from semen (min maniy)* emitted? (Qur'an 75:36-7)

Bucaille

Was (man) not a *small quantity of sperm* which has been poured out? (Qur'an 75:37)

Bucaille goes on to use the definition in *Lisan al-Arab* as mentioned above: 'It must be stated that this word [*nutfah*] comes from a verb signifying 'to dribble, to trickle', it is used to describe what remains at the bottom of a bucket that has been emptied out. It therefore indicates a very small quantity of liquid, here it is sperm because the word is associated in another verse [75:37] with the word sperm' (p. 214).

Tzortzis on *nutfah*

The Qur'an by M. Abdel Haleem that Tzortzis uses translates *nutfah* as a 'drop of fluid'.

Referring to Hans Wehr's Dictionary of Modern Arabic, Tzortzis highlights four meanings of the word *nutfah*: a dribble, a trickle, a drop and semen (Tzortzis, 2011, p. 12). But what interests him is that *nutfah* is the small quantity left in a bucket, and he interprets that as 'a singular entity which is a part of a bigger group of its kind' (p. 12). He also argues, based on *Lisan al-Arab* and a prophetic *hadith* in Ibn Hanbal's collection, that *nutfah* can refer to the male sperm or female egg. But his choice of this particular *hadith* is ironic, and Tzortzis doesn't quote it. It reports that a Jewish man passed by Muhammad, and Quraish told him that Muhammad was claiming to be a prophet. The Jewish man said he'd like to ask him a

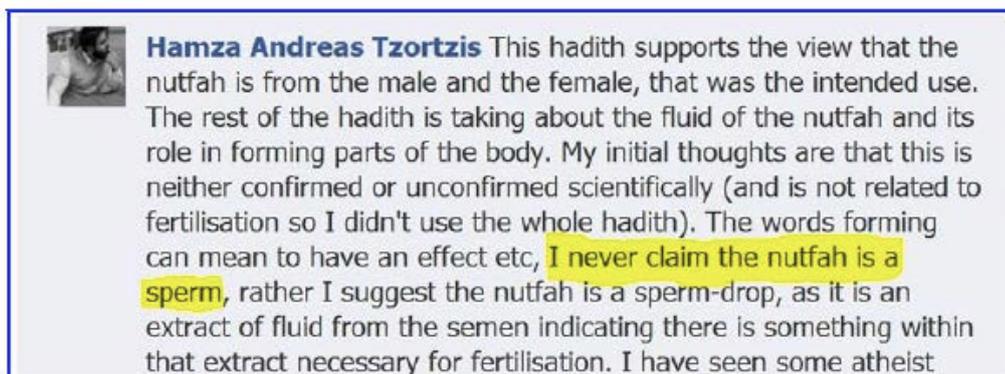
question that only a prophet would be able to answer. So he asked Muhammad what humans are created from. Muhammad answered that people are made of a thick male *nutfah* that forms the bones and nerves and a thin female *nutfah* that forms the flesh and blood. The Jewish man then stood up and said: 'This is what they said before him' (Ibn Hanbal, Hadith 4206).

Based on another verse, verse 76:2, which mentions creation from 'a drop of mingled fluids (*amshaj*)', Tzortzis also concludes that the *nutfah* refers to the fertilisation stage, where components from the man and the woman 'mingle' and form the zygote. He then quotes from an introductory embryology textbook on the formation of the zygote. Moreover, Tzortzis refutes the accusation that the Qur'anic description plagiarizes Aristotle's and Galen's descriptions of human development. He negates the first because Aristotle thought that fertilization took place between the male sperm and a substance in the female menstrual fluid, whereas the Qur'anic description does not describe the latter. Critics of this description usually point to the fact that the verse describes reproduction to be the sperm attaching itself to the female womb and without any mention of the egg. Tzortzis thus defensively stresses that Ibn al-Qayyim refers to several *hadiths* to show that reproduction does not take place with only the semen. On the other hand, Tzortzis acknowledges the similarities between the Qur'anic text and Galen's *De Semene* but rejects that they amount to plagiarism (p. 16). He also refers to a later section in the document titled 'Was al-Harith bin Kalada the Source of the Prophet's Medical Knowledge?' In it he refutes the allegation that the physician bin Kalada may have informed Muhammad on human reproduction. Citing Ibn Khaldun, Tzortzis also claims that Galen's embryo description was 'not popularised' in Arabia at the time. Further

research into Jundishapur would contribute to understanding the early Islamic context of the Qur'an.

Therefore, Tzortzis expands the meaning of *nutfah* to include all at once the sperm and the egg, as well as fertilisation and the formation of the zygote. Moreover, CaptainDisguise et al. (p. 15) notes that Tzortzis mis-identifies the ovum at this stage as the oocyte. Significantly, in the revised version 2.1b of the document, Tzortzis omitted the Hanbali *hadith* and replaced it with another from *Sahih Muslim* on the mixing of the male and female substances (Tzortzis, 2012b, p. 15). He also deleted the statement that the *nutfah* can be a sperm. He explained it on Facebook as follows, screen-grabbed by CaptainDisguise et al. (p.15):

Screenshot 5.2.



Source: CaptainDisguise et al., no date.

Tzortzis then attacks atheist rebuttals that *nutfah* means 'semen' and claims that they are 'clutching at straws' (CaptainDisguise et al., no date, p. 121), whereas the classical commentaries did, in fact, understand the word to mean 'semen', as seen above. The full exchange between Tzortzis and Martin Taverille, the co-author of *Much Ado*, is worth a read in the document's Appendix. According to CaptainDisguise et al. (p. 123), criticism also came

from Muslims telling Tzortzis 'that the information in [the] hadith is wrong. Finally, Hamza rejected that hadith and stated that it was “weak”.'

5.4.3 Clinging clot ('*alaqah*)

Saheeh International

Then We made the sperm-drop (*nutfah*) into a *clinging clot* ('*alaqah*).

Yusuf Ali

Then We made the sperm into a *clot of congealed blood*.

Pickthall

Then fashioned We the drop a *clot*.

It is noteworthy how the translation of '*alaqah*' developed from Pickthall to Sahih: from 'a clot', to 'a clot of congealed blood', to 'a clinging clot'.

Classical commentaries on '*alaqah*'

Lisan al-Arab defines '*alaqah*' as blood in general, a small quantity of thick congealed blood, or something that is blood red¹¹⁴. It is also the word used to describe small black or red worms that live in water, or leeches used in the traditional *hijamah* practice of the time that consists of leeches sucking blood out of cuts in the skin. Verbs related to the same root mean 'to hang (something)' (Ibn Manthour, 1290).

The earliest description of '*alaqah*' as 'blood' is attributed by Ibn Kathir to one of the companions, 'Ikrimah bin abi Jahl (d. 636 CE), who is also among the Hadith narrators. Al-Tabari explains that it is a 'piece of blood' (*qut'ah min al-dam*), while in al-Qurtubi it is

¹¹⁴ See <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?term=علق> (Accessed: 15 April 2015).

'congealed or coagulated blood' (*al-dam al-jamed*). Both al-Qurtubi and al-Baidawi describe it as being red, in relation to blood.

Bucaille on 'alaqah

Bucaille does not portray the embryo at this stage as a leech per se, as Tzortzis does below, but his description is not too far off:

The implantation of the [fertilised] egg in the uterus (womb) is the result of the development of villosities, veritable elongations of the egg, which, like roots in the soil, draw nourishment from the thickness of the uterus necessary to the egg's growth. These formations make the egg literally cling to the uterus. This is a discovery of modern times (p. 217).

Bucaille contradicts the classical exegeses discussed above and goes on to dispute classical explanations of the Arabic word *'alaqah* as being a 'blood clot' (p. 217) and blames the scientific ignorance of ancient interpreters for this error (p. 129). He cautions that its interpretation as a 'blood clot' is 'a mistake against which one should guard: man has never passed through the stage of being a "blood clot"' (p.217). The original meaning of *'alaqah*, Bucaille stresses, is 'something which clings'.

Tzortzis on 'alaqah

Tzortzis argues that the various meanings of the term *'alaqah* refer to several stages of embryo development from Day 15 to Day 24, where the embryo evolves from a hanging stage to the form of a leech. He draws the similarity here between the leech clinging to its host and sucking nutrients from its blood, and the embryo attached to the mother by a connecting stalk

through which it receives its nutrition. He illustrates his argument with illustrations of embryo development and cites embryologist Keith L. Moore as well as Barry Mitchell and Ram Sharma as his sources.

Tzortzis rejects the similarity with Galen's description 'when it [the clot] has been filled with blood', arguing that the ancients did not understand '*alaqah* to be blood but used the description because blood clings (Tzortzis, 2011, p. 25). This appears to be Tzortzis' own explanation as he does not reference this argument, and as was seen above, the classical interpretation referred to '*alaqah* primarily as blood or its red colour. Tzortzis also responds to the criticism that he misrepresented an embryo since the embryo with its connected yolk sac does not resemble the form of a leech (p. 26).

In the *da'wah* training video produced later, in 2014, Tzortzis' explanation for the word '*alaqah* is noticeably different (see the excerpt in Appendix B). He begins it in a similar way:

Take the word '*alaqah*. The word '*alaqah* can be found in *Surah Mu'minun*, chapter 23 around verse 14. And this word has 5 classical meanings in academic meanings:

- Number 1: blood in the general sense.
- Number 2: blood clot.
- Number 3: clay that sticks to the hand.
- Number 4: a leech or a worm.
- Or Number 5: something that clings.

However, he acknowledges that the understanding of the word at the time was indeed as 'a blood clot' and, this time, does not deny the similarities with Galen:

Now interestingly, when Allah talks about '*alaqah* – which refers to the development of the human being, the embryo – it refers to the development of

the human being, and for a seventh-century Arab, *they would take the meaning that it's a blood clot*, because when you look at dissections and abortions, it looks like, bloody, right? *This was in line with Greek physicians, like Galen*¹¹⁵, who wrote the book *De Semene*, and he said in Greek: *sarco [ithis in] aimados*, which means there's a blood-filled fleshy thing. So maybe Allah is addressing the mentality of the time, because yes, you do look like a blood clot, and wow, from this Allah formed me, so he deserves to be worshipped. That's the point of these verses.

He still holds onto the leechy appearance and behaviour of the embryo but is more restrained in describing it as a scientific revelation:

So it's addressing different times and places, but if we fast-forward to the fifteenth century when... we invented the microscope, we are now allowed... to see the embryo around Day 20 to 30. Using the microscope, we see it looks like a leech. Not only does it look like a leech, but even the internal structure of a leech looks like the embryo at the same period. Isn't that fascinating? So it addresses different times and places to make us believe that, look, look who you were and look what you were and look what you are now, so God deserves to be worshipped. But what's very interesting is this: *It might not even have a scientific or 'natural' meaning*; it might have a spiritual meaning. God is probably telling us, maybe, from a *tadabur* point of view, from a reflective point of view: Hey, you're a leech. What does a leech do? It's a parasite. It drains the resources of its host. And we were just like that in our mother's womb. We drained her resources. (...)

You know what's very interesting? Professor Lord Winston, from Imperial College University in London, he says the following words: that the leech and the embryo act in the same parasitic way. [Reaction of listeners: 'Subhan Allah.'] Isn't that amazing? (iERA, 2014b).

The change in narrative can also be attributed, at least in part, to the document *Much Ado* and the online challenges to Tzortzis, since *Much Ado* lists 24 scholars from classical exegetes to

¹¹⁵ This is an interesting choice of comparison for Tzortzis to make. A Google search for Galen turned up a page on embryology in the Qur'an from the website Answering Islam, which claims that the Qur'anic description of the development of the embryo plagiarises Galen's earlier description (<http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Science/embryo.html>). Tzortzis was aware of this claim and published an essay on his blog in February 2011 refuting it. It is titled 'Did the Prophet Muhammed plagiarise ancient Greek embryology?' and can be accessed at: <http://www.hamzatzortzis.com/essays-articles/prophetic-studies/did-the-prophet-muhammad-plagiarise-hellenic-embryology/> (Accessed: 18 February 2015). The essay is also appended to the second revision of his document on embryology (Tzortzis, 2012b).

more modern ones interpreting '*alaqah* as blood or blood clot (p. 63). Significantly, Tzortzis not only does an about-turn on this but also adds a section to the revised version of the document (2012a) titled 'Blood Clot' in which he argues that before the development of the cardiovascular system, the embryo lacks blood circulation and thus resembles a blood clot.

5.4.4 A lump of flesh (*mudghah*)

Saheeh International
and We made the clot into a *lump (of flesh) (mudghah)*.

Yusuf Ali
...then of that clot We made a (*foetus*) *lump*.

Pickthall
... then fashioned We the clot a little *lump*.

Classical commentaries on *mudghah*

Lisan al-Arab (1290) defines *mudghah* as a 'piece of meat' that is chewed or a bite-size piece.

This definition is adopted by the exegetes without further interpretation.

Bucaille on *mudghah*

Bucaille interprets the word *mudghah* as a 'chewed lump of flesh', and he stresses the importance of this distinction from the word *lahm*, the Arabic word for meat, which he translates as 'intact flesh' (p. 218). Then, the bones develop in this mass, are covered in muscle, and, vaguely, he says 'the word *lahm* applies to them' (p. 218). He appears to imply that 'intact flesh' consists of muscles and bones.

Tzortzis on *mudghah*

Tzortzis adopts the explanation of *mudghah* offered by Zaghloul al-Naggar (no date) on his website in English (Tzortzis, 2011, p. 26) as follows:

The Arabic word [*mudghah*] and its derivatives provide a great deal of detail about that specific stage of development. ... Additionally, the word [*mudghah*] also means what has been chewed, refers to something that teeth have chewed and left visible marks on; marks that change in the process of chewing due to the repetitive act.

Tzortzis argues that the *mudghah* stage refers to the embryo in its fourth week when it develops somites, 'which resemble tooth-marks' (p. 27). Furthermore, he responds to critics of this argument by clarifying that a *mudghah* does not have to be mastification but 'meat chewed once' (p. 28). In the revised version of the document (2012a), among a few other changes, Tzortzis removes the description of somites as resembling 'tooth-marks' but keeps the next statement, that the embryo at this stage appears like something 'to be chewed' and 'something that teeth have chewed and left visible marks on' (p. 29).

In the rest of the document, Tzortzis goes on to discuss the formation bones and flesh (muscles) after the *mudghah* stage in the verse. At one point, his argument comes close to Bucaille's justification of the use of flesh as *lahm* to include muscles. Tzortzis says the word *lahm* is more comprehensive than 'muscles' (*'adalat*) because it also covers tendons and connective tissue (p. 38). He thus stretches the meaning of *lahm* to make it consistent with the scientific term 'myoblasts' and distorts 'we clothed [the bones]' (*kasawna*) to mean 'the myoblasts aggregate' to form muscle masses (p. 35). Furthermore, Tzortzis tries to have the last word on his argument with Myers and others at the World Atheist Convention earlier in

the year in June 2011. In that exchange, Myers refuted Tzortzis' and Rashid's argument that the bones are formed first followed by the flesh (which they interpret as muscles), according to how the Qur'an describes their development. Myers told them that they are formed simultaneously, to which Rashid replied that the conjunction *thumma* can also mean simultaneously (as Bucaille had argued in his book). Similarly, CaptainDisguise et al. (p. 93) recounts that the user Klingschor published a YouTube video in which he criticised Tzortzis' and other apologists' arbitrary interpretation of *lahm* as muscle, and proposed that if that's what was meant, then the verse could have been improved as '*Fa-kasawna al-'Ithama [Adalan]* (Then we clothed the bones with muscles). In the document on embryology, Tzortzis revisits this point and again rejects Myers' explanation, without naming him. He writes: 'They declare bone and muscle formations occur simultaneously, but the Qur'an uses the connective particle *fa*, which in the context of the verse, indicates a quick succession of one thing happening after the other' (p. 38). Tzortzis then offers this linguistic gymnastics: 'This view represents a misunderstanding of the linguistic context of the verse. The Qur'an's use of the particle *fa* is not in the context of creating; rather it is in the context of clothing the bones with flesh. The Qur'an does not specify when the flesh (or muscles) were formed; it only specifies when the clothing of the limb bones with flesh happens' (pp. 38-9). To support his point – and for us to understand where he's coming from – Tzortzis then quotes the embryological description from the introductory textbook: '*Soon after* the cartilaginous models of the bones have been established, the myogenic cells... aggregate to form muscle masses... on the limbs' (p. 39).

Finally, Tzortzis' arguments in this document are not original. In fact, they can be seen in YouTube videos such as the First International Conference on Scientific Signs of the Qur'an

and Sunnah, organised in 1987 in Saudi Arabia¹¹⁶. In one video dated in 1990, Moore not only compares the *mudghah* to a chewed substance, but he also shows a picture of a chewed gum that he had used to demonstrate this in the past.

These changes demonstrate the dialectic between Tzortzis and his audience, both online and offline. *Much Ado* is not the only refutation of Tzortzis' embryology narrative, but it is the most elaborate and comprehensive, and it is a useful record of this period of on-going arguments between Tzortzis and his critics. Next, iERA's re-construction of the *Kalam* Argument is examined.

5.5 iERA's construction of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument

Works examined in this section:

1. A GORAP video featuring Green, posted in 2012
2. An undated essay (after 2011) posted on Tzortzis' blog: 'The Qur'anic Argument for God's Existence'
3. A talk by Tzortzis filmed and published in 2013
4. A GORAP video by Tzortzis from 2014

As seen in Chapter Four, the earlier GORAP videos featured Green explaining the different arguments. For proof of God's existence, Green uses the Argument from Design, Fine Tuning, and the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. The first argument contends that the existence of laws in nature imply that they were designed by an intelligent designer. Green makes use of a modern version of the Watchmaker Analogy: if you were walking in the desert and came upon a mobile phone (a watch), would you assume that the natural elements randomly

¹¹⁶ For the comparison of the embryo to a leech, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrxoXt7vIt4>. For Keith Moore's comparison of *mudghah* with a chewed piece of gum, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoBEg0vJCrE>.

metamorphosed by themselves into the phone or that it had been made by someone? Echoing Craig, Green says that 'common human experience' confirms that patterns and laws in nature indicate a designer (iERA, 2012d). Green moves on to the Cosmological Argument and, also similarly to Craig, describes it as a 'very, very simple' argument. He only gives the two premises and the conclusion (Therefore, the universe has a cause), without going into the argument's reasoning as Craig does. Unlike both Tzortzis and Craig, Green's discussion in the videos is more conversational, not structured and does not contain scientific and philosophical proofs. For example, in talking about scientific theories on the origins of the universe, Green says: 'You know even scientists, atheist scientists (...) they have various explanations, you know, it could have come from nothing, it could have come from nowhere, or... you know, but by that argument we could say, well, why have science?' (iERA, 2012d) Although Green tries to portray that he's opposed to atheist scientists rather than science, his scepticism of science is evident in his brief remark on 'their so-called proof for evolution' (iERA, 2012d). Although none of the GORAP videos address the Theory of Evolution, iERA has organised lectures on the topic presented by Suboor Ahmed. Moreover, in his argument that the universe is fine tuned for life, Green talks only in generalities (iERA, 2012d):

' The composition of gases in the atmosphere just happened to be the right [ones] for life to exist.'

' We happen to be just at a distance from the sun that allows life.'

'Then you can explore even further into the very forces which make the universe what it is: gravity, the strong and the weak nuclear force... they all are in such a precisely finely tuned way that if it was different by a small degree, the universe as we know it would not exist.'

Compare Green's explanation in the last quote to Craig's (2010): 'The so-called *weak force*, one of the four fundamental forces of nature, which operates inside the nucleus of an atom, is

so finely tuned that an alteration in its value by even one part out of 10^{100} would have prevented a life-permitting universe!' (p.109).

As seen in Chapter Four, not only does Green not delve into particulars, but he also does not quote Ibn Taymiyya or any Qur'anic verses in the 2012 videos. With Tzortzis, the presentation of GORAP becomes more structured and better argued, albeit less so than Craig, whose arguments Tzortzis adopts. The essay (Tzortzis, no date) can be seen as an early template for Tzortzis' version of the Cosmological Argument, which he would re-shape and develop over time. This earlier version is also the most closely similar to Craig's argument. Tzortzis uses the same scientific arguments that Craig employs: the second law of thermodynamics and the Aristotelian distinction between the actual and potential infinite. But while Craig heavily relies on al-Ghazali, Tzortzis does not refer to the Ash'ari scholar on the distinction between the two types of infinity. Instead his reference for the premise on infinity is an online source of Aristotle's *Physics* (350 BCE). Tzortzis may not have been aware of al-Ghazali's work or he may not have wanted to be seen as referring to an Ash'ari figure instead of Athari ones. The explanation for the similarities with Craig is that this blog post was among iERA's works that were accused of plagiarism. It contains a disclaimer added later that it would be more appropriately referenced in the following weeks, but this had still not been done in 2016. In contrast to Green's and Craig's presentations, the Argument from Fine Tuning is not used by Tzortzis in the works surveyed here.

Tzortzis' argument in this essay on the impossibility of an endless chain of causes is consistent with Ibn Taymiyya's, whom he quotes. It is worth noting that Tzortzis quotes Ibn Taymiyya's argument through Jaafar Idris and refers to a now-defunct link on Idris' website

(see Chapter Four). However, Tzortzis contradicts the theologian in one section when he writes: 'the number of past events cannot be infinite' (Tzortzis, no date). Ibn Taymiyya's view was that an infinite series of events is possible, whereas an infinite series of causes is not. As seen in Chapter Four, the Aqidah.com writer documented several instances when Tzortzis repeated that an infinite chain of past events is impossible, in contradiction with Ibn Taymiyya's position because it leads to conclusions that are inconsistent with the Qur'an. Also as discussed in Chapter Four, this was likely an oversight by Tzortzis; when he attempted to adopt Craig's *Kalam* Argument, he – most likely unknowingly – also adopted al-Ghazali's argument. Tzortzis' knowledge of Ibn Taymiyya's arguments may have improved over time, or this error may have been brought to his attention later, because it doesn't occur again in his other works examined in this thesis.

The filmed talk of Tzortzis follows a similar general outline to the above essay (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). He uses the same Qur'anic verses 112:1-4 as in the essay which emphasises an uncreated monotheistic deity ('neither begets nor is born'). He does this to argue that the created universe has an uncreated creator. However, although this verse is a description of God, it mainly serves to reject other belief systems and does not link the description to a Cosmological Argument:

Say, 'He is Allah , [who is] One,
Allah , the Eternal Refuge.
He neither begets nor is born,
Nor is there to Him any equivalent.' (Qur'an 112:1-4)

In addition, and without specifying a verse, Tzortzis says that the Qur'an states that 'the universe had a point and had a beginning in time' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). He

then adds that modern science has confirmed the Qur'anic text: 'this is exactly what the scientists say' (Hamza Andreas Tzortzis Fans, 2013). But this is inaccurate. The Qur'anic description of creation is consistent with the Biblical narrative that heaven and Earth were created in six days (or eight days, according to Qur'an 41:9-12). But while creation points to a beginning, the scripture does not refer to a moment of creation. Rather, does the creation of the Earth and the heavens 'in two days' each (Qur'an 41:9 and 41:12) not in fact undermine Tzortzis' claim that revelation specifies a temporal point in when the universe was created?

For his argument on the universe's beginning, Tzortzis claims that the explanations are from the Qur'an, based on various exegeses but without specifying them – this in spite of the fact that the quoted verses refer to the creation of humans. While he does not explicitly quote the verse in this video, he has repeated this justification in his other works, for example in the essay discussed above, where he argues that verse 52:35-6 can be extrapolated upon to include 'the existence of everything temporal' (Tzortzis, no date). In the GORAP video of 2014, Tzortzis also makes only a passing reference to this *surah*. It contains the question, 'Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?' from which he derives two of the four explanations for the beginning of the universe: it was created from nothing, or it created itself. However, these verses are linked to the Qur'anic challenge that precedes them in verses 52:33-4. Moreover, the Qur'an does not contain arguments related to the infinite regression. That is because the argument reached Muslim philosophers and theologians from Greek philosophy, e.g. Aristotle, who reasoned that an infinite regression, or succession, is possible (Wolfson, 1976, p. 411).

Even though the Qur'an does not address the question of the endless chain, a *hadith* narrates about Muhammad being asked 'Who created God?' but Tzortzis doesn't refer to this *hadith* in the works examined in this thesis. Three versions of the event are reported in both Muslim and al-Bukhari as follows:

Narrated Anas bin Malik:

Allah's Messenger said, 'People will not stop asking questions till they say, "This is Allah, the Creator of everything, then who created Allah?"' (al-Bukhari, Book 96, no. 27)¹¹⁷

It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah observed:

Satan comes to every one of you and says: Who created this and that? until he questions: Who created your Lord? When he comes to that, one should seek refuge in Allah and keep away (from such idle thoughts). (Muslim, Book 1, no. 252)

The Messenger of Allah said to me: they (the people) will constantly ask you, Abu Huraira, (about different things pertaining to religion) then they would say: Well, there is Allah, but after all who created Allah? He (Abu Huraira) narrated: Once we were in the mosque that some of the Bedouins came there and said: Well, there is Allah, but who created Allah? He (the narrator) said: I took hold of the pebbles in my fist and flung at them and remarked: Stand up, stand up (go away), my friend (the Holy Prophet) told the truth. (Muslim, Book 1, no. 256)

If these reports are accurate, it may then be possible that a rudimentary form of the argument may have been familiar in Arabia in the 7th century, possibly through Jewish and Christian sources. On the other hand, if these accounts are among the fabricated *hadiths*, according to Muslim tradition, they could have been aimed at the *Kalam* debates in the Abbasid period. Departing from the structure of the essay, Tzortzis goes on with two additional arguments: the one from Design and the one from the Qur'an. For the first, Tzortzis reiterates Green's phone version of the Watchmaker Analogy. The argument from the Qur'an has to prove that the

¹¹⁷ In the chapter 'Asking too Many Questions and Troubling with What Does not Concern One.'

scripture could not have been written by a man or have any other 'natural reason', according to Tzortzis.

Finally, the GORAP training video produced in 2014 featuring Tzortzis projects a more relaxed and youthful image of iERA. Instead of Green dressed in a white shirt or Islamic garment in the 2012 GORAP videos and being interviewed in a studio by Qureshi, Tzortzis is filmed with a group of six young men sitting on the stairs of a stadium (timed with the 2014 World Cup in Brazil), all wearing purple shirts displaying one of iERA's slogans, 'What's Your Goal?' (see Screenshot 2 in Chapter Two above). Tzortzis repeats Green's recommendations that proselytisers smile and make people relax. He encourages them to have a conversation with passersby rather than preach to them. His delivery in this video is more systematic and organised than Green's and his own previous ones discussed above, but the ideas are the same for the most part. He cites Ibn Taymiyya on the endless chain of causes and al-Ghazali on loving the divine. The Qur'anic verses quoted here are the same ones that he has used in previous occasions. In this video Tzortzis repeats the qualities of God (one, eternal) but adds one more quality: this deity is also powerful. He supports it with one of Craig's examples, but mistakenly attributes the figure to atoms instead of subatoms: To illustrate God's power, Tzortzis says that if one can imagine the immense energy that can be released from just one of 10^{80} atoms (subatoms) in the known universe, then how much more powerful would a creator deity be? Tzortzis also here repeats another theme that he raised in the 2013 talk, which is that people are slaves to their birth circumstances, and enslave themselves to the material world. He says: 'You obey your boss, you obey your parents, you obey your wife, your siblings, the culture, materialism, the system that we live in,' when instead people should seek true freedom 'from the emptiness of the world' through enslaving

themselves to the divine (iERA, 2014b). Finally, as seen in Chapter Three, Tzortzis misquotes Arbuthnot on the Qur'an in order to prove its inimitability, by using only a part of the orientalist's words: [it has been said that]... though several attempts have been made to produce a work equal to it as far as elegant writing is concerned, none has as yet succeeded.' (Tufal, 1994). It is unclear whether Tzortzis is aware of the full quote, but he has repeated the truncated quote on several occasions.

Therefore, the development in iERA's argument is clear between 2012 and 2014. In both videos from this period, Tzortzis gives three explanations for the universe's beginning: it was created from nothing, it created itself, or it was created (by something). However, in 2013 Tzortzis breaks the third explanation into two parts: creation by something uncreated or by something created. He then eliminates the createdness of an agent by referring to Ibn Taymiyya's impossibility of an endless series of created causes. In the 2014 GORAP video, however, Tzortzis' delivery is more structured. He more explicitly details the four explanations for the universe's beginning: it came from nothing, it created itself, it was created by something created, or it was created by something uncreated. Again he employs Ibn Taymiyya on the impossibility of an infinite regression to eliminate the third explanation. The reason for the difference in the delivery between the two videos could be either that Tzortzis improved the argument over time, or that the lecture was more spontaneous, while the GORAP video may have been better rehearsed. That said, Tzortzis does look more confident, relaxed and methodical in the 2014 video. In contrast with Tzortzis' videos, however, Green does not refer to Ibn Taymiyya's infinite regression nor does he quote any Qur'anic verses to support his arguments in the 2012 GORAP video. Additionally, Tzortzis' 2013 talk reveals his lack of familiarity with *Kalam* arguments and Ibn Taymiyya's purpose of

countering *Kalam*, as highlighted by Aqidah.com, even though Tzortzis is careful to distance himself from 'blameworthy *Kalam*'. This points to the possibility that he was responding to critics – but not yet to the Aqidah.com articles, which were published later in August 2013. Therefore, the surfacing of references to Ibn Taymiyya in iERA's arguments between 2012 and 2013/2014 may have been due to criticism of copying Craig, (unwittingly) using *Kalam* and not basing the arguments on the Qur'an. This shows that there was likely a dialectic between iERA and its audience, this time a positive one that led to the inclusion of particular Islamic principles. The question remains as to how Tzortzis decided to incorporate Ibn Taymiyya's argument. It is worth noting that iERA's works surveyed in this thesis only mention al-Ghazali once, briefly in the GORAP video, on the theme of loving the divine. The references to Ibn Taymiyya, on the other hand, may have been due to the influence of the Aqidah.com articles, or because of Islamic scholar Jaafar Idris' influence. It could also be that iERA was advised to make its arguments more authentically in line with the *salaf*. iERA's videos thus demonstrate that there was a progression in their construction of the cosmological narrative over time, most likely due to an on-going dialectic with its audience and detractors.

5.6 Why did iERA use these two constructs?

One of the limitations of this thesis is that adopting a constructionist approach restricts the ability to answer Why-questions from the analysis of texts or videos (Hjelm, 2014). As important as understanding how iERA constructed the narratives is, ultimately answering why Green and Tzortzis decided to use the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument and the embryo exegesis requires additional research. However, it is possible to come to several conclusions from the data collected in this thesis. Besides attracting converts to Islam, increasing its

follower base for the charity to grow, and fundraising, iERA aims to counter atheist narratives and to legitimate the core symbolic universes of Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims. As discussed above, there is a correlation between Internet use and weakening of faith, as people of all faiths in general, and Muslims in particular, are able to freely access unfiltered information about their faith systems that they may not have been privy to or may not have been able to access in the past. This could be one of the reasons why Iran is developing its own Internet (Vasilogambros, 2016). With the cycle of wars in the Middle East involving the U.S. and the U.K. in the on-going 'war on terror', terror attacks in the West in the name of Islam, and the tensions from the influx of immigrants and refugees from Muslim-majority countries, Islam has increasingly come under scrutiny (and suspicion in some circles). Moreover, some emerging atheist voices, mainly online and sometimes from Muslim backgrounds, who view religions as contributing to social ills rather than solving them, are attempting to deconstruct Islam and the Qur'an in a similar manner to what Christianity and the Bible underwent in the Enlightenment, when science and reason gained more trust over religion (Berger, 1967). This is combined with Christian evangelists from Western countries or who are former Muslims producing videos on a wide range of topics related to Islam, often bringing to light little known information from the Islamic core texts. For the target Muslim youth, iERA's *da'wah* approach not only legitimates their faith in the face of external challenges, it also imbues them with a sense of purpose, where *da'wah* acquires a meaning of 'profound significance' (Berger and Luckmann, 1999, p. 117). iERA's slogans illustrate this point: 'Is life just a game?' and 'What's your goal?'

5.7 How the *Kalam* and embryo narratives legitimate faith for iERA's supporters

Legitimation explains the reasons for certain things as well as the rationalisation behind them, so that knowledge precedes values (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Berger's theory on the social function of legitimation fits the format of GORAP, because instead of engaging in discussions about Islamic values (e.g. the veil), the approach seeks to explain Islamic principles instead (knowledge). Green developed GORAP on the advice of an Egyptian sheikh who brought to his attention that engaging in endless debates and arguments on Islamic practices will not change minds; explaining the worldview (symbolic universe) behind them, however, is more effective. Legitimation is also needed when symbolic universes become problematic, especially when they meet other systems of meaning (atheism, science, challenges from other faith systems) (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). For example, in a personal video on why he left Islam after having proselytised it for many years, Abdullah Sameer (2016) recounts an important moment when a sheikh declared, 'Allah holds up the sky without any pillars' (see for example Qur'an 13:2). Sameer's crisis of faith was not immediate; he had been questioning and having doubt since the year before. Along with the verses on the orbits of the sun and the moon, he had begun wondering why the Qur'anic descriptions from a divine source were more consistent with the 7th century understanding of the world rather than the modern one. Like the commenter above who confessed that information on the Internet led him away from religion, Sameer also researched his perplexing questions online. The Qur'anic conception of the sky supported by invisible pillars was a breaking point. It resulted in cognitive dissonance (Cooper and Carlsmith, 2001) about the natural world and led to his inability to ignore all his questions – or sustain his faith any longer. Green's Christian faith also faltered when it didn't legitimate an objective (taken-for-granted) reality for him. It is not

possible to know to what extent Green's narrative about his conversion is shaped in retrospect, therefore the following is only based on one account in 2011. Being separated from his parents at the age of ten, when he was sent to boarding school in the UK as his parents relocated to Egypt, had a significant effect. Green couldn't assert that this was the beginning of his questioning of Christianity, but he also couldn't understand the reason he was separated from his parents and was sent there when his family weren't devout Christians. Its impact was that he became sceptical of what he was taught. Additionally, his mother's dismissive responses to his complaints about the monks were not helpful. He began challenging authority: he thought the monks were people just like him and didn't deserve to be treated as infallible or holier than him. Subsequently, the Christian rituals became more and more absurd to him. Born Muslims struggling with the plausibility of their faith similarly need legitimations for it to continue to define their reality. Geaves' statement confirms Berger's theory that legitimation is the most crucial when the institutions are to be transmitted to the next generation: 'The central concern of the majority of Muslims whom I interviewed was with the transmission of Islam to the younger generation' (1994, p. 255).

The first stage of institutionalisation does not need legitimation (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Although levels of legitimation overlap, they are divided into four levels for analytical purposes as follows: the first is at the inherent, linguistic level, followed by basic and concrete theorising, then more advanced theory-making or 'pure theory' removed from pragmatic concerns, and finally progressing to a symbolic universe that becomes autonomous and with its own legitimations. In Chapters Three and Four, the evolutions of the concept of *I'jaz* and the Cosmological Argument were examined. They demonstrated an important feature of social construction theory: Ideas are historically and culturally contingent, produced in

historical stages (Hjelm, 2014). They do not appear abruptly but are 'products of people's thinking and communicating in a sequence of time' (Hjelm, p. 4). As seen in Chapter Three, the term *I'jaz* originally, in the Muslim tradition, conveyed the first-order meaning of the word: the Arabs' inability (*I'jaz*) to imitate the Qur'an, which was a concrete event recounted in the Qur'an. This view remained more or less until Ibn Hanbal's lifetime. However, as Abbasid conquests brought Muslims into contact with various cultures, religions, and philosophies, these Islamic claims started to be challenged, and apologists had to defend the divinity of the scripture and Muhammad's prophethood. For example, one such critic of the Qur'an was Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 911 CE) as seen in Chapter Four.

Historically, the Abbasids needed legislation derived from a higher authority. New explanations and justifications, i.e. legitimations, of Islamic beliefs were needed as they were transmitted to new generations of Muslims and converts to Islam. That is because they were historically removed from the original events and the Islamic system of meanings needed universe maintenance when it was challenged by other systems of meanings from conquered peoples. Legitimation has both a cognitive and a normative function (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 111). This perspective can help us better understand why it was in the Abbasid context that the schools of thought (*madhhabs*) and earliest *hadith* collections were developed (see Figure 1, and Berger and

Chronology of early Muslim scholars*:

Abu Hanifa (702 - 767 CE)
 Malik (712 - 795 CE)
 Al-Shaf'i (767 - 820 CE)
 Ibn Hanbal (780 - 855 CE)

Al-Bukhari (810 - 870 CE)
 Abu Dawud (817 - 888 CE)
 Muslim (822 - 875 CE)
 Al-Tirmidhi (825 - 892 CE)

Expansion of the meaning of *I'jaz al-Quran* to revealed historical facts and future prophecies:

Al-Wasiti? (d. 918 CE)
 Al-Rummani (d. 944 CE)
 Al-Baqillani (d. 1013 CE)

Expansion of *I'jaz* to all knowledge (sciences):

Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE)
 Al-Razi (d. 1209 CE)
 Al-Siyuti (d. 1505 CE)
 Al-Kawakibi (d. 1902 CE)

* Common Era years are approximate.

Luckmann p. 125 for similarities with Christianity). *I'jaz* evolved from being a linguistic concept describing an actual event (the Qur'an's inimitability), to a basic theory that further legitimates the divinity of the text, to an objective reality which needs to be re-established whenever it becomes problematic. Thus it progressed to a third-level legitimation (pure theory) in which *I'jaz* came to encompass revelation of previously unknown historical facts as well as future prophecies. Finally, it advanced to a symbolic universe whereby *I'jaz al-Qur'an* came defined the miraculous nature of the Qur'an as containing all of human knowledge. As it acquired greater and greater scope over the centuries, *I'jaz* gradually became objectivated as an obligatory belief (*fard kifayah*) that's taken for granted by many, though not all, Muslims. Whenever it became problematic, specialists developed theories of legitimation for it. Thus, *I'jaz al-Qur'an* is now supported by three main theories: the linguistic superiority of the text, its historical prophecies, and its scientific revelations.

The *I'jaz al-Qur'an* narrative is thus an example of a social construct. Algerian astrophysicist Nidhal Guessoum is critical of how the science in the Qur'an narrative has become sacralised (TVIslamScience, 2014). In social constructionist terms, it has become objectivated truth and internalised, since it is being taught in some educational institutions as a taken-for-granted truth. The narrative of embryology in the Qur'an itself is not novel and has been used in *da'wah* discourse for at least the last century. Therefore, a discursive as well as a historical approach were useful to unpack how iERA re-constructed the embryology narrative to include modern scientific knowledge, and how their approach is contextualised in the historical development of the symbolic universe of *I'jaz*.

Similarly, even though the Cosmological Argument cannot be said to be institutionalised in Islam, because the debates surrounding it peaked between the 9th and 11th centuries and petered out with al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya, still the argument is a symbolic universe that is removed from everyday experiences and instead is concerned with theories (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 113). Craig, Green and Tzortzis all describe the argument as 'simple'. It indeed does appear deceptively intuitive and tightly constructed to exclude other possibilities or complex propositions about the universe's origins. In fact, Tzortzis describes it exactly in this manner: 'This concept is *intuitive* but also agrees with reality: whatever begins to exist has a cause or a creator' (no date, my italics). Describing it as 'simple' and 'intuitive' can be attributed in constructionist terms to the taken-for-granted attitude towards the argument and its appeal to human intuition. For non-theists, the argument is considered refuted and discredited¹¹⁸. But it remains popular among some theists, particularly after William Lane Craig revived and modernised it in the 1970s. To demonstrate how the argument has become a symbolic universe, it suffices for the purposes of this thesis to look at the brief overview of its development discussed in Chapter Four. Plato's argument for a First Cause, can be considered 'pure theory', involving self-motion and motion. Plato's purpose was to legitimate a higher authority for his system of laws rather than to proselytise a religion. Aristotle developed the argument further, arguing that Plato's self-motion still needed a cause, and he added the element of the Unmoved Mover, as well as more abstract elements such as potential and actual being. As human knowledge of the natural world improved or as it was influenced by different systems of meaning (e.g. monotheistic religions), the concepts of Motion and Unmoved Mover were replaced with other terminology, such as 'Creation' and 'Uncreated Creator'. Philoponus adopted the Cosmological Argument to prove a temporal world created

¹¹⁸ There are many YouTube videos containing refutations of the Cosmological Argument.

by an eternal deity manifest in the Trinity. When the Cosmological Argument was being used in the Islamic context, it arguably was an 'pure theory' or even symbolic universe and was used to legitimate abstractions such as the nature of the world (eternal vs. created) and that of the Qur'an. Theologians and philosophers were devising increasingly complex legitimating theories for the argument. Ibn Taymiyya's treatment of the argument shows that it reached the level of an advanced, complex and abstract theory. For example, unlike Plato's chain of motion and self-motion, Ibn Taymiyya distinguished between four different types of chains (of agents, dependent causes, actions and effects), classified them into the possibility of being infinite or not, and theorised that while events are temporal, their genus (or series) can be infinite. His argument thus legitimated a version of the Cosmological Argument, which itself legitimated the nature of God's attributes, all being abstractions far detached from everyday experiences. Craig further developed the argument by building on al-Ghazali's work and inserting modern philosophy and scientific knowledge into it, such as Leibniz's argument and the Big Bang Theory. The difference between the levels of legitimation is the extent to which they are taken for granted or removed from the lay population (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Legitimations are 'a further elaboration, on a higher level' of theory (Berger and Luckmann, p. 123), and the more advanced levels of legitimation are addressed by more specialised individuals. However, this is not to say that Plato's and Aristotle's theorising about the cosmos were simplistic, but rather that they were simpler when viewed from the scope of the argument's historical evolution and increasing complexity¹¹⁹. Berger and Luckmann acknowledge that clearly distinguishing between the degrees of complexity or sophistication of theories, while useful for analysis, is challenging in practice (p. 123). This was confirmed in this thesis, particularly as it related to the Cosmological Argument. For this reason, it was

¹¹⁹ For a good historical overview, see Craig's *The Cosmological Argument: From Plato to Leibniz* (1980). London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

described in the Islamic Abbasid period above as either a pure theory or a symbolic universe – both complex theorising about abstracts. This ambiguous status of the argument in terms of social constructionism is likely due to the fact that the argument, as part of *Kalam*, ceased to be used as a legitimation once engaging in controversial *Kalam* discussions ceased and generally became frowned upon. On the other hand, as *I'jaz* has survived, was preserved and continued to be engaged with, it can be more clearly defined. If iERA succeeds in reintroducing the Cosmological Argument in Islamic discussions, it could then further develop into or as a symbolic universe with its own legitimating theories. What is interesting to contemporary times is the result of the historicity of the Cosmological Argument in the Islamic tradition: an objectivated belief that the Qur'an is uncreated, and the claim that it is, is a heresy.

In the case of iERA, the embryo narrative was used in the third step of GORAP – Revelation – as an example of *I'jaz* (symbolic universe) to prove (legitimate) that the Qur'an had a divine origin (objectivated reality) rather than a human author. To achieve this, it was combined with the premise that the Qur'anic description of the embryo was not and could not have been known to Muhammad or his contemporaries – a claim that Guessoum, al-Arefe and others dispute. As for the Cosmological Argument, iERA adopted it for the first step of GORAP to argue for (legitimate) the existence of God (objectivated reality). This was the same approach used by Craig, but iERA simplified it in its own narrative, introduced Qur'anic verses into it, and replaced al-Ghazali's finite chain of events with Ibn Taymiyya's finite chain of causes. The processes by which iERA developed the *I'jaz 'Ilmi* and *Kalam* narratives reveal a dialectic: iERA's construction of the narratives, the influence of iERA's audience on the construction of the narratives, as well as the constructs then impacting back on iERA through

modifying them and externalising them again: in the first case, the outcome was that the narrative wasn't plausible enough for iERA's audience and it had to be (mostly) abandoned; in the second case, the narrative was tailored to make it more authentic and acceptable to iERA's context.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, in the absence of a structured *da'wah* approach in the past, iERA's strategy tackles several issues facing British Muslims (Mohammad, 1991): firstly, it avoids public sectarian arguments and instead concentrates on external ones (e.g. with atheists), which serves ultimately to unify Muslims; it aims to increase Muslim youths' confidence in Islam as rational, compatible with science and relevant to the modern world, while also illuminating its rich history; and it developed a practical guide to giving *da'wah* to atheists and Christians, providing better tools for Muslims to communicate their faith to outsiders.

5.8 Institutionalisation as a form of social control

As discussed in Chapter One, institutionalisation economises on decision-making in order to maximise stability and predictability as well as to free up energy for deliberation when necessary (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). But while institutionalisation can facilitate innovation, rigid institutions can stifle innovation that is not sanctioned and that may be (perceived as) a threat. An example in this thesis is Salafism, which discourages innovation in matters of faith, be it beliefs or practices, if it's not approved by the institution. Thus, religious innovation is labelled with the negative Arabic term *bid'a*, instead of the positive term for creativity, *ibda'*. While he does not go as far as accusing Tzortzis of committing a *bid'a*,

Abu.Iyaad (2013c) blames him for adopting the approach of *Kalam* used by the Ash'aris, Mu'tazila and Jahmis which led to their innovating in religious beliefs. Abu.Iyaad's criticism of Tzortzis falls along these lines. He warns against going back to the debates with the Jahmis and Mu'tazila, for fear of re-opening a can of worms and leading Muslims into doubt. He asserts the (institutionalised) beliefs to be taken (for granted) as-is: God's attributes are part of His essence and are eternal, aren't created, without anthropomorphism but cannot be understood by human reasoning, and the Qur'an is uncreated. That is to say, these institutionalised beliefs are in concordance with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Hanbal, and their say is final on the issues.

Moreover, another one of Abu.Iyaad's criticisms of iERA's debates with atheists is that 'Tzortzis opened the door for these atheists to attack the integrity of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad' (Abu.Iyaad, 2013e). Abu.Iyaad claims that Muslims began having doubts as a result of iERA's debates with atheists. In constructionist terms, their symbolic universes became problematic and needed legitimating. He shares al-Barbahari's warning:

Beware of small innovations because they grow until they become large. This is the case with every innovation introduced in this Ummah. It began as something small, bearing resemblance to the truth which is why those who entered it were mislead [sic] and then were unable to leave it. So it grew and became the religion which they followed and thus deviated from the Straight Path and left Islaam. (quoted in Abu.Iyaad, 2013b)¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Berger and Luckmann (1991, pp. 130-1) also argue that a conceptual machinery is developed to prevent deviation from the symbolic universe, but this discussion, although relevant and has been touched on briefly, is beyond iERA and the scope of this thesis because exploring it entails a wider lens than is possible here.

Sub-universes of meaning¹²¹ that become more and more complex also become more insulated from those outside the group. And when society contains complex sub-universes of meaning, they become increasingly difficult to legitimate both to insiders and outsiders (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, pp. 104-5). Therefore, outsiders (atheists) either have to be 'kept out' or other means have to be resorted to, such as propaganda or intimidation. On the other hand, insiders (Muslims) must be 'kept in' (p. 105), through persuasion or, again, intimidation, or other means.

Finally, some thoughts on the application of social constructionism are offered. The approach facilitated an analysis of iERA's constructions, their processes, and their functions. It also was useful for finding evidence a dialectic that involved iERA, albeit to a limited degree. One challenge of the approach was differentiating between different levels of legitimation and assessing the degree of their sophistication in order to classify them. That is because empirically the levels may overlap and are not as distinct as they are in theory. It is also possible to argue that legitimations may not follow a linear progression in complexity as Berger and Luckmann proposed, and that they may also regress or no longer be in use while their effects are preserved. This was seen in the case of the Cosmological Argument in the Islamic context, where its resulting beliefs remained after it ceased to be used for legitimation, and that iERA's treatment of it was much more simplified than Craig's, al-Ghazali's or Ibn Taymiyya's. It was also not possible to assert to what extent the narratives actually do legitimate aspects of the faith without undertaking research into their impact on iERA's supporters, but that was not the focus of this thesis. Still, some indications of this impact were identified in the form of iERA's growing online following, its branching out to becoming a

¹²¹ Knowledge that has become objectivated and in turn acts back upon the group that constructed it.

provider of *da'wah* training to organisations – indicating a growing reputation – and the persistence of the more plausible narratives. Additionally, the Internet proved to be a very useful medium for documenting the development (i.e. recent historicity) of the constructions and, partially, the dialectical relationship. Social constructionism, ultimately, reflects the complexity of human knowledge in our pursuit of better understanding and ordering our world.

5.9 Conclusion

Adopting Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of knowledge has been essential to understanding how iERA shaped, and was shaped, by the narratives of *Kalam* and *I'jaz Ilmi*. This study examined how iERA's interactions with its audience, including its critics, impacted on the construction of each narrative and how that, ultimately, influenced the decisions to maintaining them or not. This approach demonstrated through the example of iERA how knowledge is socially constructed in a dialectical relationship, and its implications for social change. Desacralising certain narratives makes it possible to revisit them and re-evaluate them when they become problematic and implausible. Abu Zayd's position, which is similar to al-Shatibi's, is that the Qur'an is a linguistic text that addresses the people of its time. This perspective doesn't detract from the value that believers place on it. Furthermore, iERA's failed experiment with *I'jaz Ilmi* could have a positive influence on this trend elsewhere. Additionally, some Muslim scientists such as Nidhal Guessoum are trying to de-mystify science and separate it from the Qur'an's function as a book of religious guidance rather than an all-encompassing text. Fortunately, these efforts are increasing and they can cross borders with the help of the Internet.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In order to investigate one possible aspect of the appeal of Salafism to young adults, the UK-based charity iERA was taken as a case study to explore how it constructed its *da'wah* narratives, how those narratives were influenced by the dialectic between iERA, its audience and its critics, and how in turn they impacted back on the organisation. Chapter Two introduced iERA and its two main figures, Abdurraheem Green and Hamza Tzortzis, both converts to Islam. The research attempted to ascertain iERA's doctrinal orientation as Salafi and its possible connection or affinity with the Saudi-based Muslim World League *da'wah* conglomerate; however, more research is required to establish the existence of any such affiliation. The chapter also examined the wider context of *da'wah* and conversion to situate iERA's work. In Chapter Three, the problematic narrative of the Qur'an's *al-I'jaz al-'Ilmi* was studied due to its adverse impact on iERA's reputation. The history of the narrative's evolution was traced, and its unsuccessful undertaking by iERA was investigated. The second narrative that iERA adopted, Baptist apologist William Lane Craig's *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, was the focus of Chapter Four. Here again the evolution of iERA's use of the arguments became apparent through Tzortzis' reactions to his critics. The discussion in Chapter Five analysed the development of each narrative in detail and found how Tzortzis revised and tweaked each one to infuse a more authentically Islamic foundation to them. He was more successful in doing so with the *Kalam* narrative than the embryo one in terms of being able to retain it.

Applying a social constructionist approach to iERA's narratives revealed the dual dialectics at work: the production of knowledge (*I'jaz* and *Kalam*) underwent a dialectic with the audience. Each underwent a transformation by this interaction with iERA's audience and external influencers (e.g. atheist critics). This resulted in the events in turn impacting back on iERA as far as its decision to maintain a revised narrative (*Kalam*) or abandon it (*I'jaz 'Ilmi*). In its attempt to counter atheist narratives, iERA resorted to using science and reasoning to legitimate to its followers the narrative that there doesn't exist a contradiction between faith in God and the religion of Islam (*naql*) on the one hand and science and rationalism (*'aql*) on the other hand. However, iERA's strategy was neither creative nor sophisticated; the organisation's strength is its image, the delivery, and the development of a practical template. For the embryo verses, Tzortzis mainly adopted existing modern exegeses, such as that of al-Naggar. Thus he didn't completely break with the traditional scholars, but then he stretched the classical definitions of the key terms of verses 23:12-15: *sulalah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudghah* to make them agree with inaccurately relayed scientific facts in embryology. After challenges from atheists and Muslims, and four document revisions later, iERA was no longer able to sustain the plausibility of this narrative and removed it to a large extent from its program – or in some instances downgraded it from miracles to signs.

Next, in order to make a rational case for Islam, iERA appears to have turned to the examples of some Christian apologists. William Lane Craig has achieved a degree of fame with his industry of marketing logical arguments for Christianity with his modern development of the Cosmological Argument. Unfortunately, iERA's adoption of the argument was not as illustrious. First, iERA waded into the controversial area of *Kalam* and its bitter history. Then, Tzortzis used al-Ghazali's argument, which Craig bases his work on and which contradicts

Ibn Taymiyya's: an infinite series of events is impossible. Then, Tzortzis mostly relied on Craig's scientific arguments, at times plagiarising him and at others inaccurately relaying scientific facts. Finally, Tzortzis attempted to inject Qur'anic verses into the argument to make it more Islamically authentic and robust. While iERA's construction of this narrative was also unsuccessful, it was still able to retain it. There could be several reasons why that is so. First, the argument appears to be popular because it feels logically intuitive at first. That is because the premise that everything except God has a cause comes from the human thinking of the world in patterns of causality. However, scientific knowledge sometimes shows that human experience and intuition about the world is not accurate; one case in point is observing the appearance of the sun orbiting the Earth, which was disproved. Next, the debate devolves into complex scientific theories that are removed from the lay person, making it difficult for a spontaneous conversation with street proselytisers to be able to fact-check and debate. Also, there are numerous online videos and articles on both sides of the argument that could make some people indecisive.

Taking advantage of Facebook Live, a new feature introduced in 2016 that allows live video broadcasts, iERA has delivered a few talks live and has posted fewer recordings of its workshops and talks. Its work is now increasingly 'offline': setting up *da'wah* groups internationally, delivering workshops to the public, and being a training provider for other organisations. This approach reduces the online accessibility of iERA's narratives to its critics and the chances of public embarrassments or challenges – which seem to have also decreased but haven't completely stopped. iERA is being invited to deliver *da'wah* workshops in the Middle East and is positioning itself as a provider of practical *da'wah* training, e.g. with the online entities Messengers of Peace Academy and (Qatar-based) Islamic Online University. If

iERA is committed to its position against the *I'jaz* narrative – rather than using it pragmatically – and it doesn't shy away from challenging it where it's sacralised, then it could have a positive impact and open up the space left by this narrative to more engagement with science. However, I believe this outcome is too optimistic because it is not iERA's goal. It will tread in this area cautiously because, at the same time as abandoning *I'jaz 'Ilmi*, the organisation is still propagating doubt and mistrust in secular science as far as it threatens to undermine (particular interpretations of) the Qur'an. Therefore, a more positive perception of science may come as an unintended outcome of iERA's approach. This space could also be filled by Muslim scientists such as Guessoum and members of the Muslim-Science.com Task Force, whose goal is to make science more accessible to Arabs and Muslims, while also retaining their Islamic faith. That is because the disconnect between the Qur'an and modern scientific knowledge is aggravated by a rigid adherence to a literal reading of the text, the confines of the traditions of the *hadiths* and *taqlid*, and the resulting crystallised institutions of the three main *I'jaz* theoretical legitimations: linguistic, scientific and historical. While the latter serve the purpose of defending the divine origin of the Qur'an, they simultaneously undermine this claim as human knowledge continues to expand and uncovers information that contradicts them. The alternatives for them are either to suppress or undermine competing symbolic universes (secular science and other faith systems). A better alternative is to revisit the Qur'anic text and appreciate it as an eloquent, or poetic, representation of certain aspects of the human world and to reinterpret particular verses metaphorically, as both Campanini and Guessoum advocate. Yet this approach is not without drawbacks. For instance, the classical commentaries are useful records of language use during their time, and their positive effect is that words can't be taken to signify anything and everything, as was seen in the example of Bucaille's liberal definition of the conjunction *thumma* (then). They can therefore restrain

misleading interpretations such as iERA's embryological exegesis. The question that remains for advocates of plural meanings, then, relates to the methodology of such an exegesis. Moreover, literalism could become increasingly problematic if the Qur'an is perceived to be in contradiction with advancing human knowledge and is used to override scientific facts, as was shown in the example of Abdullah Sameer renouncing the religion due to the problematic adoption of a literalist understanding of the Qur'anic descriptions.

This thesis is an analysis of *da'wah* narratives through the application of social constructionism. It uncovered how one *da'wah* group is countering atheist and scientific challenges to religion, in this case Islam. It is hoped that it would pave the way for more research in this area, for it would help to understand the appeal of Salafi groups and how their narratives attempt to fulfil individuals' needs and comfort their concerns. This thesis also demonstrated how, as Campanini argued (2005), the historicity of the Qur'an, i.e. the tradition of adherence to classical interpretations, can at times be problematic. It is also an in-depth academic study of the Islamic charity iERA. In addition, it highlighted aspects of how religion is being marketed and turned into a commodity for consumption (Boubekeur and Roy, 2012). This is not exclusive to Muslims alone but is also a trend in other religions.

Several areas have come to light for further research. One such area of interest is to quantitatively measure iERA's growth, change in popularity and impact over time. Another is to investigate claims that converts left Islam following examining the counter-arguments to *I'jaz 'Ilmi*, and to include born-Muslims as well, both in the UK and in other contexts.

Additionally, a comparative study of Islamic proselytical narratives and their outcomes and Christian ones, as well as others, would shed more light on this topic. Philosophers and others

can also explore the *Kalam* debates in the Abbasid period for parallels with contemporary issues, as there is increasing interest among Arab Internet users in the freethinkers and atheists of that period, whose works are not taught in schools and have been marginalised due to their controversial criticism of religious tenets. This study has contributed to research by examining commonly used *da'wah* narratives adopted by iERA and how they were socially constructed over time. It is hoped that it will pave the way for further research into Salafi *da'wah* narratives and Internet trends, and that it will be useful in a range of disciplines, from *da'wah*, Qur'anic exegesis, the application of social constructionism, to religion on the Internet and online Islamic verses atheistic narratives.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: iERA's online shop

MISSION DAWAH ONLINE SHOP* - accessed October 2, 2014

* All items in the online shop can be downloaded and printed by users

ITEM	PRICE (in £)
BANNERS (for tables)	
Is life just a game? (yellow)	20.00
What's your goal? (purple)	20.00
BOOKS **	** usually printed through fundraising on Facebook and Twitter
3 Reasons for God	0.00
Muhammad in the Bible	0.00
Neighbours Booklet	0.00
Pocket Dawah Manual	0.00
Qur'an: A Short Journey	0.00
The Man in the Red Underpants	0.00
The Qur'an - Arabic with English translation (by Saheeh International)	0.00
CDs & DVDs	
None (2/10/14)	
CLOTHING	
T-SHIRTS	
5 men 1 vision (maroon)	5.00
A new era in dawah (black)	5.00
Born to call (black)	3.00
Born to call (white)	3.00
My five-a-day [prayers]	5.00
What are you doing here? (black)	5.00
What's your goal? (purple)	10.00
iERA polo shirt (white)	5.00

SWEATSHIRTS

A new era in dawah (black)	15.00
Born to call (white)	8.00
What are you doing here? (black)	15.00

GIFT BOXES

<i>Da'wah</i> gift box	0.00
------------------------	------

POSTCARDS

What's your goal? (Pack of 250 postcards)	0.00
-------------------------------------------	------

What's your goal? (Pack of 250 postcards)	0.00
-------------------------------------------	------

Shipping: Only within the UK (2/10/2014), within 5 working days. ;All da'wah books and flyers etc. are free of charge, you only pay for P&P.' UK Mainland Standard Rate UK postal delivery.

Appendix B: Summary of Berger and Luckmann's (1991) levels of legitimation

Incipient legitimation:

Pre-theoretical, foundation of legitimation.
Linguistic objectivations are transmitted, such as vocabulary.
Simple affirmations: 'this is how things are done'.

Rudimentary theoretical legitimation:

Rudimentary theoretical propositions.
Explanations that are: very pragmatic, directly connected to concrete actions.
Examples: proverbs, moral maxims, legends, folk tales.

Pure Theory:

Explicit theories to legitimate something.
Such legitimations provide fairly comprehensive frames of reference.
More complex and differentiated legitimations at this level, entrusted to specialists.
Beyond pragmatic application. 'Pure theory'. Therefore, legitimations at this level are autonomous and may eventually become their own institutions.

Symbolic Universes:

Symbolic universes are close to Durkheim's 'religion'.
Hjelm: worldview.
Example: Religion, philosophy, science and art.
Theoretical traditions that integrate different systems of meaning and 'encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality' (p. 113).
Symbolic processes here mean: realities other than those of everyday experience.
Integration of meaning and institutionalised conduct occurs in all sectors of the institution at this level, more fully than at third level.
Symbolic universes may themselves require legitimation in the same way as institutions, excluding the first level because it is pre-theoretical and symbolic universes are theoretical:

Second level of legitimation: pragmatic and concrete.
Third level of legitimation: Beyond pragmatic, pure theory.
Fourth level of legitimation: complete frame of reference; integration of meaning and conduct.

Appendix C: Berger and Luckmann's (1991) Levels of Legitimations

The Objectivation of Reality

Level 1 – Language: Vocabulary, pre-theoretical
Example: Cousin.

Level 2 – Basic theory: Pragmatic explanations for concrete actions.
Proverbs. Legends. Folk tales.
Example: “He who steals from his cousin gets warts on his hands.”

Level 3 – “Pure Theory”: More complex theory. Specialists. In themselves become institutions.
Cousinhood, its rights, obligations, and standard operating procedures.

- Legitimations:

- L. i – can’t exist here – language, pre-theoretical.
- L. ii – Basic theory.
- L. iii – Pure theory.
- L. iv – Symbolic universes.

Level 4 – Symbolic Universes: an all-encompassing matrix.
E.g. Theology. *I'jaz al-Qur'an*.

- Legitimations:

- L. i – can’t exist here – language, pre-theoretical.
- L. ii – Basic theory.
- L. iii – Pure theory.
- L. iv – Symbolic universes.

Appendix D: Qur'anic verses on human development and Bucaille's classification

A. Full list of verses in the Qur'an usually used in *da'wah* as divine revelation on human reproduction and describing the embryo:

8:32	16:4	18:37
22:5	23:13-14	32:8-9
35:11	36:77	39:6
40:67	53:45-6	71:14
75:37-9	76:2	77:20
82:6-8	86:6-7	96:1-2

B. Bucaille's interpretation of the verses (*suras*) in *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*

1. As describing human reproduction in the Qur'an (pp. 212-3)

Verses: 71:14 82:6-8

2. Fertilisation is performed by only a very small volume of liquid (pp. 213-4)

Verses: 16:4 23:13 75:37

3. The constituents of the fertilising liquids (pp.214-6)

Verses: 32:8 75:37 76:2 77:20 86:6

4. The implantation of the egg in the female genital organs (pp. 216-8)

Verses: 22:5 23:13-4 39:6 40:67
75:37-8 77:21 96:1-2 22:5

5. Evolution of the embryo inside the uterus (pp. 218-220)

Verses: 22:5 23:14

Appendix E: Excerpt from an iERA transcript

Excerpt from the transcript of an iERA *dawah* training video titled “How to give *dawah* with Hamza Tzortzis”¹²²:

The final argument I wanna talk about, and there are many many more things to talk about the Qur’an, is the fact that when you engage with the Qur’an – *tadabur*, reflection – you see that it’s so fascinating it addresses different peoples at different times. It’s multi-layered, especially when it talks about verses that God wants you to think about, like man, life and the universe. And I wanna give you an example. Take the word '*alaqah*'. The word '*alaqah*' can be found in *Surah Mu'minoon*, chapter 23 around verse 14. And this word has 5 classical meanings in academic meanings.

Number 1: blood in the general sense.
 Number 2: blood clot.
 Number 3: clay that sticks to the hand.
 Number 4: a leech or a worm.
 Or Number 5: something that clings.

Now interestingly, when Allah talks about '*alaqah*' – which refers to the development of the human being, the embryo – it refers to the development of the human being, and for a seventh-century Arab, they would take the meaning that it’s a blood clot, because when you look at dissections and abortions, it looks like, bloody, right? This was in line with Greek physicians, like Galen¹²³, who wrote the book *De Semene*, and he said in Greek: *sarco [ithis in] aimados*, which means there’s a blood-filled fleshy thing. So maybe Allah is addressing the mentality of the time, because yes you (sic) do look like a blood clot, and wow, from this Allah formed me, so he deserves to be worshipped. That’s the point of these verses.

So it’s addressing different times and places, but if we fast-forward to the fifteenth century when we developed the microscope, we discovered the microscope, we invented the microscope, we are now allowed, or we’re given the capacity to see the embryo around Day 20 to 30. Using the microscope, we see it looks like a leech. Not only does it look like a leech, but even the internal structure of a leech looks like the embryo at the same period. Isn’t that fascinating? So it addresses different times and places to make us believe that, look, look who

¹²² Accessed from <http://www.missiondawah.com/training/dawah-training/give-dawah/> on 14 August 2014.

¹²³ This is an interesting choice of comparison for Tzortzis to make. A Google search for Galen turned up a page on embryology in the Qur’an from the website Answering Islam, which claims that the Qur’anic description of the development of the embryo plagiarises Galen’s earlier description (<http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Science/embryo.html>). Tzortzis was aware of this claim and published an essay on his blog in February 2011 refuting it. It is titled “Did the Prophet Muhammed plagiarise ancient Greek embryology?” and can be accessed at: <http://www.hamzatzortzis.com/essays-articles/prophetic-studies/did-the-prophet-muhammad-plagiarise-hellenic-embryology/> [Accessed 18 February 2015].

you were and look what you were and look what you are now, so God deserves to be worshipped. But what's very interesting is this: It might not even have a scientific or "natural" meaning; it might have a spiritual meaning. God is probably telling us, maybe, from a *tadabur* point of view, from a reflective point of view: Hey, you're a leech. What does a leech do? It's a parasite. It drains the resources of its host. And we were just like that in our mother's womb. We drained her resources. So it's as if God is telling us, Lower the [whim?] of humility for your mother, because she's sacrificed for you willingly. Be compassionate and loving to your parents, especially your mother, because look you were like a leech, like a parasite.

You know what's very interesting? Professor Lord Winston, from Imperial College University in London, he says the following words: that the leech and the embryo act in the same parasitic way. [Reaction of listeners: "Subhan Allah."] Isn't that amazing? Now, it may even have no meaning, we may not have any meaning that we can find in science or in today's reality. But that's fine, science will catch up because that's the whole point of science. *And it's as if God is saying to us, You may not really know what this means now, but it's encouraging us to develop scientific advancements in the future. It is no wonder that Prophet Muhammed (uhbp) said, "For every disease is [there's?] a cure. So seek the cure". It's a spiritual encouragement to go and look into science. So we're not anti-science. (my emphasis)*

So this is why the Qur'an is so amazing and there's so many other different reasons that you all know about. So this establishes good reasons to believe the Qur'an can't come from man, can't come from the natural world, must come from the supernatural, right? Which makes sense of God.

Appendix F: Themes in the iERA booklet
Science in the Qur'an

The booklet titled *Science in the Qur'an* was published by One Reason and is undated. But it can be dated to around 2012 because in its references the last retrieval is stated as 17 June 2012.

The booklet lists the following as scientific facts that can be found in the Qur'an:

Origin of life

Iron

The sky's protection

Mountains

Expansion of the universe

Sun's orbit

The ocean

Lying and movement

Pain receptors

Appendix G: The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, by W. L. Craig

Pro	Con
<p>Whatever begins to exist has a cause.</p> <p>Something can't come from nothing. →</p> <p>The vacuum is not nothing. ←</p> <p>Otherwise, anything and everything could come from nothing.</p> <p>Experience confirms this truth.</p>	<p>Physics gives examples of things coming from nothing.</p>
<p>The universe began to exist.</p>	
<p>Therefore, the universe has a cause.</p>	

Source: Craig, W. L. (2010) *On Guard: Defending your Faith with Reason and Precision*. Colorado: David C. Cook. (pp.102-104)

Appendix H: Comparative chart of Craig's and iERA's arguments

Craig's <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument	iERA (GORAP)
<p><u>First Cause argument (al-Ghazali):</u></p> <p>Whatever begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist.</p> <p>Therefore, the universe has a cause.</p> <p><u>God as the First Cause (Leibniz):</u></p> <p>Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence.</p> <p>If the universe has an explanation for its existence, that explanation is God.</p> <p>The universe exists.</p> <p>Conclusion: God is the explanation of the universe.</p>	<p><u>Argument made by Green:</u></p> <p>Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist.</p> <p>Therefore, it has a cause.</p> <p><u>Explanations for the existence of the universe and God by Tzortzis:</u></p> <p><i>By a process of elimination-</i></p> <p>The universe came from nothing. It created itself. It was created by something else that was created. It was created by something else that wasn't created.</p> <p><i>Explanation #4 remains and is considered the best explanation.</i></p> <p>Conclusion: The universe was created by something uncreated. -> God is that uncreated something.</p> <p><i>(No arguments made to link the two.)</i></p>

Appendix I: Plato and Aristotle's Cosmological Arguments

Plato's Cosmological Argument (Source: Craig, 1980, p.4).

1. Some things are in motion.
2. There are two kinds of motion: communicated motion and self-motion.
3. Communicated motion implies self-motion because:
 - a. Things in motion imply a self-mover as their source of motion
 - i. because otherwise there would be no starting point for the motion
 1. because things moved by another imply a prior mover.
 - b. If all things were at rest, only self-motion could arise directly from such a state
 - i. because a thing moved by another implies the presence of another moving thing.
 - ii. But this contradicts the hypothesis.
4. Therefore, the source of all motion is self-motion, or soul.
5. Soul is the source of astronomical motion because:
 - a. The heavens are in motion.
 - b. Soul is the source of all motion.
6. There is a plurality of souls because:
 - a. There must be at least one to cause good motions.
 - b. There must be at least one to cause bad motions.
7. The soul that moves the universe is the best soul because:
 - a. The motions of the heavens are good, being regular and orderly like those of the mind.
8. There are many souls, or gods, because:
 - a. Each heavenly body is a source of self-motion.

Aristotle's Cosmological Argument (Craig, 1980, pp.23-4):

1. Everything that is in motion is being moved by something.
2. This something is itself either in motion or not in motion.
3. If it is in motion, then it is either self-moved or moved by another.
4. The members of a series of things each being moved by another must ultimately be in motion only by reference to a self-moved thing.
5. The members of the whole series of self-movers and things moved by another must be in motion only by reference to an unmoved mover.
6. The first mover must be utterly unmoved and eternal because:
 - a. motion itself is continuous and eternal.

Appendix H: Excerpt from an iERA video transcript

The following is an excerpt from iERA's last GORAP video (iERA, 2014b):

And this allows us to move on to now God's existence. And we say, well the first part of the concept of Islam is that we believe that God is a reality, the divine reality, God is the Truth. And we have good reasons for this. And give them some of your reasons. Now many of you may have your own reasons, but lemme give you one. For instance, we know that this whole universe began, it wasn't always here, we don't live in the 1940s and 50s anymore, we know the universe popped into existence. Well there are 4 possible explanations – and by the way, the Qur'an gives us the logic of these explanations in Chapter 52 verses 35 to 36. These verses refer to the creation of the human being, but you can apply the logic to anything that began, that is *muhdath* – that came into being. So the universe came into being. So what are the 4 logical explanations?

Number 1, it came from nothing.

Number 2, it created itself.

Number 3... smile... it was created by something else that was created.

Or Number 4, it was created by something that is uncreated.

So we have these four options and, actually, make into a dialogue and ask them these questions. "So, do you think the universe could have come from nothing or via nothing?" They'll be like, "Well, let me think about that." Of course not because out of nothing what comes? [Response: Nothing.] If I had nothing, gave you a little bit more nothing, added a little bit more nothing, sprinkled a little bit more nothing, what am I gonna get? [Response: Nothing.] Nothing, exactly. So there must have been *something* that brought the universe into existence (his emphasis).

Let's go to the second option. Could the universe create itself? [No response.] Well the way I address this is in the following way: For something to create itself, it means it was in existence and not in existence at the same time which is impossible. Could you exist and not exist at the same time? [Response: No.] Exactly. Also, I use this as a little joke: Could your mother give birth to herself? Exactly, your mother couldn't give birth to herself. So we know the universe couldn't create itself.

So the third option. Could the universe be created by something ultimately created? For example, if this universe, Universe 1, was as a result of Universe 2, and Universe 2 was as a result of Universe 3, and Universe 3 was as a result of Universe 4, and that went on forever, could we have the universe today? No, exactly. Even the classical scholars in Islam like Ibn Taymiyya, may Allah's mercy be upon him, he said you can't have an infinite regress of causes, because you can't have one cause after another cause after another cause, and that going on forever, otherwise you'll never have the effect which is the universe itself. So we understand the universe couldn't be as a result of something else that was created. Let me make this a little bit simple for you guys. Imagine I'm a Marine and I wanna shoot a bird (laughs), right? And in order to shoot a bird, I have to ask permission from the Marine behind me, but this Marine also has to ask permission. If this goes on forever, will I ever shoot the

bird? No, exactly. Same with the universe, there must have been an uncreated creator. And that's why we have the last final option which is the best option, which is there must have been an uncreated creator, which makes sense of God, which makes sense of Allah.

So now we've established God's existence. And don't forget to get agreement. "Do you agree with this?" Now if they don't agree with you, don't get stuck on intellectual gymnastics and philosophical ideas. *Our job is to plant the seed. That's our job* (my emphasis added). We are farmers; we plant the seeds. It's Allah's job to ensure that it grows into the fruits of *iman*. Don't get bogged down. Rational arguments from the Qur'an and Sunnah are only there to wake up the *fitrah*, what is already known within us. So don't get bogged down thinking, "no you have to understand this point!" Just say, "Fine, let's agree to disagree, but let me explain to you the concept of Islam." You're planting the right seeds here. Does this make sense? [Response: Yeah.] Good.

So you get agreement, and now we're talking about God's oneness. So if there's an uncreated creator, well it makes sense that He must be eternal, because He's uncreated, it's very simple. The second point is, He must be powerful, because He created the whole entire universe. There's around 10 to the power of 80 atoms in this universe. If I take one of these atoms and split it you have a release of energy, and that's just one of them. So it follows that this uncreated creator is powerful. This uncreated creator is knowing. Why? If I drop this card, what happens? [Response: It drops.] It drops because of the law of gravity. And a lawgiver implies something or a being that knows, right? What's important though is that this uncreated creator is different, disjoined and distinct from us. Just like the famous scholar said, that creation is distinct and disjoined from creation. Why? If I made this card, do I become the card? {Response: No.} Exactly. I'm distinct and disjoined from the card. Likewise the uncreated creator is distinct, unique and disjoined from His creation. Does this make sense so far? Not only that, but since He created us, and He created human beings who love themselves – we all love ourselves right? Don't say you don't. The reason we love ourselves: because we don't wanna die, we wanna prolong our existence, we wanna eat food – now this self-love should make us now love this creator. Why? Now the famous 11th century scholar al-Ghazali (may Allah's mercy be upon him), do you know what he said? He said, your self-love should project you to the love of God, which is part of worship. Why? Because, who created you? Who sustains you? Who created the universe and the causes, physical causes in the universe to sustain your own creation? Who even created love itself? Who's the source of love? *Al-wudood* as we know in Arabic, the name of Allah, "the loving", "the excessively loving." So you must wanna love God, not only love Him but you wanna worship Him. Because he [feels?] the creator of the entire universe: why are you worshipping other things...? And also you don't worship other things. Even atheists worship other things. You obey your boss, you obey your parents, you obey your wife, your siblings, the culture, materialism, the system that we live in. We all have these reference points. We all have these... enslavements. We all have these kind of (sic) slavery to all of these slave masters. But if God created me I wanna enslave myself to Him; that would truly free me from the worldliness, from the emptiness of the world, right? So this is establishing the oneness of God.

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