

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF FAITH AND GOOD WORKS IN THE EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

## *Perkembangan Konsep Iman dan Amal Baik dalam agama Kristian dan Islam: Satu Analisis Perbandingan*

Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman  
Akidah and Global Outreach Centre and Faculty of Leadership and Management,  
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

rosmizi@usim.edu.my

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the development of the concept of faith and good works in the early Christianity and Islam. This article is a library research which uses descriptive and content analysis methods. In early Christianity and Islam, there were several interpretations that led to controversies which were either directly or indirectly related to the issue of faith and good works. The study found that there were several different interpretations that had been regarded as erroneous or heretical. Such different interpretations were represented by Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism in early Christianity, and Kharijites, Murji'ites, Mu'tazilites in early Islam.

Keywords: faith, good works, the Kharijites, the Murji'ites, the Mu'tazilites, the Batinites, the Manichaeans, the Donatists, the Pelagians.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity and Islam all require both faith and good deeds. Nevertheless, they apply different degrees of emphasis, and have their own interpretations and controversies related to both faith and good deeds, as well as of religious Law. Some parts of this article are already covered in my previous writings (see Mohd Rosmizi, 2018), however, they are retained in order to relate with the new aspects and context of current article.

### **FAITH AND GOOD DEEDS IN CHRISTIANITY**

#### **Faith in the Old Testament**

The term "faith" and its related terms appear much less frequently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. The term "faith" appears twice only in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament (Deut. 32:20; Hab. 2:4), and eighteen times in its Revised Standard Version where it is used to refer to breaking faith or acting in good faith (twelve times altogether e.g., Lev. 5:15, Judg. 9:15f.) and at times to refer to trust (six times) (Douglas, 1980: 496).

In spite of the relatively few occurrences of the term "faith" in the Old Testament, and the fact that there are no comprehensive verses of the Old Testament dealing with an inclusive injunction to believe in an article of faith, it nevertheless has its place in the Old Testament, as well as in Judaism. The primary meaning of faith of the Old Testament refers more to the exclusive relationship of trust between Yahweh and Israel rather than faith *per se*. In addition, Judaism places more emphasis on action or good deeds, rather than faith in a particular doctrine. In its early centuries, Judaism did not have formal articles of faith or dogma. The creed and formal doctrines were only formulated when Judaism faced external pressure.

### **Faith in the New Testament**

Unlike in the Old Testament, the term “faith” appears much more often in the New Testament. By contrast, the term *pistis* and *pisteuō* (the Greek word for faith) occur more than 240 times in the New Testament (the Revised Standard Version), whereas its adjectival form, *pistos*, appears 67 times (Douglas, 1980: 496).

In the context of the New Testament, to have faith generally means “to believe,” “to rely on,” and “to trust” (E.g., Mark 13:21; John 4:21; Acts 27:25; Rom. 4:17. For the noun faith which means loyalty, trust or belief, see 1 Thess.1:8; Philem. 6; Heb. 6:1; and for the adjective πιστός (faithful) which means loyal or trustworthy or believing, see Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 16:10–11; 1 Tim. 3:2; Rev. 2:10, 13, etc. See further Pickar and Jonsen, “Faith,” 591). However, technically, having faith in the New Testament means to have faith in Jesus Christ’s salvific work; his life and death—incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The need to have faith (i.e., in Christ for salvation) is strongly stressed in the Pauline epistles.

The concept of faith in the New Testament is not only confined to passive intellectual assent. In fact, it also involves, and indeed requires, an act of the will. This feature or requirement is stressed by Paul on many occasions. For instance, Paul maintains the necessity of obedience to the Gospel (Rom. 1:5, 10:16; 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Thess. 1:8); the need to guard and protect faith (Rom. 12:3, 11:20–22; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 6:14–15; 1 Tim. 1:19; 6:10); the need to make faith be a living one (Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 5:8.); the need to remain firm in faith; and the need to preserve in faith (Rom. 11:20; 1 Cor. 15:2, 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:23–24, 13:5; Col. 1:23, 2:7; 1 Tim. 2:15). In addition, Paul also maintains that faith is not static, but it can be developed and perfected (Rom. 10:10, 11:20–22; 2 Cor. 10:15; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:25; 2 Thess. 1:3).

### **Good Deeds in the Bible (The Old and New Testaments)**

The above analysis suggests that in both the Old and the New Testaments, good deeds—either directly or indirectly—have their place in the realm of faith. The common English term used in the Hebrew Bible and in Christianity to denote good deeds is good works. As with the term “faith,” the term “work” also appears many times in different forms in the Bible. Compared with the definitions of faith examined above which represent the Old and New Testaments’ respective outlooks on faith, the meaning of the term “works” here—and its various forms—is somewhat more complex. This is because these terms are rather general and used in different contexts, many of which have no connection with the concept of good deeds (i.e., good works). Perhaps the most characteristic usage of the term is found in the epistles of Paul and James.

The great importance attached to good deeds in the Old Testament—such as the observance of the Law and right living—cannot be questioned, for these features characterise the central theme of Jewish scriptures and teachings. The observance of the covenant and the Law, rather than relying on faith alone, is the prerequisite for salvation in Judaism. Thus, the importance of good works or good deeds in the context of right moral conduct is never questioned, and they are always connected with true faith. There are many instances in the New Testament that either implicitly or explicitly suggest that good deeds are very essential and that they have their own role in this life and in the Hereafter.

### **The New Testament and Early Christianity**

The concept of faith underwent a radical shift in the New Testament. Faith associated with the exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel as the chosen people, symbolised in the form of the Covenant, now found a new interpretation in Jesus Christ’s salvific work, presented in a series of events of Christ as the Son of God, that is, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This

new focus on a set of beliefs in Christ's salvific work is among the distinctive characteristics of the New Testament faith.

Therefore, Christianity has its own distinctive articles of faith. Believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah or Saviour is the central tenet of the New Testament faith. The concept of sin as bad deeds, understood in the Old Testament as a breach of God's commandment, was traced back by Paul to Adam's transgression of eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. For Paul, humanity is shared in Adam's sin, but the faithful can be redeemed in Christ.

In the New Testament faith is connected more to belief in Christ and his sufficiency and efficacy in man's salvation. Hence, the great emphasis placed on the Old Testament on action or good deeds in the sense of fulfilling the commandments or the Law seems absent in the New Testament. In contrast, many instances in the New Testament, especially the Pauline epistles, tend to go against this idea, where relying on the Law is not only refuted as the prerequisite for salvation, but is regarded as an instrument which exposes more evils and bad deeds and even brings a curse (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-12, etc.). But this does not mean that the New Testament and Christianity totally reject the Law of the Old Testament and/or of Judaism. Some laws were discontinued. Some others were retained albeit in a new interpretation, and others were replaced with the new *laws* (i.e., principles). In addition, the New Testament and Christianity do have their own injunctions or principles that require commitment from all Christians, for instance the twofold commandment to love God and neighbour, and this injunction has been regarded as the primary religious principle.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, apart from normal ethical conduct, good deeds in a religious sense also include the observance of religious rites (i.e., the Seven Sacraments) and compliance with Church traditions, as directed under the guidance of the Pope. Catholic teaching is that the sacraments have been instituted by Christ (Catholic Church, 1994: 311). Indeed, these sacraments aim at appreciating and celebrating Christ's salvific work. Therefore, every Catholic Christian is expected to participate in the sacraments as well as other actions prescribed or encouraged by the Church. This affirms Alder's contention that in Christianity, good deeds cover a wide aspect of actions. They should not be limited to the acts of charity, but it includes any good actions that are done in obedience to God, covering both religious and moral actions (Alder, 2005: 22; Moo, 1985: 101-102).

### **ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

While both faith and good deeds play an important role in the Christian scriptures, there were still many alternative interpretations of their relationship which arose in the first centuries of the Christian era, some of which developed into a series of controversies and accusations of heresy. These alternative interpretations were labelled by their critics as Manichaeans, Donatists, and Pelagians, or as having certain views in common with Pelagius.

Manichaeism—also known as Manicheism or Manicheism—was a Gnostic religious movement founded by Mani in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, lasting for some twelve centuries. The fundamental teaching of the Manichaeans was the belief in dualism, namely, the existence of two opposite divine powers, that is, the Light and the Darkness, Good and Evil, or God and Matter. The Manichaeans held a negative concept of man's nature as evil. Mani asserted that man had been despoiled and imprisoned with the evil nature of devils. Therefore, man's nature, including the body or *flesh*, was considered to be evil.

Following his idea of the evil nature of man's flesh—passion or lust, avarice, and sexual intercourse—Mani presented strict ways of salvation, namely, through rigorous asceticism and a strict performance of certain ritual ceremonies (Newman, 1890: 18). These rigorous ways—such as suppressing lust and avarice, abstaining from marital intercourse, avoidance from eating meat and

from drinking wine, etc.—were meant to suppress the evil of the flesh, avarice, and lust. They were also intended to illuminate the light—which has been imprisoned in the darkness of the flesh—and thus, to enable man to attain liberation and salvation. They believed that salvation could only be achieved through rigorous asceticism.

This Gnostic soteriology within Manichaeism goes beyond the normal observance of good deeds. Indeed, Manichaeans advocated a radical belief and proposed extreme practices. Since they placed great emphasis to radical faith which propagated the evilness of man, they did not appreciate a normative way of performing good deeds, and a normative way of right living. The Elect—who were regarded as the true Manichaeans—thinking that they had become the Light, tried to maintain their state by detaching themselves from accepted ways of living, namely, marriage or holding property. They also could not work, but had to live a wandering life.

The Manichaean negative concept of man also led to a rigorous interpretation of bad deeds especially for the Elect. For instance, connubial intercourse was regarded as an improper practice, and even marriage was not allowed for the Elect. They could not work and were not allowed to have possessions. They were only allowed to have food for the day and clothes for the year (Runciman, 1955: 15). The Manichaeans considered those who were enslaved by lust as sinful, and severe punishments awaited the sinful person after his life. Thus, the stance of the Manichaeans on faith and good deeds was that they placed a great emphasis on radical faith and rigorous asceticism. Therefore, good deeds and right living were not really their concern.

Donatism was an early Christian movement considered as heretical or schismatic, especially in the North African church. The Donatist controversy arose from a rigorous persistence in maintaining the need for the holiness and purity of the priest in administering the sacramental rites. In their earnest attempt to maintain the purist views and practices of North Africa, the Donatists held fast that the church must be the church of the saints, which was pure and cleansed of sinners. Therefore, they regarded the *traditores* (traitors) as sinners or apostates and invalidated their sacramental administrations. Thus, the main dispute between the Donatists and other members of the Christian Church was over the status of those who had renounced their faith in order to be saved during the persecution.

The issue of man's deeds underpinned this debate. Bad deeds were perceived as bringing negative consequences for faith. Surrendering the scriptures to the imperial authorities was regarded by the Donatists as a bad deed which jeopardised the faith of the doer. Therefore, the outward action of surrendering the scriptures to the civil authorities was considered to be a grave sin or a serious bad deed, which in turn defiled the perpetrator's faith and invalidated his sacramental administration. Because of their extreme position in maintaining the purity and cleanliness of the Church, the Donatists practised rebaptism on Christians who converted to their sect, who were once considered as the *traditores*. They believed that such action of submitting to the imperial authorities was a severely detrimental action (a grievous bad deed), which was harmful to one's faith.

Pelagianism, named after Pelagius, was perhaps the most controversial movement. This movement, which at first appeared as an attempt to reform the ethical and spiritual condition of the Christians of the day, was later declared to be heretical. The controversy began in 412 CE with the condemnation of Caelestius by a council in Carthage in North Africa (Denzinger, 2007: 44-48). He was a Roman aristocrat who enthusiastically propagated some unorthodox views later associated with Pelagius, who in turn was eventually forced to defend himself at the synod of Diopolis in Palestine in 415 CE. Grace and free will, central in this debate, are interconnected with the issue of good deeds. As Bishop Hefele publicly declared, the primary Pelagian doctrine was on the absolute ability and

efficacy of man's merit in attaining virtue independent of grace (Warfield, 1886: 10). The Pelagians have been alleged to argue that man can attain righteousness and salvation through his own good deeds, and not through the gift of God's grace.

Pelagius was concerned with the moral and spiritual state of man. His concern was with faith in practical life rather than theoretical teachings. His main concern was for the right conduct, and therefore, he was distressed with the pessimistic view of human nature. He was trying to reform Christians who were indifferent to the observance of good deeds. For Pelagius, true Christians are not only Christians in name, but they must also be Christians in deeds (Rees, 1991:2, 8; Kelly, 1977: 357). Therefore, he tried to combat the negative and passive attitudes of the Manichaeans which attributed evil to man and his nature. In opposition, Pelagius maintained that man's nature was good. Thus, he advocated a positive view of man and believed that man, by his own effort, was capable of doing good deeds and attaining righteousness. He also did not accept the notion of the ruined state of the human race having been caused by Adam's sin. In his mind, this view seemed to be another form of negative and passive attitude towards man. He worried that these attitudes would undermine man's moral and spiritual dimensions, making man a mere puppet, incapable of doing and achieving anything on his own.

The above brief analysis touches on the many different interpretations concerning good deeds in early Christianity. Christian scholars perceived all these other interpretations as inaccurate, or rather as dangerous threats. Some other relevant issues are discussed in the following chapter.

## **FAITH AND GOOD DEEDS IN ISLAM**

### **Faith and Good Deeds in the Qur'an**

It could be argued that the concept of good deeds is clearer in Islam, in that many deeds of devotion are already prescribed and explained by the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. Both of these primary sources stress the necessity of performing good deeds and delineate certain principles that should be observed.

### **The Meanings of *Iman* (Faith) and *'Amal* (Deeds)**

"*Iman*" is an Arabic term which is derived from the root word *amn*, from which the verbs *amina* (to be secure; to trust; to entrust; to place one's trust [in God]) and the verb *amana* (to believe) are formed (Kassis, 1983: 9, 149). From this root are derived other related forms, for instance *amin* (peaceful; safe; become safe; secure), *aman* (security; safety; peace), *mu'min* (believing; faithful; believer), and *iman* (faith; believe; creed). The term *iman* appears many times in the Qur'an in various forms and in different contexts.

Literally *iman* means "faith," "belief," "creed," or "counting/declaring true" (*al-tasdiq*). Its antonym is unbelief or infidelity (*kufir*), or denial (*al-takdhib*). In this literal context too, *iman* means "accepting one's statement as true," or indicates one's affirmation of other person's statements in mind or both in mind and words (Singh, 2000: 553). Basically, in Islam *al-iman* or simply *iman* means to have faith or to believe in articles of faith. Those who believe and have firm faith in Islamic faith are called *Mu'min* (pl. *Mu'minun*) which means "the believer" or "the faithful."

The Arabic term which denotes deed is *'amala* ([pl. *a'mal*] deed, work, action), derives from the root word *'aml* (doing, acting, action, activity, labour, practice, achievement, etc.). From this root is derived other related forms, for instance *'amila* (to do, act, operate, be active, work), *'amali* (work, working), and *'amaliyah* (work, job, action, activity, making, manufacture, fabrication, etc.). The term *'aml* appears in the Qur'an in various forms in different contexts. When referring to a good

deed, the term *'amal salih* is normally used, often with the term *iman* (faith), especially in perfect active form (*amanu* [pl.]).

“Good deeds” is a general term which has a wide scope, and as stated in Chapter Three, it has no specific and unanimous definition. In an Islamic context, however, good deeds refer to those deeds that are commanded, encouraged, or praised by the *Shari'ah*. It is a good, beautiful, virtuous, or righteous deed which is done for the sake of Allah, namely, for His content and pleasure, and done according to the *Shari'ah*. Its scope is wide and comprehensive and therefore covers all aspects of activity, such as those related to religious rites and rituals (*'ibadah*), social activities (*mu'amalah*), and ethics (*akhlak*). Good deeds are required to realise the fundamental objectives or the foundational goals of Islamic law (*maqasid al-Shari'ah*), which are intended to preserve justice, balance, and harmony, among other virtues.

Among the Arabic terms which denote good deed/s are *'amal salih* (pl. *a'mal salihat*), *birr*, *khayr* (pl. *khayrat*), etc. The last two terms (*birr* and *khayrat*) are also used in rather a general sense as referring to all that is good, or to all good things, whereas the first term (*'amal salih*) is more specific in that it refers to meritorious or righteous deeds, performed according to the *Shari'ah*. In this regard, Mohd Yusuf Noor asserts that the term *khayr* is a general term referring to all that is good which leads to happiness or to accomplish what is needed (Mohd Yusuf Noor, 2011: 5). On the other hand, the term *salihat* (sg. *salih*) refers more specifically to righteous deeds that conform to God's will. The primary criteria for such deeds, in addition to conforming to God's will, are that they should be performed sincerely and accordingly, namely, in the right way as prescribed by the *Shari'ah*.

#### **ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS IN EARLY MUSLIM TRADITION**

This analysis has established that the concept of faith in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions is dynamic and comprehensive, requiring an active performance of good deeds. The various Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic traditions on this, however, did not prevent certain groups from proposing alternate interpretations of certain relevant issues which caused some controversies especially in the early centuries of Islam. Those groups that are relevant to the issue of faith and good deeds are the Kharijites, the Murji'ites, and the Mu'tazilites, each holding different and even contradicting views. According to Imam al-Ghazali, there were also different interpretations spread in his time as represented in the four groups of the “seekers after truth,” namely, the theologians (*mutakallimun*), the philosophers, the Batinites, and the Sufis or mystics. Some of the above interpretations were regarded as heretical.

The Kharijites were among the earliest Islamic sects who addressed the issue related to faith and good deeds differing from the orthodox position. Even though they split into several sects, they still shared many common beliefs. They regarded good deeds as an indispensable part of faith, and that both faith and good deeds were absolutely interrelated and cannot be separated. Since they believed that deeds will directly affect faith, therefore, some of them advocated that not only bad deeds could be detrimental to faith, but it could also obliterate faith altogether. For that reason, some of them—for instance all the Azariqa, the 'Ajarida, the Akhnasiya, and the Mukramiya—maintained that a grave sinner no longer remained as a believer or a Muslim (al-Shahrastani, 1984: 103, 109, 112). In other words, a grave sinner was considered as either an unbeliever or a polytheist. They also advocated rebellion against any leader they considered as an unbeliever (*ibid.*, 99). Some of the Kharijites exercised *takfir* (condemning as an unbeliever) indiscriminately. For instance, the Azariqah declared that those who opposed them as being an unbeliever or even a polytheist. In fact, the children of those who opposed them were also regarded as polytheists, who will be thrown into Hellfire (al-Baghdadi, 1966: 83-84). As a result, they became fanatics within their own group.

The radical interpretation of the Kharijites of faith and good deeds accelerated the conflict among early Muslims. Accordingly, a new theological school that disagreed with the Kharijite interpretation emerged. They were known as the Murji'ites (those who postpone or suspend judgement). Primarily, the Murji'ites maintained that there was no essential relationship between faith and good deeds. They declined to judge people—no matter what serious sins they had committed—in this life, but to postpone the judgement and to leave it to God alone. Al-Shahrastani has observed that they either regarded good deeds as totally different from faith, and that therefore they did not really matter, or that good deeds were perceived to be a mere secondary matter that had no relative importance (al-Shahrastani, 1984: 121-124). For instance, the Yunusiya held this first view and therefore claimed that all believers who had a pure faith would definitely enter Paradise regardless of their bad deeds. They argued that the requirements to enter Paradise were sincerity and love alone. Another group, the Ghassaniya, maintained that faith increased but did not decrease. Whereas the Thaubaniya advocated that all deeds were secondary. This view was supported by the 'Ubaydiya who held that God will certainly forgive all sins except polytheism, and therefore, no sin would be detrimental to the faith of any Muslim. Because of the above interpretations, the majority of the Murji'ites considered good deeds as not essential and that bad ones did not bring any negative impact to one's faith and status as a believer.

The conflict over the issue of faith and good deeds was not resolved and continued with the positions of the Kharijites and the Murji'ites. In between these opposite interpretations there was another alternate interpretation which claimed to advocate the intermediate position, which was propagated by the Mu'tazilites. The Mu'tazilites attempted to propose a balance between the Kharijites and the Murji'ites. Departing from their contradicting interpretations, the Mu'tazilites advocated that a grave sinner was neither a true believer nor an unbeliever but was placed in an intermediate position between these two states. However, if the person died unrepentant, he would abide in Hell forever (al-Baghdadi, 1966: 121; al-Shahrastani, 1984: 44-45; Sharif, 1963: 199-200). The majority of the Mu'tazilites agreed with the Kharijites in maintaining that a sinner was destined to Hell forever. However, unlike the Kharijites who declared that a sinner was an unbeliever and could be opposed, the Mu'tazilites were still cautious by placing him in the middle state. Some sects of the Mu'tazilites—such as the Jubba'iya and the Bahshamiya—called this person or state as a *fasiq* (sinner); neither a believer nor an unbeliever, but if he died unrepentant he would abide and be punished in Hell forever (al-Shahrastani, 1984: 66).

The Mu'tazilites agreed to regard good deeds as part of faith as maintained by the three major Sunnite schools of law (the Malikites, the Shafi'ites, and the Hanbalites) (Sharif, 1963: 203). Nonetheless, they disagreed on some other related issues. For instance, on the origin of faith and deeds, unlike the Sunnites who attribute their real source to God, the Mu'tazilites argued that it was man himself who created guidance or misguidance and that man himself who decided and authored his acts—good or bad. Thus, they asserted that man was the creator of his own guidance (or misguidance), action, and fate (al-Shahrastani, 1984: 200-201). They believed that man has absolute capability and free will. In this regard, they were the Qadarites. In addition, the Mu'tazilites did not readily attribute to God the creation of bad things, evil, and unjust actions. On the other hand, they maintained that God only created and made what is right and good. Because of that, they believed that it was incumbent upon God to execute justice, namely, to reward good deeds and punish evil deeds. All these doctrines have been refuted by some prominent Sunnite scholars, such as al-Ash'ari, al-Baghdadi, al-Shahrastani, Ibn Hazm, and al-Ghazali.

Another alternative group was known as the Batinites (the Isma'ili Shi'ite or the Ta'limites). The most outstanding difference lies in their concept of an infallible *Imam* or Imamate doctrine (i.e., the religious, spiritual, and political leadership) as the central figure and the only authentic interpreter of

religious doctrines and practices in the Shi'ite tradition. In relation to faith and good deeds, the Shi'ites argue that both should be in accordance to the interpretation of the *Imam*. Whatever opposes the teachings of the *Imam* is regarded as invalid. The Shi'ites believe that the *Imam* is the leader of the age, divinely ordained from the Prophet–'Ali's family lineage, otherwise known as the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of Prophet Muhammad).

There are disagreements between different sects of the Shi'ite tradition on the number of the *Imams*. However, they all believe that the *Imams* are infallible, faithful, and perfect examples to lead their communities (Goldziher, 1981: 183). As stated above, the *Imam* is the central and powerful figure in the Shi'ite tradition. His teachings and decisions are binding on his communities. Compliance with the *Imam* is among the key factors in determining the validity of a Shi'ite faith and good deeds. Extreme groups, such as the Batinites, have gone so far as to regard those Muslims outside their community as unbelievers or at least accusing them of not following the right way. They held firm to their *Imams'* teachings and they also interpreted the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions in the light of their doctrines.

The Batinites, one of the extreme sects of the Shi'ite tradition, held scrupulously to this Imamate doctrine to the extent that, they argued, no truth and knowledge can be known except by and through the *Imam*. Therefore, the knowledge of good and bad, and the way to practice the good and avoid the bad should be in accordance with the interpretation of the *Imam*. They also advocated the inner or esoteric meaning of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, interpreting them in the light of their doctrines.

The majority of Muslim scholars maintain that *iman* (faith) entails performing good deeds. This is one of the characteristics of the Islamic creed or of being a true Muslim, namely, surrendering or submitting to God's will. John L. Esposito has rightly observed this Islamic stance. He concludes that, unlike Christianity which places much emphasis on orthodoxy (or correct doctrine of belief), Islam insists on orthopraxy (or correct action), but without neglecting the importance of orthodoxy (Esposito, 2005: 68). He then concludes that in Islam "[f]aith (*iman*) and right action or practice are intertwined" (ibid.). This contention further supports that both faith and good deeds are interrelated and united in Islam.

The majority of the Sunnite schools of law (the Malikites, Shafi'ites, and Hanbalites), with the exception of the Hanafites, agree that good deeds constitute an indispensable element of faith (Mohd Rosmizi, 2016). They further advocate that *iman* consists of three "acts," namely, of the tongue or speech (such as testimony or confession), of the heart or mind (such as counting true or verification), and of the limbs (actions, works, or deeds). Thus *iman* covers the whole human dimensions (physical, spiritual, and intellectual). Several Prophetic traditions affirm this state, indicating that the level of faith could change" (Ibn Hajar, n.d.: 33:44, 298-299). Based on this concept, the majority of Sunnite scholars, again with the exception of the Hanafites, agree that faith increases or decreases according to deeds. This view makes good deeds become more important and emphasises that they are the fundamental requirement of faith.

## CONCLUSION

This article has briefly discussed the meaning and context of faith and good work in Christian and Islamic perspectives. It delineated their meanings from the relevant scriptures and sources of each tradition. The article then discussed some alternative interpretations on faith and good works that were upheld by different groups, which were later considered as erroneous or heretical. These different interpretations came from the Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism in early

Christianity, and the Kharijites, Murji'ites, Mu'tazilites in early Islam. All these groups had been regarded as heretical movements.

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